1 Virginia Woolf's purse

> "We all came out of Gogol's 'Overcoat,'" the most famous apocryphal saying of Russian literature, is attributed to Dostoevsky. It suggests not only that Gogol was the great source of the Russian novel but that his works lent themselves to a wide enough range of interpretations for his overcoat to shelter, comfortably, future Turgenevs, Chekhovs, Dostoevskys, and Tolstoys.
>
> Alex de Jonge, 1974[1]

Motherland. Mother tongue. The birth of the nation. These common metaphors suggest a link between gender and nationalist movements. Women in general and mothers in particular are responsible for inculcating the key characteristics that define a cultural or ethnic identity, including such basics as language, religion, dress, and cuisine. Women serve as "boundary markers" between different national, ethnic, and religious communities, and thus might be expected to play an important role when such communities come into violent conflict.[2] Yet the relationship between gender, identity, and ethnic or nationalist conflict is only beginning to receive systematic investigation from social scientists.[3] In some major overviews of ethnic conflict, by anthropologists and political scientists alike, one cannot even find *gender* or *women* in the index.[4]

[1] Alex de Jonge, "Under the Overcoat," review of Henri Troyat, *Divided Soul: The Life of Gogol*, *New York Review of Books*, 21, 6 (April 18, 1974).

[2] Deniz Kandyoti, "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 20, 3 (1991), pp. 429–443; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[3] See, for examples of statistical and qualitative case-study approaches, respectively, Mary Caprioli, "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly*, 49, 2 (June) 2005, pp. 161–178; and Joyce P. Kaufman and Kristen P. Williams, *Women, the State, and War: A Comparative Perspective on Citizenship and Nationalism* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 2007).

[4] Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on Ethnic Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Ted Robert Gurr, *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000). The neglect of gender and women holds true for theories

A number of scholars have begun to remedy the situation by addressing the role of women and political violence broadly – a subject made more urgent in the wake of the "war on terror," the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, and incidences of female suicide terrorism.[5] Although few in number, the scholars who have looked specifically at the relationship between gender, nationalism, and conflict have produced some intriguing hypotheses – about men as well as women. They have followed a path blazed by one of the most creative thinkers about these matters – the novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf.

For scholarship is not the only, or even the most effective, way to generate insights about social relations. Few have captured the psychology of a speculative economic bubble and the consequences for society – a timely subject for the first decade of the twenty-first century – as well as the nineteenth-century English novelist Anthony Trollope in *The Way We Live Now* (1875). Russian literature is rich with examples of novelists conveying some of the most profound human emotions and interactions – from the existential anxiety of Gogol's Akakii Akakievich in "The Overcoat" (1842) to the self-absorbed nihilism of Dostoevskii's revolutionaries in *The Devils* (1872). Tolstoi so effectively portrayed the range of human relationships across gender, age, and historical time (not to mention the verisimilitude of his battle scenes) that a later Russian writer, Isaac Babel, observed of *War and Peace* (1869): "If the world could write by itself, it would write like Tolstoi."[6]

In that context it is not surprising that Virginia Woolf, the novelist, should produce such enduring insights into the relationship between gender, nationalism, and war. In *Three Guineas*, she poses the question: how are we to prevent war? She seeks to answer it by responding in a series of

of violence that are not necessarily related to nationalism or ethnicity. For a critique, see Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007), esp. ch. 7. One of the most influential treatments of nationalism, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), has also come in for criticism of its neglect of gender. See, in particular, McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

[5] See Caroline O. N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark, eds., *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Tara McKelvey, ed., *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007); Paige Whaley Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Sarala Emmanuel, "The Female Militant Romanticised," *Women in Action*, 1 (2002), www.isiswomen.org/wia/wia102/femmilitant.htm; Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*. Cynthia Enloe, the preeminent theorist of gender, nationalism, and war, whose work is discussed throughout this book, has written on the issues raised by the "global war on terror" as well. See, for example, her *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

[6] Quoted in Richard Pevear's Introduction to *War and Peace*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Random House, 2007), p. vii.

letters to requests for donations (a guinea) from the leaders of an antiwar society, an organization to promote women in the professions, and a fund for building a women's college. She finds the impetus to war in men's competitive behavior, not only in the armed forces, but in higher education, the clergy, and business. She conveys her views in witty, barbed prose, but also in pictures. She makes the point that one sign of men's hierarchical nature is their reliance on dress "to advertise the social, professional, or intellectual standing of the wearer." When women advertise their profession by their dress – at least "in the opinion of St. Paul" – they are considered "immodest."

