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## Boekbespreking van: War and Gender

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## Book Reviews

Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, ISBN 0-521-80716-6, £ 30.00.

Joshua Goldstein begins *War and Gender* with an empirical fact that cries out for some theoretical explanation. Human societies have exhibited substantial variation in gender roles and norms, both historically and among contemporary societies, which is precisely what we would expect for something that is socially constructed. There is also significant variation in the practice of war. What strikes Goldstein as both interesting and odd is that the variation in gender roles does not extend to war: “despite the diversity of gender and of war separately, gender roles in war are very consistent across all known human societies” (p. 3). The question is why we find such consistency. Why has there never been a society in which women were primarily responsible for fighting wars? Why have all societies adopted the same basic gendered division of labour? Goldstein goes in search of answers.

It is important to recognize what type of work *War and Gender* is and, perhaps just as important, what it is not. Goldstein does not attempt to advance any grand or novel theory about the relationship between war and gender. Nor does he present much in the way of new empirical research or freshly gathered data. Instead, *War and Gender* is an exercise in critical ‘stocktaking’. Drawing on an impressively wide range of interdisciplinary literature, Goldstein identifies 17 ‘hypotheses’ about the relationship between war and gender in four basic areas: biology, small group dynamics, the social construction of militarized masculinity, and male sexuality. Evaluating each hypothesis in turn, Goldstein relies on whatever systematic or anecdotal evidence he can find in order to judge whether the proposition is ‘not supported’, ‘slightly supported’, ‘mostly supported’ or ‘supported’. Thus, I see *War and Gender* operating on three levels; first, the discussion of literature; second, the specification of hypotheses; and finally, the evaluation of hypotheses in light of existing evidence. On the first level he succeeds, but on the other two there are some problems.

## Book Reviews

One of the difficulties in examining what others have said about the relationship between war and gender is that these observations are scattered throughout extremely diverse theoretical literatures, almost all of which lie outside the narrow confines of political science and international relations. Nonetheless, Goldstein does an excellent job of making sense of very disparate theoretical and empirical literatures, focusing nicely on the central issues for the study of war and gender. There is, however, one glaring omission: nothing is included in terms of the possible contributions of evolutionary biology to our understanding of the gendered nature of warfare.

While the cross-cultural similarity in gendered war roles is interesting, such a division is not only evident in war. In almost all social roles that entail an increased risk of death or serious injury one finds a similar pattern across cultures. In law enforcement, for example, a similar gendered division was apparent until very recently. From an evolutionary perspective the reason why men specialize in very dangerous roles is obvious: men are biologically more expendable than women. A society that lost 90 per cent of its women in war would find it far more difficult to replenish its population than one that lost 90 per cent of its men. In simple terms, one man and ten women can have more offspring in a year than one woman and ten men. Thus, early in human evolution this gendered division was adaptive. Over the course of human history myths and social rationalizations have obscured this initial reason for the gendered division of labour, but we should not mistake the reasons why a particular social practice emerges with the forces that perpetuate it. Whatever one thinks of such arguments, they need to be addressed in any comprehensive account of war and gender. Fortunately, Goldstein has since recognized the oversight, and on his website ([www.warandgender.com](http://www.warandgender.com)) he indicates that he is working on an edited volume devoted to evolutionary arguments.

More problematic than the omission of a single body of literature is Goldstein’s attempt to specify hypotheses and judge whether they are supported by available evidence. Three problems stand out. First, many of the ‘hypotheses’ are not really hypotheses in the sense of stating a relationship between variables. Second, the hypotheses are often specified in an insufficiently precise and clear fashion. And third, Goldstein’s criteria for judging the level of support provided by the evidence is confusing and inconsistent, to say the least.

Take, for example, hypothesis 6B, which “proposes that men’s participation in combat *depends* on feminizing the enemy and enacting rape symbolically” (p. 356, emphasis added). From the outset it is unclear what he means by ‘depends’ in this hypothesis. Is ‘depends’ another way of saying that feminization of the enemy and symbolic rape are *necessary* to get men to participate in combat? That is how I would normally read it, but this would make little sense in light of his subsequent discussion. After stating this hypothesis, Goldstein provides a host of historical examples of feminization and rape (actual as well as symbolic) in wartime. In the end he concludes that the original hypothesis was ‘mostly’ supported by the evidence (p. 405). To be blunt, I have no idea how he could reach this conclusion. The problem is not showing that feminization and symbolic rape occur; obviously they do. Any reasonably

informed student of war would know this before opening the book. The difficulty is making an assessment of how common this is for soldiers and societies. Maybe there are many more instances in which these things do not happen. There is no indication, however, that Goldstein (or anyone else) has made any systematic attempt to determine the relative frequency of feminization and/or symbolic rape. Thus, how we end up with a judgment that the evidence 'mostly' supports the hypothesis as opposed to 'slightly' remains a mystery to me (and, of course, if 'depends' indicates a necessary condition, even a single disconfirming case should lead to a rejection of the hypothesis).

