"A Message to the Emperor" & "The Battle of the Cradle": Gendered Nationalism and Identity Politics in the Great War

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Abstract:
Olive Schreiner, an outstanding feminist, political activist and prose writer from South Africa, is one of those remarkable late 19th century English cultured women who locate themselves within and beyond the categories of war, peace, empire and nation. In refusing to accept 'all the boundaries, dichotomies, and divisions, which are the hallmark of sexist society' she aims to 're-make art and society' as Liz Stanley rightfully observes (235). [...] Most interesting in the context of gender and war is her claim for an ultimate deconstruction of any fixed socio-cultural and sexual identity. In acknowledging the interaction of parameters like ethnicity, culture, social status, setting, class and gender in traditional concepts of identity construction, Schreiner envisions a universal identity and acknowledges that this can only be achieved through a prior dismantling of all boundaries and borderlines, especially those which limit women's freedom and liberty in the private, regional, national and international sphere.

> It is our intention to enter into the domain of war and to labor there till in the course of generations we have extinguished it. (Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* 69)

1 At the outbreak of the Great War writer Hilda M. Freeman, an Australian and British citizen, found herself stranded in Germany. In her travelogue *An Australian Girl in Germany: Through Peace to War* (1916) she describes her war experiences as follows:

> […] I am suffering from a very bad attack of Suppressed Conversation. Of course, everyone knows that it is a dreadful thing for a woman to have a great deal to say and to be unable to say it. To me, here [Germany], speech is practically impossible. There is only one topic of conversation - the war - on that subject I must be dumb. […] I can think, even if I must not speak. (46)

Freeman's choice of tactical silence to survive in the enemy's country, her determination to continue thinking about war along with Schreiner's theoretical reflections in the beginning prove politicians and historians of the time wrong who claimed that "[...] warfare is [...] the one human activity from which women, with the most insignificant exceptions, have always and everywhere stood apart" (Keegan 75). Nowadays we know of a great number of female war writing which documents in its variety and broad scope of issues covered how women take a stand and are involved in defining the categories of war and peace.[1] Inscribing

[1] For recently published primary sources regarding women and the Great War in English cf. Sharon Ouditt's insightful bibliography *Women Writers of the First World War* (2000).For anthologies containing first-hand accounts of women's written Great War Experiences see Angela Smith. *Women's Writing of the First World War: An Anthology* (2000). Moreover, Margaret R. Higonnet (ed.). *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I* (1999), which covers the broadest range of women's war writing from all over the world in English and foreign languages, with English translations for the non-native English sources. Then, Susan R. Grayzel (ed.). *Women and the First World War* (2002), Joyce Marlow (ed.). *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War* (1999);

themselves into war history, women writers and activists of the Victorian and Edwardian Age, for example, remind us that it would be too short-sighted to claim that "during the period of high imperialism most [English language] writers saw it as their bounded duty to sing the glories and responsibilities of Empire" as Chris van der Merwe and Michael Rice argue (12-13).

2 Olive Schreiner, an outstanding feminist, political activist and prose writer from South Africa, is one of those remarkable late 19th century English cultured women who locate themselves within and beyond the categories of war, peace, empire and nation. In refusing to accept "all the boundaries, dichotomies, and divisions, which are the hallmark of sexist society" she aims to "re-make art and society" as Liz Stanley rightfully observes (235). Of particular interest is Schreiner's theoretical treatise *Woman and Labour* (1911), widely acknowledged as a very influential feminist text of the time (see Schoeman, Krebs). Here, she does not only ask for an elimination of gender inequality, or as she puts it, "the falling of the last wall that encloses artificially the activity of woman and divides her from man" (Schreiner 117). Rather, in pointing at the masculinity of women and the femininity of men on the one hand, but also at the interdependence of the sexes on the other hand she aims at "a movement of the sexes towards a closer union" (103) in all her fictive, theoretical, political and personal writing. Most interesting in the context of gender and war is her claim for an ultimate deconstruction of any fixed socio-cultural and sexual identity. In acknowledging the interaction of parameters like ethnicity, culture, social status, setting, class and gender in traditional concepts of identity construction, Schreiner envisions a universal identity and acknowledges that this can only be achieved through a prior dismantling of all boundaries and borderlines, especially those which limit women's freedom and liberty in the private, regional, national and international sphere. In the respective chapter on "Woman and War" she argues:

