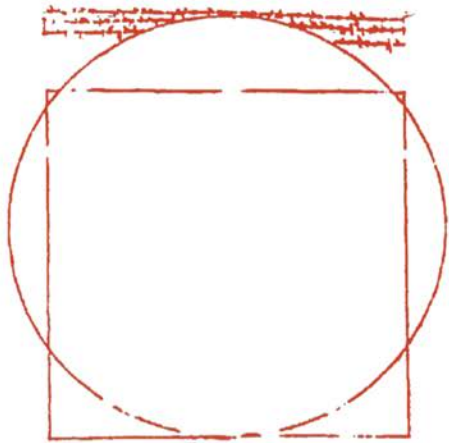


# 1914/18 - revisited



L'HOMME

EUROPEAN REVIEW OF FEMINIST HISTORY  
REVUE EUROPÉENNE D'HISTOIRE FÉMINISTE  
EUROPÄISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR FEMINISTISCHE GESCHICHTSWISSENSCHAFT  
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## Reflections on the Gender Aspects of World War One: Commemoration Projects and Historiography in Hungary

A large number of public events, conferences, exhibitions and publications shows that there has been significant attention placed to the commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the First World War in Hungary since 2014.<sup>1</sup> In this year, more events and exhibitions about the Great War took place than during the past 25 years altogether. However, it should be noted that the centrally launched, state-funded calls that aimed at creating, editing and organising commemoration projects in Hungary were mostly announced not earlier than in 2014.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in a special challenge, as this timeframe did not allow for new basic research projects in the year of the centenary. The final results of those long term projects initiated after 2014 will obviously become evident much later.<sup>3</sup> The selected projects were expected to draw the public attention to new, innovative perspectives of the Great War.

The Hungarian government created the Centenary Commemorative Committee of World War One in late 2012.<sup>4</sup> Its members are heads of ministries and high government officials, except for the historian Mária Schmidt, the leading figure in the

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1 The authors wish to thank historian Boldizsár Vörös for giving us basic information and guidance about centenary events and publications at the beginning of our data collection. He contributed to several projects and publications on World War One. Cf. Boldizsár Vörös, Terek, tömegek, filmek: Rendezvények magyar híradókban 1915-ben és 1919-ben [Spaces, People, Films: Events in Hungarian Film Reports, 1915 and 1919], in: Iván Bertényi Jr., László Boka and Enikő Katona (eds.), Propaganda – politika, hétköznapi és magas kultúra, művészet és média a Nagy Háborúban [Propaganda – Politics, Culture, Arts and Media in the Great War], Budapest 2016, 303–312. We also thank Iván Bertényi Jr., András Gerő and András Kappanyos for their time and their valuable comments to our interview questions.

2 Cf. Zoltán Oszkár Szóts, Volt egyszer egy évforduló – válogatás az utóbbi két év első világháborús szakirodalmából [Once Upon a Time on a Centenary. Selection of WWI Literature of the Past Two Years], in: Múltunk. Journal of Political History, 2 (2016), 120–146.

3 Cf. interview with Iván Bertényi Jr. (Director of the Institute of Hungarian History, Vienna) who was involved in several centenary events and publications. He pointed out that the time limits and the late publication of calls made it difficult to investigate new topics for those who have not previously been involved in WWI-related research.

4 A Kormány 1472/2012. (X. 29.) Korm. Határozata az Első Világháborús Centenárium Emlékbizottság létrehozásáról [Government decision 1472/2012. (X. 29.) about establishing the Centenary Committee].

politics of history of the Orbán cabinets.<sup>5</sup> Another governmental resolution was adopted in mid-2013 about the centenary programme,<sup>6</sup> which – demonstrating the cultural-political importance attributed to the Treaty of Trianon – extended the commemorative period concerning World War One to the time between 1914 and 1920. The resolution assigned the coordination of this programme to the Institute of the Twentieth Century, headed by Schmidt. The Scholarly and Advisory Board,<sup>7</sup> which defined the framework of the commemoration events in order to schedule the “historical-professional definition of the centenary events’ orientation”, put emphasis on the novelties and innovations. It called for a new perspective and a new historical narrative in order to overcome “previous stereotypes” and a “politically motivated” and “old-fashioned approach” applying the winners-losers dichotomy.<sup>8</sup> However, some criticism<sup>9</sup> and the statistics of the first centenary year show the difficulties in meeting those high expectations of achieving historiographic innovations: nearly half of the selected 230 projects were about the renovation of existing World War One monuments. In addition to a hundred different cultural events, only six book publications and seven film scripts were supported by the budget of 500 million HUF spent for centenary activities during the first year.<sup>10</sup> It seems that not only the official programme was burdened by high expectations for new approaches in historical representation.<sup>11</sup>

The remembrance of World War One in the Hungarian public and cultural spheres has been strongly attached to certain key motifs, connected mostly to the narratives of losses. The dramatic consequences of the war, the disastrous defeat and the Peace Treaty

5 Mária Schmidt, chief advisor of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán between 1998 and 2002, is trustee of the main laboratory of pro-government historical knowledge production, the Public Foundation for the Research of Central and Eastern European History and Society. Schmidt is the director of the two research institutions and the House of Terror Museum, affiliated to the public foundation.