> Yet the tradition, or belief, lingers among us that to express worth of any kind, whether intellectual or moral, by wearing pieces of metal, or ribbon, coloured hoods or gowns, is a barbarity which deserves the ridicule which we bestow upon the rites of savages. A woman who advertised her motherhood by a tuft of horsehair on the left shoulder would scarcely, you will agree, be a venerable object.[7]

In the original edition of *Three Guineas* (but unfortunately not in the subsequent paperback editions), these remarks were followed by several photographs of men in feathers, wigs, furs, gowns, jewelry, and ornate hats – all intended to convey Woolf's point that the symbols of masculine competition make for "a ridiculous, a barbarous, a displeasing spectacle."[8]

If, as the cliché has it, a picture is worth a thousand words, then a moving picture should be worth at least a scholarly article or book. The premise of this book is that we can learn much about the relationship that Virginia Woolf first explored in the 1930s between gender, nationalism, and war by watching movies. In the chapters that follow, I explore the myriad ways that gender stereotypes contribute to the militarization of national movements by examining feature films that treat major nationalist conflicts – in Algeria, former Yugoslavia, Chechnya, and Québec. The project is explicitly interdisciplinary. I employ the tools of visual and textual analysis (but not the jargon, to the extent I can avoid it) to evaluate what social scientists like to call *hypotheses* about relationships between gender, nationalism, and violence. My main inspiration is the essay by Virginia Woolf, a woman known primarily for her fiction, yet it is the causal logic of her arguments about the real world around her

[7] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938), pp. 29–30. For an exploration of how the theme of St. Paul's teachings figures in *Three Guineas*, see Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), ch. 8.

[8] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, pp. 30–31.

that invites further inquiry. Political scientists have begun to gather and analyze data to evaluate some of Woolf's hypotheses – even if they seem unaware of their provenance. I discuss some of their findings in the pages that follow. But the bulk of this study is devoted to exploring a potentially richer source of insights – modern cinema. In discussing the films, I provide context for each historical case and connect the findings of social scientists regarding, for example, economic and demographic sources of violence, to the depictions of gender and conflict on screen.

This chapter begins with a summary of the state of the debate about the relationship between gender and war, drawing on the work of two US political scientists who present sharply divergent views. It then turns to *Three Guineas* to draw out the hypotheses Woolf has embedded there. A number of feminist scholars have found inspiration in Woolf's work and have developed or moved beyond her insights in valuable ways.[9] This chapter links their work to the findings of economists and demographers who have related violence to the lack of economic opportunities for young males. The notion of the "proliferation of small men" helps explain why men sometimes resort to violence and why women are often the victims. I summarize the key hypotheses connecting gender and nationalist violence before introducing the main empirical focus of the book – ethnic and nationalist conflict in four countries – and elaborating on my rather unconventional (for a political scientist, at least) decision to explore the relationships between gender, nationalism, and violence through analysis of cinema. The chapter ends with an illustration of my technique, applied to a movie genre that will be familiar to most readers: the American Western.

War as a mostly male activity

In 1998, the journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article called "Women and the Evolution of World Politics." Its author was a public intellectual well known for his contributions to other high-profile debates, but not yet this one: Francis Fukuyama. Drawing upon a cursory reading of the literature in primatology, Fukuyama argued that human males, like their chimpanzee cousins, are by nature aggressive. He suggested that "there is something to the contention of many feminists" (unspecified) who maintain that "aggression, violence, war, and intense competition

[9] The most influential work for me has been that of Cynthia Enloe. Particularly rich with insights is her chapter "Nationalism and Masculinity," in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), where she even draws a bit on Hollywood movies to make some points about gender and colonialism.

for dominance in a status hierarchy are more closely associated with men than women." He parted company with his understanding of "the feminist view" that such behaviors are "wholly the products of a patriarchal culture," because "in fact it appears they are rooted in biology." Moreover, the prospects for resocializing men to be less violent – what he took to be the feminist agenda – are dubious: "What is bred in the bone cannot be altered easily by changes in culture and ideology."[10]