> If our European nations should continue in their present semi-civilised condition, which makes war possible, or a few generations longer, it is highly possible that as financiers, as managers of the commissariat department, as inspectors of provisions and clothing for the army, women will play a very leading part; and that the nation which is the first to employ its women may be paced at a vast advantage over its fellows in time of war. (66)

3 In her belief, that social progress and a peaceful future can only be ensured once women's emancipation is established and women are given unlimited opportunities for self-development in a modern world, Schreiner lays the groundwork for U.S. American

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Agnès Cardinal et. al. (eds.). *Women's Writing on the First World War* (1999). Of particular interest are also genre-specific volumes like Catherine Reilly (ed.). *Scars Upon My Heat: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (1981) and Claire M. Tylee et. al. (eds.). *War Plays by Women: An International Anthology* (1999).

playwright Marion Craig Wentworth, who takes up the issue of women, war and pacifism in a similar vein. Moreover, both join the ranks of other English-language women writers from Edith Wharton (*Fighting France*, 1915), New Zealand-born Katherine Mansfield ("An Indiscreet Journey", 1915, "The Fly", 1922), Canadians Mary Borden (*A Diary Without Dates*, 1918) and Francis Marion Beyon (*Aleta Day*, 1919) to Helen Zenna Smith (*Not So Quiet ... Stepdaughters of War*, 1930) and American Gertrude Stein (*Wars I have Seen*, 1945) as well as activists such as Emily Hobhouse (see *Boer War Letters*), Millicent Garrett Fawcett (*What I remember*, 1924) and others.[2] Transgressing geographical, political and cultural borders as writers, travellers, professionals and artists in the early 20th century, these women approach major political issues and military conflicts of the time such as the South African War (1899-1902), also known as the Second Anglo-Boer War[3], and the European based Great War (1914-18) from trans-national angles in multiple discourses. Their intriguing and quite provocative though highly influential outsider perspectives, e.g. Emily Hobhouse's *Boer War Letters*. Emily Hobhouse, a writer, humanitarian and political activist from England, went to South Africa to examine the situation of captured Boer Women and children in the British concentration camps there. In her own writing and through the publication of a collection of *Boer War Letters*, which consists of letters written by imprisoned Boer War women translated (from Afrikaans into English) and edited by Hobhouse, she revealed the British atrocities in the concentration camps of South Africa to an international audience and forced the British government to ultimately rethink its war strategy.[4] The publication is very insightful here, further reminding us that "besides analyzing war through the lens of gender, we must also explore the global intersections between gender and class, race, nation and ethnicity", as Jennifer Turpin rightly concludes in "Many Faces: Women Confronting War" (4).

4 Marion Craig Wentworth's play *War Brides* (1915), for instance, discusses how gendered imagery, sexual difference and maternity have been employed in wartime Europe to constitute nation-ness in terms of group coherence that defies any subjectivity and individuality. This essay applies a gender-sensitive approach to analyse how nationalism, gender roles and identity politics are intertwined and how they relate to the protection of the home-front in the play. Before focussing on Wentworth's drama, I will look at female war participation in the Great War in general to shed light on how women have been targeted by

[2] See among others also E. Sylvia Pankhurst, Adela Pankhurst, Enid Bagnold, and Virginia Woolf. For critical approaches see Nelson Wattie; Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate; Anne Varty; Joy Damousi and Susan Lake. Some of the fore-mentioned primary works can also be found in *Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write About War*. Ed. Sayre P. Sheldon (1999) and *My Country is the Whole World: An Anthology of Women's Work on Peace and War*. Ed. Cambridge Women's Peace Collective (1984).
[3] For the Anglo-Boer War see in particular Olive Schreiner, Emily Hobhouse, Millicent Garrett Fawcett.
[4] See Rykie van Reenen.

war propaganda as war brides and mothers for the nation state and how ambitious they have been to assert subjectivity and transgress the wartime mobilization of manipulative gender imagery.