6 A Kormány 1182/2013. (IV. 5.) Korm. Határozat az első világháború centenáriumi rendezvénysorozatáról [Government decision 1182/2013. (IV. 5.) about launching the commemoration events].

7 Formed in June 2013.

8 Tudományos és tanácsadó testület programadó nyilatkozata, 18 June 2013, cf. document of the scientific advisory board defining the aims and the programme, at: [www.elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/14-tudomanyos-es-tanacsado-testulet-projektindi-to-nyilatkozat/file](http://www.elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/14-tudomanyos-es-tanacsado-testulet-projektindi-to-nyilatkozat/file), access: 6 April 2018.

9 Cf. Eszter Babarczy, Március [March], in: *Élet és Irodalom* [Life and Literature], 59, 12 (2015), 7. Cf. Mária Schmidt’s answer to this criticism at: [www.elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/21-7/file](http://www.elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/21-7/file), access: 6 April 2018.

10 Cf. the communication of the Ministry of Human Resource (Emberi Erőforrások Minisztériuma közleménye), [www.elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/24-9/file](http://www.elsovilagaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/24-9/file), access: 6 April 2018, 5 paragraphs.

11 Several authors, main organisers and contributors of the centenary events have expressed the necessity of overcoming the previous narratives and to introduce new approaches and themes, as was argued for example by András Gerő, historian and director of the Institute of Habsburg History, Budapest. About the dominant Trianon remembrance cf. e. g. the reflective essay by János Kőbányai, *Az elbeszélhetetlen elbeszélés. Az első világháború a magyar irodalomban.* [Story That Can Not be Told. WWI in Hungarian Literature], Budapest 2014, 7.

of Trianon have dominated the memories of the Great War. However, there have been great efforts to include topics such as modernity and warfare, social and structural changes, attitudes and cultural impacts connected to World War One beyond the usual themes of previous historical narratives focusing on the history of diplomacy, politics and the events of warfare. Furthermore and connected to the grand narratives, a significant part of the commemoration events in Hungary deal mostly with the role of “key” figures such as kings, emperors and senior military officers of the belligerent countries.<sup>12</sup>

Leading Hungarian historians and major personalities who play a significant role in the organisation of the events to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War One emphasised their willingness to reconsider previous ways of commemorating or writing about the history of the war and stressed the need of including new approaches.<sup>13</sup> Yet, several circumstances made these intended changes and innovations rather difficult.

Against this background, our paper aims to grasp the main features concerning the inclusion of gender topics in these performances and analyse in what ways such issues contribute to new understandings of gendered features of the war or reaffirm previous approaches. The paper will present some of those centenary projects (exhibitions, events and publications) that had a special focus on women or, defined more broadly, on gender aspects. We examine the motivations, values and processes of the establishment of selected commemoration projects based on personal interviews with the theme leaders concerned. Thus, the paper reflects on some characteristic and significant events and publications in order to outline our main analytical point of view, which is the analysis of gender representations.

## 1. Gender and the First World War

In international research, gender is considered a relevant and valid category of war studies and commemorations – be it in general or related to World War One in particular. Many historians currently regard gender and war as “inevitably intertwined”.<sup>14</sup> Gender relations and gendered notions of war, images and representations

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12 One of the key centenary exhibitions in Budapest, entitled “1914–1918. A New World Was Born. Europe’s Fraternal War” at Castle Garden Bazaar in Budapest, represented World War One as a parallel narrative, addressing both traditional and the new topics (warfare, politics, diplomacy, yet also home front and social changes).

