

# H-Net Reviews

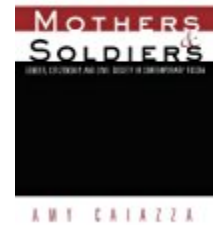
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Amy Caiazza. *Mothers and Soldiers: Gender, Citizenship, and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002. xv + 192 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-93177-9.

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## The Power of Radical Motherhood

Amy Caiazza's book looks at big questions: the development of civil society, the concepts of citizenship, and gender politics in 1990s Russia. To do this she takes a small slice of political life and examines it systematically. She looks at the influence of four interest groups (three women's and one men's) on two important policy issues: motherhood and military service reform. Debates on the duties and rights of citizens informed much of Russia's political discourse in the 1990s. The duties of citizens in the Soviet period were clearly articulated: men as soldiers; women as working mothers. This study's four interest groups called for the renovation of the concept of citizenship, while at the same time utilizing its gendered meanings. During this transitional period, the varying degrees of success of these groups related to the "fit" of their gender ideologies with Russia's political culture and opportunity structures. As Caiazza puts it, "ideas about gender turned out to be a defining factor determining groups' policy successes" (p. 156).

In the "motherhood" policymaking arena, Caiazza compares a conservative women's party, the Women of Russia Party (WRP), with a feminist academic organization (the Moscow Center for Gender Studies). WRP had a greater impact on policymaking than the Center because its gender ideology "fit" Russian cultural norms more comfortably than the Western-style feminism of the Center. The WRP, whose Soviet-era ideology supported "traditional" ideas about motherhood as well as women's economic rights in the workforce, gained seats in parlia-

ment in 1993 and designed and helped push a new Family Code through the Duma. Despite these initial victories, however, it failed to win seats in the elections of 1995, in part because its gender ideology and compromising approach to politics undercut its own political agenda. The Center, on the other hand, was less successful at finding either institutional or ideological opportunities to pursue its political goals of "detaching motherhood from citizenship" and creating more space for women in the public sphere. Although the Center helped to draft legislative guidelines for implementing the Constitutional clause on equal rights and opportunities (1993), Caiazza sees its ultimate impact as largely "symbolic" (p. 94).

The "military policy" arena—dominated by the First Chechen War and scandals highlighting abuses of recruits in the military—was a contentious site, relatively impermeable to lobbying by "human rights" interest groups. Here, Caiazza examines the highly effective deployment of gender ideology by the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (CSM) and compares it to the far less visible activities of a men's interest group, the Antimilitarist Radical Association (ARA). Fighting for an amnesty for war-related activities and reform of the military services, the CSM used maternalist rhetoric: as mothers, its members claimed to have a "reckless, biological instinct" to protect their endangered sons (p. 126). It mobilized mothers around the country, infiltrated military bases to snatch sons to safety, convinced the Duma to declare an amnesty, and put military reform on the po-

political agenda. CSM's careful assessment of Russia's political opportunity structure and its use of gender ideology was crucial to its strategy. During the First Chechen War its campaign worked because CSM's identity fit well with the Russian ideological context. But in the Second Chechen War, the CSM lost visibility, as political and military leaders tightened control of the media. Working in the same arena of military policy, the mostly male ARA had little impact in its campaign to permit alternatives to mandatory military service. Caiazza points to its inability to mobilize "male consciousness" in the way that the CSM (or the WR) could generate support of a "female consciousness" and the citizen-mother in its campaign.

Caiazza finds that in transitional, relatively undemocratic societies where there are few institutional opportunities for groups in civil society to exploit, ideological opportunities can be particularly important. And in the case of the four interest groups, gender ideologies that featured Russian women's roles as mothers and wives had a special resonance. The all-too-fleeting influence of these interest groups on policymaking is seen as symptomatic of the opportunities available to civil society generally. Caiazza's interest groups are also symptomatic, if we take a wider view, of the gendered political culture in post-socialist Russia. Finnish scholar Suvi Salmenniemi argues that, increasingly in the 1990s, institutional pol-

itics became associated with masculinity; civic activism with femininity. This was the case not only in Moscow (the geographical focus of *Mothers and Soldiers*), but in the provincial cities as well.[1]

The book's methodological package allows Caiazza to undertake a complex analysis and make nuanced conclusions. Its political opportunity approach is impressive—and would have useful applications in other studies. For data, it relies on questionnaires and interviews of a wide range of political actors and journalists, public opinion polls, and published materials. It assembles a meticulously structured argument. However, this reviewer would have welcomed an occasional widening of perspective and teasing out of implications of this research for the changing dynamics of Russian political culture.

This stimulating book would be of interest to researchers as well as graduate and upper-level university students.

#### Note

[1]. Suvi Salmenniemi, "Renegotiating Citizenship: Gender and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia," (paper presented at the 5th European Feminist Research Conference, "Gender and Power in the New Europe," held at Lund University, Sweden August 20-24, 2003), p. 2.

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