5 Now, as contemporary theoreticians like V. Spike Peterson argue,

> gender refers not to anatomical or biological distinctions but to the social constructions, which is [*sic*] always culturally specific, of masculine and feminine as hierarchical and oppositional categories. Symbols, theories, practices and individuals are gendered, meaning that their characteristics can be associated with, or construed as manifestations of, masculinity or femininity. (48)

This constructed gender division is most evident in Western societies in times of war as critics like Marilyn Lake, Joy Damousi, Marin Van Creveld and Jean Bethke Elshtain among others have repeatedly outlined in their studies. Their respective findings are aptly summarised by U.S. American political scientist Francine D'Amico who writes: "That we even need to talk about 'women and war' underscores the gendering of our construct of war. War has been perceived as men's domain, a masculine endeavour for which women may serve as victim, spectator, or prize. Women are denied agency, made present but silenced" (119). The war diary of American writer Ellen La Motte, one of the first American nurses serving in the French battlefields, substantiates D'Amico's argument:

> It is the Nation's war, and all the men of the Nation, regardless of rank, are serving. […] Women can come into the War Zone, but wives cannot. Wives, it appears, are bad for the morale of the Army. […] They establish the connecting link between the soldier and his life at home [and] mean responsibility. […] Women / [W]omen only mean distraction and amusement, just as food and wine. […] So she herself must be censored. (162)

6 La Motte's observation is further consolidated once we call to mind that when writing about the Western nations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, historians usually refer to the nation or nation state as a form of political organization, or to the concept of nation-ness, that is, an integrate idea providing a focus for collective identity.[5] When we look at the nation-state and the role of women and men as citizens and participants in national, political and economic struggles in that context, it appears that until today men and women are perceived in significantly different ways (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis). What is more, as Claire M. Tylee observes, historians such as Paul Fussell perpetuate the myth of the "men-only-construction of the Great War" (7) to deny women any decisive participation in their

[5] See Gleason 213-234 and Anderson. Also Hutchinson and Smith's volume which consists of an array of 49 key texts on nation and nationalism in general. It provides insightful information on the origin of the term, differentiating concepts, key representatives and historical developments; however, with just one article on "Women and the Nation-State" by Flora Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (312-316) it does not do full justice to the expanding field of research on Gender and Nationalism and thus hints at the need for a greater acknowledgement of the issue beyond feminist and women studies departments.

national culture.[6] Elaborating on this, Jennifer Turpin traces a gender-hierarchical structure that underlies any construction of nation-ness in times of war: Women should behave in maternal fashion, they should need men to protect them, and their wartime experience should be sexualised. Men should feel that in order to prove their masculinity they should fight and generally support their nation going to war. Men should take on exceptionally masculine behaviours and attitudes through their military training. (16)

7 Chicago political scientist Jean Bethke Elshtain points at two respective symbols that bear witness to this traditional gender division in Western societies during the war: Men are seen as "Just Warriors" while women are identified as "Beautiful Souls" (4). As Bethke Elshtain rightfully argues, these tropes are rather narrow, one-sided, and unreal and do not comply with the complexity and diversity of real war experiences of men and women. Her observation has been taken up by critics like Sandra Gilbert, Lois Ann Lorentzen, Jennifer Turpin, Sharon Ouditt, Sharon Abbey, Andrea O'Reilly and others. According to their studies women are not only socialized into traditional female roles in a private context, e.g. as obedient daughters, submissive wives and nurturing mothers, but they are also expected to shoulder national and patriarchal responsibilities in wartime. In Britain alone, for example, about eighty thousand women served in so-called women's forces during the Great War period. This is not to suggest, however, that women in non-traditional uniforms, that is beyond the scope of nurses, ambulance drivers, etc. in Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs), were also accepted or at least tolerated. On the contrary, women in combat were not tolerated at all. Flora Sandes is one of the few documented women who manage to transgress the traditional gender divide in the First World War. Sandes uses cross-dressing to enter the supposedly male sphere of war at the battle-front. As historian Joanna Bourkes puts it, she thus "turn(s) from a woman [and VAD] to a private soldier" while fighting as a sergeant-major in the Serbian army. Nevertheless, she remains an exception to the rule, as Bourke shows in "Women and the military during World War One."[7] In all, the ideal female citizen was still viewed as nurturing, submissive and pacifist, provided that the latter did not interfere with nationalist interests. Quite paradoxically though, war propaganda linked motherhood, nationalism, and militarism to indoctrinate women to be patritic, loyal and even pacifist as daughters, wives and mothers; however, it also urged them to work in munitions factories and thus support militarization for the sake of the nation (see Woollacott, Elshtain and Tobias).

[6] See Tylee. Also Fussell.