13 Cf. personal interviews with András Gerő and András Kappanyos, see note 1.

14 Ana Carden-Coyne quotes Alison Fell, *Gendering the War Story*, in: *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1, 1, (2007), 53–58, and Carden-Coyne refers also to John Horne, *Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850–1950*, in: Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (eds.), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, Manchester 2014, 22–40. Cf. Ana Carden-Coyne, *Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World*

constitute a major focus in a number of recently published studies on war (and peace) and volumes on World War One.<sup>15</sup>

At first glance, the examination of wars in regard to gender differences appears to support the traditional gender dichotomy in that, while men ‘make’ war, women are the ones who keep life going on at the home front.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, military masculinism was not questioned, but taken for granted, and an analysis of gender was understood as the examination of women’s situation.<sup>17</sup> Two basic optional frameworks of interpretation are relevant here, which serve as backgrounds for investigations of women and war. The first one is the frame of care-giving (that refers to women’s activities during wartime as fulfilling their seemingly essential and primary tasks as caregivers, food suppliers and as nurses and healers).<sup>18</sup> The second interpretive frame exceeds beyond the limits of the first one and offers a more complex approach, focusing on women also as active participants in public life in wartime: either in politics, women’s organisations, in civil society in several ways or as those who contribute to the formulation of the systematic social institutions (employment, health, childcare, etc) that fulfil the emerging needs at times of war.<sup>19</sup>

Recent academic interests, however, go beyond the former dichotomies and a focus solely on women. They formulate new approaches and reflect on the “ways in which discourses of gender intersect with political debates about and cultural representations of war”.<sup>20</sup> Among the new subjects, the questions of military masculinities, the relationship between military masculinity and national identity or the challenged gender roles as a side effect of the war are becoming more and more examined and elaborated in international literature. The social problems of returning wounded and disabled soldiers from the front and the losses in private lives are also frequently investigated research topics, as well as the characteristically gendered, anti-war feminist pacifist activism and women’s involvement in politics, public life and social service.

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War: A Centenary Reflection, in: *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies*, 20, 1 (2015): *Revisiting the Great War*, ed. by John Mullen and Florence Binard, 1–8.

15 Cf. Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp (eds.), *The Women’s Movement in Wartime. International Perspectives, 1914–19*, Basingstoke/New York 2007; Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger and Birgitta Bader-Zaar (eds.), *Gender and the First World War*, Basingstoke/New York 2014.

16 Cf. Andrea Pető, *Az I. világháború története a társadalmi nemek szerint [Gendered History of World War One]*, in: István Majoros, Gábor Antal, Péter Hevő and Anita M. Madarász (eds.), *Sorsok, frontok, eszmék. Tanulmányok az első világháború 100. évfordulójára [Fates, Fronts, Ideas. Studies published for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of WWI]*, Budapest 2015, 567–576.

17 Though, arguably, gender history is still often equated with the study of women (and implicitly femininity), cf. Carden-Coyne, *Masculinity*, see note 14, 1.

18 Pető, *Az I*, see note 16, 568ff.

19 Cf. Zoltán Völgyesi, *Harctértől a hátszörzsigig. Az első világháború gazdasági és társadalmi hatásai Magyarországon a levéltári források tükrében [From the Front to the Home Front. The Economic and Social Impacts of WWI in the Light of Archival Sources]*, Budapest 2016.

20 Alison Fell, *Gendering the War Story*, see note 14, 54.

Due to the restrictive publishing policies of state socialism before 1989, the majority of relevant research literature determining the changes in history writing and research was neither translated, nor could it be purchased in the original language in Hungary. Even these days, after the transition, such books are hardly available. Thus, these new tendencies could not make significant impact. Women studies in general and women's history in particular have difficulties entering the mainstream of Hungarian academia. Yet, since the 1990s, several university departments have introduced courses connected in one way or another to women's history, and devoted several publications, conferences, special issues and events to this topic.<sup>21</sup>

History in East Central Europe is framed by some common features: "The most important among them is how the memory of the end of the war and its outcome dominated and still dominates its memory in the region. [...] irrespective of victory or defeat, being born out of the collapse of the empires or just profiting from it, state formation and its territorial aspects form the focus of politics of memory"<sup>22</sup> – as it is stated in the World War One special issue of the journal "Múltunk", published by the Institute of Political History, a foundation and non-profit research institute that played a significant role in the centenary events in Hungary. It launched a four-year project<sup>23</sup>, funded by the Citizens for Europe – European Active Memory programme of the European Commission, in order to help develop, facilitate and strengthen the memory of the Great War. The project organised a series of events, both for the larger public and the scholarly community, and also aimed at involving international experts and audiences to discuss features of commemorations in the region.<sup>24</sup>

Beyond such initiatives and the exclusive groups of esteemed historians and experts there is still a lack of basic, general, wide-ranging studies about new tendencies of

21 Women's history initiatives were often carried out by interdisciplinary studies. Cf. e.g. one of the first series of lectures, entitled "Woman in Society", organised at ELTE, Budapest, in 1987 by Mária Adamik, Judit Acsády and Andrea Tóth. Women's and gender studies courses were often introduced at English Departments or connected to sociology, cultural studies, economics, literature, philosophy e.g. at the universities of Szeged, Debrecen, ELTE, Corvinus. Founded in the 1990's, the CEU also established a gender programme in Budapest. Initiated by Erzsébet Barát, a feminist linguist (University of Szeged, English Department), a gender studies conference has been organised in the south of Hungary, in Szeged, entitled "Language, Ideology and Media" every year from 2005 onwards. Barát is also the editor in chief of the only gender studies journal in Hungary, the "TNTeF Interdisciplinary eJournal of Gender Studies", founded in 2010.