The example of hypothesis 5C is similarly frustrating. This hypothesis "proposes that women do not participate in combat because their peaceful natures make them oppose war" (p. 322). One sentence later Goldstein tells us that "a sizable number of women – generally somewhat more women than men, and often acting in the name of their gender – do oppose wars and work for peace" (emphasis added). Furthermore, "at the local level, many individual women... buffer intermale violence in a number of ways." On the basis of these observations alone, one might anticipate that the hypothesis would be judged at least 'slightly supported.' One would be wrong, however: Goldstein judges the proposition 'not supported' (p. 405). How does he reach this conclusion? He notes that "this hypothesis cannot be supported... given evidence that many women actively support wars" (p. 322). But this clearly will not do. By the same logic, if there was any evidence that many men have participated in combat without feminizing or symbolically raping the enemy, hypothesis 6B would have had to be rejected. Now, maybe every soldier and army has feminized the enemy and/or engaged in symbolic rape, but I doubt it. Thus, I fail to see the basis on which one hypothesis is 'mostly' supported while the other is not supported at all. As a result, for much of the time I was confused. I was hardly ever able to accurately anticipate whether Goldstein would eventually classify a hypothesis as 'mostly' or 'slightly' supported from his discussion of the evidence.

I do not think I have ever read a book that left me with such mixed feelings. On the one hand, *War and Gender* provides a consistently intelligent and fascinating discussion of a vitally important and usually ignored topic. On the other hand, the pseudo-precision of Goldstein's attempts to evaluate specific hypotheses was frequently frustrating, unconvincing and occasionally annoying. I learned a great deal from *War and Gender*, as will anyone else who reads it. This is a book that deserves a wide audience. I only wish Goldstein had dispensed entirely with his attempts to isolate and judge specific 'hypotheses'.

Keith L. Shimko

Geoffrey Pridham, *The Dynamics of Democratization: A Comparative Approach*. London and New York: Continuum, 2000, ISBN 0-8264-5038-5, £ 55.00

Since the beginning of the so-called third wave of democratization, not a single comprehensive work has been published that provides an overarching view of the phenomenon of 'democratization', that is both accessible to students and useful for seasoned scholars. To be sure, there have been many works that have focused on democratization. Most of these have been either very area specific, usually involving either the investigation of specific cases in comparative perspective (such as many studies based on the Latin American or Southern European experience), or they have been only very broadly theoretical. This work both systematically links the lessons from area specific literature into a coherent comparative approach to democratization. In this book Geoffrey Pridham, has made a significant contribution to the literature, and this work represents a major advance in the development of a coherent theory of comparative democratization.

This book offers a very comprehensive overview of the existing approaches to democratization. Chapter 1 provides a useful and succinct introduction to some key themes and concepts, and offers a critical review of the existing 'transitological' and 'consolidological' literature. In particular, Pridham identifies three general 'families' of existing theories in the literature. The first are the 'functionalist theories' associated with modernization theory and its emphasis on structural and socio-economic conditions that affect the development of democracy. The second is what Pridham calls the 'transnational theories', which emphasize external factors, global waves of democratic change, and the diffusion of democracy. The third group is referred to as 'genetic theories', which emphasize the particularities of individual national transition experiences and the role of individuals in affecting the course of democratic transition. The chapter also offers an 'interactive model of democratization', a model that provides an outline of the themes explored by the rest of the book. These themes include: historical determinants (e.g., background conditions, legacies of the previous authoritarian regime); the processes of authoritarian breakdown and collapse (i.e., how the previous regime collapsed and the kind of transition process that took place); institutional design (constitutional factors and choices); the actions of political actors; economic transformation and democratization (or the dual transformation); the development of civil society; national identity (i.e., the third transformation); and finally the international dimensions that affect regime change.

The methodology employed by the book is broadly comparative. The chapters address themes as opposed to using case studies. When case study material is used this is derived from the European experience (Western, Southern and East-Central Europe), in part because the use of a limited number of illustrative cases allows for the systematic comparison of countries that are very different, but which share some common features (such as the European tendency to have relatively better developed and structured party systems). In part, I suspect, it is also due to the author's own