[7] Flora Sandes wrote and published the documentary An *English Woman Sergeant in the Serbian Army* (1916) which tells about her experiences in the Serbian forces. The book was written out of interest to raise money for the Serbian army and not primarily to bring a female perspective to a traditionally male domain, the combatant experience on the frontlines.

8 Public and political debates within the nations involved in the Great War centered upon this double standard. The ambivalent imagery of morale, morality, and sexuality was enhanced by a respective media propaganda. Two contrasting presentations of women appear frequently, firstly, women were shown as loyal wives and mothers who follow their patriotic duties, that is support conscription, entice their men to go off to the war, keep the home-fires running themselves, etc.; secondly, portrayals of women as loose, sexually available and even prostitute-like mannequins functioned to sell the war to men. Numerous postcards and billboard posters as well as advertisements and articles in the popular press and film provide enough evidence for this objectification of women in the context of war propaganda. The main purpose was to lure men to the battle-zone and women into blind civil obedience and fervent patriotism. To fully acknowledge the importance of this so-called information culture of the street (Roberts 168), one may recall briefly that the whole period of 1890 to 1918 is generally acknowledged as the Golden Age of posters, advertisements, picture postcards, cigarette cards, juvenile journals and popular magazines. In the Great War Period all this material lay ready to hand for state propaganda. Soon, most of it was strongly bent to national war efforts and devoted to patriotic and military ends as John M. Mackenzie points out in *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (17). This can be seen in a wide range of propaganda postcards, billboard and wall posters in which colorful alluring imagery is used to appeal to men and women with slogans such as:

> "Is your Home Worth Fighting for? It will be too late to Fight when the enemy is at your door so Join today." (Poster by Peel, Dublin)
> "Women of Britain say - Go!" (Poster by E. Kealy)
> "Gee!!! I Wish I were A Man - I'd Join the Navy: Be a Man and Do It - United States Navy Recruiting Station." (Poster by Howard Chandler Christy)[8]
> "To the Women of Britain: Some of your men folk are holding back on your account. Won't you prove your love for your country by persuading them to go?"[9]

9 A billboard advertisement for recruiting women for the Voluntary Aids Detachment (V.A.D.) provides a very revealing insight as to the traditional roles assigned to women beyond the scope of motherhood and maternity. Featuring three nurses who pose in front of a wall that is dominated by an oversized red cross and the names of "France, Italy, Malta, Gibraltar, Saloniki, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Holland, Switzerland and Russia" as possible task locations, it reads: "V.A.D. - Nursing Members, Cooks, Kitchen Maids, Clerks, House-Maids, Ward-Maids, Laundresses, Motor-Drivers - All Urgently Needed" (Imperial War Museum,

[8] Cf. "World War I Poster collection" in the Imperial War Museum in London.
[9] See Robert Opie (ed.), *The 1910s Scrapbook: The Decade of the Great War* (2000).

London, PST 3268).

10 While the commodification of gender and sexual imagery to constitute a national group coherence and enhance a patriotic and patriarchal warfare is quite obvious and explicit in all the prior cases, it could be more implicit and rather difficult to trace once ethnic, racial and religious contexts are put into consideration as well. In all, a broad range of backgrounds and experiences of women in regional, national and international locations requires any study on women, war and the nation to move beyond essentialism, universalism and simplistic gender dichotomies. Rather than assuming homogeneity and unity among women, diversity and difference have to be acknowledged. In *Women-Nation-State*, Flora Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis put it as follows:

> When we discuss the ways women affect and are affected by national and ethnic processes within civil society, and the ways these relate to the state, it is important to remember that there is no unitary category of women which can be unproblematically conceived as the focus of ethnic, national or state polices and discourse. (7)

11 What is more, Jean Bethke Elshtain's important analysis entitled "The Discourse of War and Politics: From the Greeks to Today" (1987) as well as V. Spike Peterson's research provide enough convincing evidence to claim that conventional notions of nationalism are rooted in patriarchy and gender hierarchy. In fact, nationalism therefore constitutes a decisive part of a power structure that privileges men over women.[10] In Spike Peterson's words:

> Nationalism is gendered in terms of how the naturalization of domination ('us' at the expense of 'them') depends upon the prior naturalization of men/masculinity over women/ femininity. In this sense, taking domination as natural obscures its historical context and disables our knowledge of and attempts to transform hierarchical relations. (44)