A few years after the *Foreign Affairs* article appeared, the political scientist Joshua Goldstein published a major study, *War and Gender*, in which he sought to address essentially the same question that attracted Fukuyama's attention: "why warfare is virtually an all-male occupation."[11] Goldstein, who worked for a time as a research biologist at Stanford University and knew the specialist literature well, took a very different perspective from Fukuyama on the question of biology versus culture. The difference was apparent from the very outset of his book when he explained why he eschewed the conventional terminological distinction between *sex* as a biological category and *gender* as a cultural one. In sharp contrast to Fukuyama's bred-in-the-bone contention, Goldstein offered almost the opposite of the common wisdom: "Biology provides diverse potentials, and cultures limit, select, and channel them." More strikingly Goldstein claimed that "culture directly influences the expression of genes and hence the biology of our bodies." Thus, "no universal biological essence of 'sex' exists, but rather a complex system of potentials that are activated by various internal *and* external influences."[12]

Goldstein's claim that culture influences genetic expression and our very bodies might seem surprising at first. Some of the evidence seems obvious in retrospect, however. Goldstein pointed out, for example, that cultures that favor boys over girls (most of them) will typically encourage families to give priority to their male offspring in terms of nutrition and education, with measurable impact on the physical and mental development of their bodies. Mothers who nurse male babies for longer periods than female babies, for example, are carrying out a culturally determined practice with clear biological effects. Societies that do not allow girls to engage in sports limit their physical abilities by a cultural decision. Societies that do not allow girls to attend schools do the same for their mental capacities.

[10] Francis Fukuyama, "Women and the Evolution of World Politics," *Foreign Affairs*, 77, 5 (September/October 1998), pp. 24–40.
[11] Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 169.
[12] Ibid., p. 2, original emphasis.

Gender-differentiated play styles contribute to explaining Goldstein's puzzle of male-dominated warfare, but only in combination with key influences that fall under the rubric of socialization or cultural construction. The first is segregation of boys and girls, typically reinforced or engineered by parents and teachers. Goldstein points out that "children's gender segregation is much less pervasive and absolute than is gender segregation in war," where traditionally only males have fought. Nevertheless, he sees it as "a first step in preparing children for war." Rough-and-tumble play among boys becomes "tied directly to the boys' future roles in wartime (play-fighting, dominance, heroic themes, and specific war scripts)."[13]

The most powerful socializing processes are those that associate masculinity with toughness, discipline, and ability to control and hide emotions – traits valuable for engaging in warfare. For, contra Fukuyama, "war does not come naturally to men (from biology), so warriors require intense socialization and training in order to fight effectively. Gender identity becomes a tool with which societies induce men to fight."[14] Women play a key role in this process by shaming boys and men who do not fit the masculine model and by embodying the "opposite" feminine model of the nurturing, emotional mother, lover, or nurse. The practice among male soldiers of feminizing their enemies "to encode domination" also reinforces the militarized masculine stereotype.[15] It is in effect the external variant of, and what often serves to justify, the subordination of women at home.[16]

Neither Fukuyama nor Goldstein dealt much with the sexualization of war, an issue that seems increasingly evident in US military policy. It entails not only the feminization of enemies but the fear of homosexuality.[17] A US marine's memoir of the 1991 Gulf war describes rituals of mock homosexual rape as a tool for building camaraderie within the unit, and accusations of homosexuality and the crudest misogyny as key elements of basic training – features prominent in the second US war against Iraq in 2003 as well.[18] For female soldiers, even as they made up

[13] Ibid., pp. 248–249.
[14] Ibid., pp. 252–253. On the extraordinary efforts that armies and societies must undertake to get soldiers to overcome their aversion to killing, see (Lt. Col.) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).
[15] Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 406.
[16] J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Tickner, *Gendering World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
[17] A classic discussion of the Cold War era is Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs*, 12, 4 (Summer 1987), pp. 687–718.
[18] Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (New York: Scribner, 2003), pp. 21, 44–45; Tyler Gilbert, interviewed by Sam Diener, "Basic

15 percent of the US force, the sexualization of war plays a major role as well. "Sex is key to any woman soldier's experience in the American military," writes a female veteran of the 2003 Iraq war. She describes two exclusive categories into which male soldiers put females – "slut" or "bitch," depending on the woman's availability for sex. Those in the latter category are often denounced as lesbians and become victims of sexual violence.[19] In some of the cases discussed in this book the feminization and homosexualization of enemies figures prominently as a source of violence and possible explanation for why men join armed groups – to prove that they are "real men," neither women nor gay.[20]

