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Andrew Orr. *Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. xxvi + 192 pp. $75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-02630-9.

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In the middle of reading Andrew Orr's book on women in the French Army, the subject of this review, I met an American woman who recounted her experiences as an army nurse in Vietnam. She shared that she has been repeatedly ridiculed for wearing her Vietnam veteran's hat, for dishonoring her husband's sacrifice by wearing ***his*** hat. As a woman, she could not possibly be a Vietnam vet or have been a soldier; it could not be her hat. It is in light of these kinds of stories of women's erasure from military histories that the value of Orr's book on women in the French military can be understood.

Orr's 2017 book, ***Women and the French Army during the World Wars, 1914-1940***,seeks to illuminate the contribution of women to the French military and their experiences beginning in 1914. Their stories, up to this point, have remained silent in the documentary record for reasons that reflect these women's tenuous status in the French Army. Orr seeks to rectify this gap in both French military history and gender history; he sheds light on the contribution that women made to the military as civilian employees and their persecution. Orr demonstrates that their status in the military was a reflection of political debates, military paternalism, and the army's need for often clerical manpower. Throughout the book, Orr traces a consistent tension between the military's increasing reliance on female labor and their painstaking attempts to remove women from what Orr terms "the military community." Using military archives, Orr sketches the military's struggle to accept women as a permanent part of the military and the contradictions that help explain their gradual "gains" in the military, as he searches for their experiences.

While Orr's title puts emphasis on the "world wars," he treats the moment of in between—the interwar period—as critical to understanding female employees' gradual entrenchment in the French military from 1914 to 1944. According to Orr, it was during the interwar period that women's position in the military evolved due to budgetary issues, hiring preferences, manpower needs, and eventually, a growing trust in women as a loyal part of the military. Orr's emphasis on women's "gains" in the interwar period takes issue with Patrice and Margaret Higonnet's "double helix" theory that asserts that women's roles vis-à-vis men did not fundamentally change as a result of World War I.[1] Their 1987 essay, published in ***Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars***, argues that although women took on new roles during World War I within the traditionally masculine sphere, this change only happened when such labor could be measured against men's "super-masculine" roles as soldiers. Even when women stepped into

traditionally masculine roles as men went to the war front, it did not change the gendered relations of power: a woman's role still remained defined in relation to that of men. They point out that women employed in traditional masculine positions, such as in munitions factories or as drivers, were fired after World War I, returning to more traditional "female" positions, such as secretaries. In conversation with the Higgonets, Orr demonstrates that change did occur in the French military over a longer trajectory. Explicitly refuting the "double helix," Orr instead says that women's place in the military did significantly evolve over the course of the interwar period in ways that shifted gendered relationships of power.

Throughout the book, Orr points to the contested nature of female military labor and the irony of their expanded place in the military following World War I. The story that Orr describes is not one of the heartfelt acceptance of women as vital military labor, but rather a fraught political and budgetary battle. On the eve of World War I, the French military actively eliminated women from the military. The French military battlefront had historically included women: the ***cantinères***. These women had followed the troops to battle, treated the sick and wounded, and fed soldiers. In 1914, the French military banned the ***cantinères*** in an effort to "masculinize" the war front and the French Army. Yet, in the midst of the war, the military had to backpedal on their blanket elimination of female workers. In desperate need of manpower, the French Army began to hire women into clerical and civilian positions that, unlike the ***cantinères***, were kept separate from the battle lines. By bringing women into the military in civilian positions, the military gained crucial male bodies to send to the war front.

Despite their need for women to step into military roles, military leaders always intended these women to be a temporary weapon in a time of total war. Orr explains that military leaders never trusted women's suitability in the military; they especially doubted that women had the proper discipline, knowledge, and loyalty to serve as soldiers. In 1918 during demobilization, military leaders first "purged" female employees en masse, making good on their promise that these positions were only temporary. But, ironically, this elimination of women was ***again*** short-lived. With mass demobilization of soldiers between 1918 and 1919, the French Army was drowning in paperwork. In need of clerical assistants, the army rehired many of these women to sort through the filing. Reflecting on the double helix, Orr argues that the reliance on women during demobilization demonstrates that women "stepped forward," regaining their wartime advances at a moment when men "stepped backward" or faced demobilization (p. 45). Women proved ideal employees because they were legally allowed to be paid less and they were apolitical, lacking the right to vote. Furthermore, the military hired certain women—war widows and the daughters of fallen soldiers—out of a paternalist "moral" obligation to care for these military families of the dead. Orr notes, "This policy defined women by their relationship to men, and in this case military men, marking them as dependents and de facto family members. In military leaders' eyes, it was the manly sacrifice of wartime soldiers and the suffering that brought their family members that justified hiring widows and daughters rather than the women's skills or desire to support the war effort" (p. 15). Not out of step with the Higonnets' point, women received positions ***because*** of their husband's heroic sacrifice and the military's paternalism, not because of the military's view that women earned these positions for themselves.