12 In pointing at the politics of reproduction as a crucial aspect of gendered nationalism that needs to be re-assessed Sylvia Walby (1997) and Jill McCalla Vickers (1990) have opened up the possibilities for such a gender-sensitive reconsideration of nationalism. Both critics claim that the traditional politics of reproduction has two focal points: "the battle of the cradle," in which women are viewed as biological producers, and "the battle of the nursery," in which they are targeted as social producers (Vickers 485). In both categories women's autonomy and freedom of choice is limited and aligned to national patriarchal interests. It could be claimed with Spike Peterson that "the battle of the cradle is about regulating under what conditions, when, how many, and whose children women will bear" while "the battle of the nursery" focuses upon the social role of women and "involves the ideological

[10] For more recent analysis of nationalism and gender see among others Enloe and Sutton; Spike Peterson (1992); Gleason (1991) Also the special issue of Gender and History entitled "Gender, Nationalism and History (Summer 1993).

reproduction of group members" (43). Vickers views the battle of the cradle as a battle over women's sexual reproduction and the battle of the nursery as a battle over identities and loyalties (483).

13 In the context of war and thus in a situation where women face particular pressures to support the nation by complying to their role as biological and social producers of community and nationhood, this is even more complex. Quite often it seems as if the "deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7) of national allegiance can only be realized under pressure from outside. This implies that during war customary and traditional forms of behavior are temporarily suspended for the benefit of a greater cause. Furthermore, it happens that quite unrelated and dissimilar people are united as one community of brothers and sisters until victory is achieved. However, within such a presumably unified community, subjectivity is hardly possible to attain. In fact, it is rather viewed as a deviance from the norm and as such severely sanctioned. What is more, as F. Anthias and N. Yuval-Davis point out in *Woman-Nation-State*, even if the establishment of group coherence and national unity should go along with a presumably equal treatment of all citizens by the state, it will "not necessarily lead to the destruction of a sexual division of labor in society more generally. Notions of what are specifically women's needs or duties often reassert themselves in very traditional ways even in revolutionary societies" (11). Thus, the state is constituted in a gendered way, that is "as essentially male in its capacities and needs" (7). None the less, as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis point out in their conclusion, "the state does not exclusively construct gender divisions nor can they be seen only in the context of any specific state mechanisms at any historical moment as they relate to the whole area of gender differentiation" (316). As illustrated earlier, the various positions women held in the past show that women ultimately defy traditional gender dichotomies and take an active stand to modify their roles and re-conceptualize ideology, society, and nationalism.

14 U.S. American playwright Marion Craig Wentworth uses the subversive and politicized environment of theatre to examine these issues on stage. She was born in Minnesota in 1872, studied at the University of Minnesota and the Curry School of Expression in Boston, and worked as a teacher of expression. As a devoted social activist and suffragist, Wentworth was very much involved in the American Women's Suffrage Campaign and gave passionate speeches and enthusiastic recitals of Elizabeth's Robin's suffrage play *Votes for Women*. These experiences combined in an intersection of political drama, propaganda and agitation that is evident in several plays she wrote on social and women's issues. Her suffrage drama *The Flower Shop* (1912), for example, has a quite successful

performance history in Britain and the United States. In the later play *War Brides* she focuses on political action and private lives alike to take an anti-war and pro-pacifist stand. Centering upon the archetypal myth of the American Mom in the Great War, she reveals how nationalism and social constructivism are intertwined to channel women's and men's traditional role within patriotic and gendered warfare. However, in setting the action in an unspecified country in war-torn Europe, Wentworth does not limit herself to the USA and thus a home-front experience devoid of direct warfare. Instead, she transgresses national confinements and points at the popularized image of maternal womanhood which dominated the ideological front of a western world torn apart by war. Appealing to an alternative notion of gender revision in the end, she aims at deconstructing the traditional concept of femininity as passive, nurturing, and submissive, as the latter has only been re-iterated to deny women any agency in the nation and the conduct of war.