Some six decades before Francis Fukuyama made his foray into feminism, Virginia Woolf, in *Three Guineas*, anticipated many of the hypotheses that he and later Joshua Goldstein put forward, even as they disagreed with each other on basic points. Her small book contained the seeds of many fruitful explorations of the links between gender and war, carried out subsequently by prominent feminist scholars Cynthia Enloe, Cynthia Cockburn, Joane Nagel, and others. If, as this chapter's epigraph suggests, Gogol's "Overcoat" (the short story and the metaphor) could cover a range of Russian writers from Dostoevskii to Turgenev (and, one could add, many others in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras), the purse that holds Woolf's three guineas is equally capacious. She had, in 1938, explored many of the relationships between gender, nationalism, and war that subsequent scholars have rediscovered and investigated.[21] She even captured one of the key issues of contention between Fukuyama and Goldstein – the biological effects of culture, in the form of norms of gender discrimination.

Training: Basic Cruelty, Basic Misogyny," *Peacework* (February 2005), pp. 6–7; Joseph Rocha, "I Didn't Tell. It Didn't Matter," *The Washington Post*, October 11, 2009. These practices obviously predate the Gulf wars; see, e.g., Helen Michalowski, "The Army Will Make a 'Man' Out of You," in Pam McAllister, ed., *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982), pp. 326–335.

[19] Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the US Army* (New York: Norton, 2005), p. 18. On links between fear of lesbianism and misogynistic violence, see Suzanne Pharr, *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, CA: Chardon Press, 1997; originally published 1988).

[20] See, for example, John Borneman, "Toward a Theory of Ethnic Cleansing: Territorial Sovereignty, Heterosexuality, and Europe," in his *Subversions of International Order* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 273–317; Beverly Allen, *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Dubravka Zarkov, "The Body of the Other Man: Sexual Violence and the Construction of Masculinity, Sexuality and Ethnicity in the Croatian Media," ch. 5 in Moser and Clark, eds., *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors?*

[21] Cynthia Enloe acknowledges the importance of *Three Guineas* to her own work in her collection *The Curious Feminist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

Writing in the dark days before the outbreak of World War II, Woolf sought to convey, in an extended response to a fund-raising letter from the treasurer of a peace organization, why her outlook on matters related to war and peace differed so much from his. She made the point that despite the fact that women were legally allowed to earn their own livings in the professions (but only since 1919 in England), they still "differ enormously" from men. In fact, she distinguished between two "classes." In the realm of education, for example, "your class has been educated at public schools and universities for five or six hundred years, ours for sixty." Regarding property, "your class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically all the capital, all the land, all the valuables, and all the patronage in England. Our class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically none of the capital, none of the land, none of the valuables, and none of the patronage in England." Perhaps more metaphorically than Goldstein, she nevertheless adduces the same point: "That such differences make for very considerable differences in mind and body, no psychologist or biologist would deny … Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes."[22]

Woolf had something to say about Fukuyama's proposals as well. He suggested that status-seeking "alpha" males might pursue the nonmilitary opportunities that a liberal, market economy offers them in the universities, politics, and the stock market, as an alternative outlet for their aggressive proclivities. Woolf, by contrast, maintained that such competitive behavior under capitalism – even in seemingly benign institutions such as the universities of Cambridge and Oxford – is precisely what leads men to engage in wars. For her, aggressive competition for university titles – and their visual representations in gowns, ribbons, and tassels – is a symptom of the same syndrome that induces soldiers to seek higher ranks through their military exploits.

As for women, Woolf proposes two competing explanations for their possible attitudes towards war. Denied education and property, treated as a slave to her father and husband, a woman might reject national sentiment and support for her country's wars by declaring "as a woman I have no country." This slogan, mistakenly taken by some as an adequate summary of Woolf's argument, is in fact only a hypothesis. Woolf offers an alternative possibility as well – that women support war in an attempt to achieve greater equality with men:

> How else can we explain that amazing outburst in August 1914, when the daughters of educated men … rushed into hospitals, some still attended by their

[22] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966 [1938]), p. 18. Citations hereafter are to the paperback edition.