These are just a few of the ironic ways that women achieved "gains" in the military. These achievements often had little to do with the military's appreciation of female labor or a conviction that women belonged in the military. Instead, the practical need for "female" positions like typists and for cheap and apolitical bodies led to women keeping their temporary jobs as civilians, but not

achieving permanent status as a part of the military. It is not until the eve of the fall of the Third Republic to the Nazis, in the spring of 1940, that women achieved regular status as soldiers, but in step with the ebbs and flows of Orr's story, these successes would be reversed within the month with the fall of France and the rise of the Vichy regime.

Despite the relatively constant paternalist and gendered attitudes on the part of military leaders toward women in the military, change in women's status as part of the military community did occur at the ground level. Orr shows that individual units formed bonds of kinship and trust with their female colleagues, and therefore, these relationships granted access to a "military identity." Although women held ostensibly impermanent positions, many women remained with the same units, often the units of their fallen male family members, for extended periods of time. Take for example the story of Madame Hélias. Hélias had worked for her deceased husband's unit since 1918, and when she faced the threat of demotion or transfer in 1923, her unit commander intervened on her behalf, "citing the bonds of trust she had established with his men and the debt the army owed to her husband for his sacrifice." Although Hélias does not get to speak for herself in the archives, Orr argues that this episode shows the "process by which women slowly integrated into the French Army's culture" and the creation of a professional identity for women by officers (p. 67). Orr traces women's acceptance into the military community and their assumption of a military identity on the eve of World War II through the army's inclusion of women in anti-gas training and their permission to wear uniforms, demonstrating the military's concern for female soldiers' safety and their view of women as a valued part of the "military community."

Although Orr succeeds at giving these female civilian employees in the military a history and showing how women remained vital to France's military needs despite being relegated to temporary civilian positions, he cannot adequately give them a voice. This is due to a paucity of sources that provide access to their perspective. He can only tell Hélias's story through the words of her unit commander. Orr's archival sources, largely military records from a male perspective, force him to reconstruct women's experiences—to the extent that he can—through a masculine military gaze. Despite the silence of these women in previous scholarship and the archives, itself a reflection of their liminal place within the military itself, Orr is able to reveal their struggles and limitations, as well as their critical contribution during these years. His research sketches out the gender dynamics within the military and (more broadly) the ways that French ideas regarding women's place within a masculine sphere of warfare shifted over time.

Although Orr is plagued by the limits of his sources, there is room for a more nuanced discussion of gender "change" in this work. In his focus on women's "gains" and their regularization on the eve of World War II, Orr plots teleological change, rather than attempting a more complicated reflection on gender roles or female military identity. He uses "gains" as an analytic, papering over the gendered dynamics and the struggles that underscored this change, and the ironies inherent in the story he tells. What can the military's consistent, unchanged, paternalist hiring preferences reveal regarding women's changing place in French society? Orr shows us that women became accepted into the military in part because of the institutional devaluation of their labor, the ability to pay them less, their disenfranchisement, and the military's paternal obligation to care for these families. These frictions are not completely out of harmony with the Higonnets' theory: when gender roles evolved, the gendered regimes that underscored them remained in place. Thinking with the "double helix" rather than starkly in contrast to it could produce a more nuanced and complicated analysis of women's empowerment and their identity as civilian military employees. In this regard,

Anna Krylova's work on Soviet female fighter pilots could provide a useful model for thinking about female military identity. Her book, ***Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front*** (2010), shows how these female fighter pilots developed their own distinct military identity as women and as pilots. Nonetheless, change does happen: men came to identify and bond with their fellow female employees; women began to advocate for themselves and their rights as female soldiers; and eventually, the military permitted women new rights—military training, uniforms, and a place in female battalions—that accorded women a clear and important place within the history of the French military and national security.

Note

[1]. Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L. R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in ***Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars***, ed. Margaret R. Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 31-47.

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