15 At first glance, the social world Wentworth's one-act play presents is united by nationalism and imperialism, the need for wartime sacrifice and the desire for victory in a kind of universal setting. The action takes place in "a war-ridden country [where] the war brides were cheered with enthusiasm and the churches were crowded when the large wedding parties spoke the ceremony in concert" (16). While national war interest requests group coherence and community spirit instead of individualization, it also supports women's access to the labor market. In the opening scene the significance of women's equal participation at the home front is emphasized:

> […] Through the open door [of the peasant cottage] may be seen women stacking grain. Others go by carrying huge baskets of grapes or loads of wood and gradually it penetrates the mind that all these workers are women […]. There is everywhere the tense atmosphere of unusual circumstance, the anxiety and excitement of war. (16)

This visualization implies that the conditions for women at home has indeed changed and the strict division between the outer, public, "masculine" world and the private, domestic, "woman's" world that marked the life of the middle and upper middle class Victorian society, has been eroded. And indeed, the introduction continues: "[…] gradually it penetrates the mind that all these workers are women, aristocrats and peasants side by side" (16). Nevertheless, closer analysis reveals that Wentworth does not draft a picture of women's liberation in the context of a nation leading war. Nor does she verify the thesis of her contemporary, the American writer and journalist Mabel Potter Daggett who went to Europe before the US entered the Great War and stated in her report on the female war experience: "[…] I think we may write it down in history that on August 4, 1914, the door of the Doll's House opened - For the shot that was fired in Serbia summoned men to their most ancient

occupation - and women to every other" (2).[11] In fact, Wentworth's depiction of women in the play rather suggests the opposite. Most female characters relate to home, matrimony and motherhood as their primary duties. They adopt traditional female roles enthusiastically, willingly or at least half-heartedly and do not care that their loyalty is ultimately employed by the state for nationalist purposes. Minna, one of the war brides, puts it as follows: "I'd rather be a wife or a widow any day than be an old maid; and to be a war bride - oh!" (19). And with regard to her "war bridegroom" she states: "He's all right. He's a soldier now. […] I probably wouldn't have picked him out in peace-times, but it is different now. […] it's for the country. We'll be famous, as war brides. Even the name sounds glorious, doesn't it? War bride!" (18).

16 What is more, not even the protagonist's sister Amelia, who demonstrates a certain degree of independence and freedom and thus transgresses some traditional gender roles, is finally able to leave the doll's house. The ultimate disruption of the earlier feminist mood takes place once the mother figure, a very traditional, strict, unyielding and patriotic character, occupies center stage. By linking up the description of the mother's characteristics with the impact it has on the daughters Wentworth reveals the dilemma of the younger women, namely the daughters Amelia and Hedwig. The stage directions put it as follows: "She is old and work-worn, but sturdy and stoical. […] She casts a sharp eye at Amelia" (16). All of a sudden, the "determined air" (16) in Amelia's behavior turns to subordination. Amelia's "downcast eyes" (16) express the impact of the maternal gaze to condition the deviant daughters and urge them to adopt the traditional female roles defined by a patriarchal system. The mother is further convinced that during war female identity and subjectivity has to be completely submitted to male-defied national interests and the aim of winning the war. She goes even further in claiming that women's prior duty is to use her reproductive capacity and give birth to new citizens to secure the home front:

> Mother: It is for the fatherland, Amelia. Aye, aye, the masters have said so. It is the will and judgment of those higher than us. They are wise. Our country will need children. Aye. Say yes, my daughter. You will not say no when your country bids you! It is your emperor, your country, who asks, more than Hans Hoffman. (19)

With this interpretation of the mother as thorough patriot who plays a crucial role in raising her children as obedient and subservient citizens, Wentworth exposes mothers as agents of state propaganda, that is as ferocious participants in various nationalist wartime maneuvers along an ideological front line, a scheme the playwright's contemporary, Canadian feminist writer Francis Marion Beyon, identifies as "national motherhood" in "Answers to an Anti-Suffragist," a well-received article in the Canadian newspaper *Guide* (1 October 1913, XII).

[11] In that context see also Clarke and Gallagher. In addition, see Doty.