maids, drove lorries, worked in fields and munitions factories, and used all their immense stores of charm, of sympathy, to persuade young men that to fight was heroic … So profound was her unconscious loathing for the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity that she would undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape. Thus consciously she desired "our splendid Empire"; unconsciously she desired our splendid war.[23]

In preparing *Three Guineas*, Woolf had conducted prodigious research in order to come up with her generalizations. She read widely in "biography and autobiography," as her detailed notes attest, and followed current debates, for example, in the House of Commons, from the daily newspapers, what she called "history in the raw."[24] Ultimately Woolf arrived at a series of hypotheses, some pointing towards women's rejection of war and the hierarchical, competitive institutions that she identified as its main cause, others suggesting the conditions under which women might favor war – primarily in order to better their own positions in a highly discriminatory society. What she did not anticipate, writing in the period before the emergence of anticolonial movements of "national liberation" in the wake of World War II, was the role that women would play in nationalist violence. Under conditions of double discrimination, within their own societies and within the structure of colonial control of their country, women often resorted to violence – in ways that neither Fukuyama's bred-in-the-bone biology nor Goldstein's more sophisticated cultural and sociological account explains. Woolf was attuned to women's potential for *resistance* to oppression (including colonialism or imperialism), but seemed to assume that resistance would take nonviolent form.[25] Neither she, nor many subsequent observers, have sought to understand why under some conditions women (or men, for that matter) resort to violence while under others they pursue nonviolent resistance. During the era of decolonization, dominant expectations about appropriate gender roles – that men would be violent and women nonviolent – often made women more effective than men at carrying out acts of anticolonial violence. The Algerian war of independence against French colonial rule is the most striking example, and Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers* (*La Battaglia di Algeri*, 1966), discussed in the

[23] Ibid., p. 39.
[24] Ibid., p. 7. For more background, see Naomi Black, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), esp. ch. 3, "The Evolution of *Three Guineas*."
[25] On Woolf's views on imperialism, see Black, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, pp. 175–178. On the complicated relationship between British feminism and imperialism, see Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

next chapter, remains one of the most powerful portrayals of the effect of gender on that conflict.

Nor could Woolf have anything to say about the role of postcommunist nationalism in eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. Indeed, in her lifetime, Russia was the world's only communist state. She could not anticipate that the demise of some communist regimes would lead to the outbreak of wars justified on nationalist or ethnic grounds – or the myriad ways that women and gender would be implicated. For example, in former Yugoslavia – the topic of chapter 3 – women played multiple roles, sometimes as leaders of antinationalist and peace movements, often as victims of sexual violence perpetrated under the nationalist banner, and occasionally as promoters of extreme nationalist policies. Although there are few female characters in Srđan Dragojević's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (*Lepa sela, lepo gore*, 1996), the film captures the role of gender in prewar and wartime Yugoslavia in a way that helps us understand how the conflict became so infused with misogynist violence.

Chapter 4 is devoted to Chechnya, Russia's rebellious republic, which has suffered two devastating wars since declaring its independence in the early 1990s. Following the Russian military incursion into Chechnya in late 1994, some Chechen mothers worked with their Russian counterparts to free Russian soldiers taken prisoner by the Chechen fighters. Other Chechen women became supporters of the violent resistance to Russian occupation, even to the point of undertaking suicide terrorism – out of some combination of desperation, desire to avenge the loss of their relatives at the hands of Russian soldiers, or the political motive of expelling the occupiers. Over a period of more than a dozen years, as violence raged in Chechnya, Russian directors produced a wide range of films treating the conflict, from Sergei Bodrov's *Prisoner of the Mountains* (*Kavkazskii plennik*, literally "Caucasian Prisoner," 1996) to Aleksandr Sokurov's *Aleksandra* (2007). This chapter covers several of them, offering insights into the strikingly different ways the conflict itself and the role of gender have been portrayed.

That women could identify with nationalism by supporting nationalist or separatist movements that did not pose the risk of violent conflict was another possibility that Woolf failed to consider. Yet the experience of modern Québec nationalism, at least since the mid-1970s, constitutes precisely such a phenomenon. It is the topic of chapter 5, the centerpiece of which is an analysis of Robert Lepage's 1998 film, *Nô*. Following a brief period of political violence modeled on Third World national liberation movements, and suppressed by the federal government, Québec nationalists – or sovereigntists (*souverainistes*) as they often prefer to be called – confined their struggle to peaceful means. Battles were now