17 Drawing upon the mobilization of mothers and maternal imagery to garner support for the war effort, Wentworth recognizes the productive cycle as site of oppression in women's lives and as a decisive feature of gendered nationalism. This is in line with Heather Ingman's assertion that "Far from being inborn and unchanging, mothering is shaped by the society in which mothers live and in turn daughters are brought up by their mothers to fit into their particular society's understanding of womanhood" (1). A major conflict for the protagonist is to thwart the social-constructivism of traditional gender roles as it is persistently perpetuated by flat characters such as the traditional war bride Minna, and the Mother. Their uncritical pro-patriarchal and pro-war attitude facilitates the nation's re-enforcement of gender-inequality in an emergency case like war. Subsequently, it is not merely a patriarchal war the protagonist fights but also a war against female liberation. Right from the beginning Wentworth leaves no doubt about Hedwig's ambition, vigor and conviction to meet these challenges and fight for women's liberty, as the protagonist's first appearance on stage reveals:

> *Enter Hedwig. She stands in the doorway looking out on the distant crowds [of warbrides and marching men]. She is tall, well built, and carries herself proudly. Strong, intelligent features, but pale. Her eyes are large with anxiety. She has soft, wavy black hair. An inward flame seems to be consuming her. The sounds continue in the distance, cheering, disputing mingled with far bugle-calls and marching feet.*
> Hedwig (*contemptuously*): Ha! War Brides! […] A breeding machine. (*They all draw back*) Why not call it what it is? Speak the naked truth for once. (18)

Hedwig's depiction in the first tableau classifies her not just as a rebel but, as I would like to argue, as a femme fatale. According to Patrick Bade's definition the femme fatale shows the following characteristics:

> They are pale, proud, mysterious, idol-like, full of perverse desires yet cold at heart. The link between eroticism and death is always present, as is an atmosphere of perverse cruelty which became increasingly intense as the century drew to a close. For many artists, it hardly mattered whether they painted Helen of Troy, Judith or Morgan-Le-Fay. The subject was always perceived in the same terms: women as malignant, threatening, destructive and fascinating (8-9).

Read this way, Hedwig's mysterious beauty, her alluring fatal attractiveness and her transgression and disobedience epitomize her as femme fatale. At the same time, however, Wentworth's heroine deviates from the prototypical notion of a femme fatale in that she leads a life dominated by resistance and victimization alike in a war context. She does not use her mysterious beauty to lure men and women to the battlefields, but rather to keep them out of it and make up a home-front of resistance and deviance against national war propaganda and belligerent state actions. She warns state authorities to kill the baby in her womb if war does

not stop immediately and women are given participation in politics and national affairs. In addition, she requests other women to also resist a gendered nationalist propaganda mechanism as the latter reduces women's civic role to that of reproduction and thus the perpetuation of a patriarchal nation-state. How she views the impact of war on women precisely can be seen in her conversation with the military official Hoffmann:

> Hedwig: […] Oh, it is an insult to our womanhood! You violate all that makes marriage sacred! Are we women never to get out of the dust? You never asked us if we wanted this war, yet you ask us to gather in the crops, cut the wood keep the world going, drudge and slave, and wait, and agonize, lose our all, and go on bearing more men - and more - to be shot down! If we breed the men for you why don't you let us say what is to become of them? Do we want them shot- the very breath of our life? Hoffmann: It is for the fatherland. Hedwig: You use us, and use us - dolls, beasts of burden, and you expect us to bear it forever dumbly; but I won't! I shall cry out till I die. And now, you say it almost out loud, "Go and breed for the empire." War brides! Pah! (18)

18 Undermining the assumption that women are officially obliged to "express their citizenship or even nationalism by proudly sending sons to war" (Lorentzen and Turpin XI), Hedwig links matrimony and motherhood to pacifism, morale, and female equality in the nation-state. She is not interested in any jingoistic patriotism and does not promote values like honor, religious idealism and sacrifice in the context of war and patriarchy either. Rather, for her civilization itself is at stake, because the female womb is no longer a safe haven where an innocent and positive future might prosper. Furthermore, women are still denied unrestricted agency as citizens and don't have a say in communal and national affairs. In an argument with Hertz she puts it as follows:

> Hertz: […] There will always be war. Hedwig: Then one day we will stop giving you men. Look at mother. Four sons torn from her in one month. […] We don't want armies and fighting, we women. […] And haven't we anything to say? Hertz: No. War is man's business. Hedwig: Who gives you the men? We women. We bear and rear and agonize. Well, if we are fit for that, we are fit to have a voice in the fate of the men we bear. If we can bring forth the men for the nation, we can sit with you in your councils and shape the nation, and say whether it is to war or peace we give the sons we bear. (23)

19 Contrary to the notion that "[. . .] war cultures must invest in an image of a peace worth fighting for, a peace which is imagined through images of an idealized and nostalgic pre-war Golden Age" (16), put forward by Helen Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munch and Susan Merrill Squier (1989), Wentworth does not see a pre-war Golden Age but rather envisions a post-war Golden Age where women are powerful agents within the nation. Moreover, she takes up critic April Carter's later thesis that maternal thinking is not merely a basis for feminist pacifism, but enhances women's participation in so-called just wars. As

Carter points out in an essay entitled "Should Women Be Soldiers or Pacifists?": "If war is inevitable […] or if there are some genuinely just wars, then women's responsibility as citizens may sometimes require them to fight, regardless of whether fighting clashes with women's biological or culturally created 'nature'" (36). In *War Brides* Wentworth traces such a link between women, war and citizenship, in line with April Carter's and Jean Bethke Elshtain's claim that women have to go beyond feminism to make political judgments within fundamental debates about war and peace. Consequently, the patriarchal forces of stability, namely nationalism, devotion to duty, traditional gender roles, patriotic sacrifice, and a cheerful willingness to die for one's country, prevail until the play's final scene in which the protagonist receives the message that her fiancée has been killed at the front. At first sight, Hedwig is completely pain-struck and appears just as another traditional female war victim back home. Nevertheless, soon she escapes the home-front war trauma of loss, mourning and suffering, conservative women like her mother fall victim to. As she states, "I shall never take it like mother - never! […] Poor mother (and they never asked her if she wanted this war to be)" (25). In fact, the news of Franz' death destroys the last affiliation she had with the patriarchal nation-state and is the ultimate trigger to her subsequent suicide. Through this ultimate act of transgression Hedwig escapes from the patriarchal power she opposes and claims her revolutionary significance. Since society, in the form of the lieutenant, soldiers and the militaristic state, leaves her with no other option, she elects to (most willingly) face death rather than face dismissing her own identity and political ideas (rebellion). Subsequently, her suicide is not a desperate performance of a mad woman but the deliberate action of a silenced political activist and pacifist who uses the last possibility left to her to exercise power and retain a limited freedom to choose her own destiny. This notion is supported by a message she leaves behind for the emperor stating "I refuse to bear my child until you promise there shall be no more war" (25). Although Hedwig is dead she still speaks, firstly, through the written message she leaves behind, secondly, through her suicidal act and its consequences. The double murder she commits in that she kills herself and the baby in her womb, is, to apply modern war terminology, a suicide-attack against patriarchal society. The radical politics and the defiance to liberate herself and also to resist and redefine the state merges in a kinship between life and death. This puts Hedwig in line with Antigone, the traditional feminist icon of defiance. As Judith Butler points out in *Antigone's Claim* (2000):

> Prohibited from action, she [Antigone] nevertheless acts, and her act is hardly a simple assimilation to an existing norm. And in acting, as one who has no right to act, she upsets the vocabulary of kinship that is a precondition of the human, implicitly raising the question for us of what those preconditions really must be. […] She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality

> exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social norm of its aberrant, unprecedented future. (82)

20 In conclusion, one could claim that Wentworth subverts the essentialist notion that "all women who bear children are committing, literally and symbolically, a blood sacrifice for the perpetuation of the species" (168). Modifying the concept of "motherhood as one of the pivotal components of women's war resistance" (Lorentzen and Turpin XII) in the play, she illustrates that it is not motherhood per se which will lead to changes and a pacifist future, but rather its ultimate disruption in a politicized context. In all, War Brides suggests a female identity construction in the context of war and nationalism which critic Jean Bethke Elshtain has described as chastened patriotism (see *Women and War*). For Elshtain a chastened patriot is a woman who is committed to the nation; however, she is never a blind follower of state authorities, but rather a critical citizen who is able to detach herself from present confinements and thus able to think about alternatives. Valorizing diversity, multiple identities and progress, a chastened patriot thus changes the traditional concepts of nationalism, and war as Elshtain concludes (see 268-269). This theory suggests a transgression of binary oppositions and enables a re-assessment of the historical role of women beyond traditional gender dichotomies and patriotic warfare in the political and public sphere. Furthermore, it links up with Spike Peterson's notion of gendered nationalism in that it allows a gender-sensitive approach where gender is not the primary or most salient dimension to transform hierarchical relations; however it is recognized as "making a difference, and in the context of nationalism and intergroup conflicts, may be the difference we most need to see and move beyond" (Spike Peterson 47).

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