22 Gábor Egrý and Róbert Takács, Pieces from the Puzzle of the Memory of WWI in Central and Eastern Europe, in: *Múltunk. Journal of Political History*, 2 (2016), special issue: Memory and Memorialization of WWI in East Central Europe: Past and Present, ed. by Gábor Egrý, 154–172, 156, open access at: [www.multunk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/multunk\\_special\\_wwi\\_2016.pdf](http://www.multunk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/multunk_special_wwi_2016.pdf), access: 6 April 2018.

23 "Frontlines and Hinterland" project at the Institute of Political History, Budapest. The collective of the institute wish to engage with blind spots of social memory of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWI and present a new picture of the social experience of war between 1914 and 1918." Quote from the preface in: *Memory and Memorialization*, see note 22, 4.

24 The project also launched a website. For the English version cf. [www.elsovh.hu/english](http://www.elsovh.hu/english).

history writing, including the aspects of social history, micro-history and the history of events from the standpoint of different social groups and, consequently, gender aspects.

## 2. Representation of Gender in the Centenary Events and Publications in Hungary

Regarding the events and projects launched in Hungary in the context of the centenary, gender aspects of war in the above outlined sense<sup>25</sup> are rather rarely displayed and examined. A significant majority of the centenary commemoration events and publications devoted to the occasion<sup>26</sup> approaches the Great War as a total war that impacts all segments of society. Thus, the commemorations often include interdisciplinary methods to describe the multiple effects of the war on economy, culture, social life, services, health care, demography<sup>27</sup> or education, among many others.

The volumes and exhibitions were often organised around one leading topic or attempted to include several of them. For example, this applies to a volume published by the National Széchényi Library on the role of propaganda in the media during World War One or the publication of the KKETTK Public Foundation<sup>28</sup> and another edited volume, “The Aftermath of World War One”<sup>29</sup> that all include interdisciplinary studies. The book “Fates, Fronts, Ideas” devotes a whole section to women’s issues. Besides, these volumes have relatively few references to gender relations or gendered features of the war. As an effect of a basic dichotomy in these descriptions of front (men) and home front (women), the representations remain mostly in an essentialist framework. Women are described as connected to the private sphere of life, to care and nursing; women’s public role during the war, or women’s organisations are not discussed.<sup>30</sup> The same

25 Cf. also Carden-Coyne, *Masculinity*, see note 14, 1: “Masculinity has been named as an explicit subject of historical investigation in relation to wartime and militarism”.

26 Apart from the above-mentioned volumes and articles, the following journals published special issues in Hungary in the context of the commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWI: *Múltunk*, 2 (2016) (also a special issue in English, see note 22), *AETAS*, 1 (2017), *Jel-Kép*, 1 (2016).

27 Cf. for example Zsombor Bódy, *Népesedés, életmód és a nők helyzetének változásai Magyarországon az I. világháború után* [Demography, Women’s Lives after WWI], in: Béla Tomka (ed.), *Az első világháború következményei Magyarországon* [Aftermath of WWI in Hungary], Budapest 2015, 227–257.

28 The volume “Fates, Fronts, Ideas. Studies published for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of WWI” contains papers presented at a conference at ELTE University in May 2014. See note 16.

29 Cf. Tomka, *Az első*, see note 27; open access at: [www.nemzetfotere.hu/uploads/nemzetfotere/kiadvanyok/az-első-vilaghaboru-kovetkezme.pdf](http://www.nemzetfotere.hu/uploads/nemzetfotere/kiadvanyok/az-első-vilaghaboru-kovetkezme.pdf), access: 6 April 2018.

30 For a discussion of Hungarian feminist movements during World War One and international pacifisms cf. Judit Acsády, *In a Different Voice. Responses of Hungarian Feminism to the First World War*, in: Fell/Sharp, *Women’s Movement*, see note 15, 105–123; Judit Acsády, “Beszéljen a szívünk!” *Háborúellenes hangok a hazai és a nemzetközi nőmozgalomban az I. világháború idején* [“Let our Heart Speak.” *Pacifist Voices in Hungarian Feminist Movement during WWI*], in:

holds true for the exhibitions.<sup>31</sup> Gender in the above-mentioned cases is not framed as a social construction, and the social positions of men and women are not critically reflected.

The fact that women's issues dominate gender-related topics discussed in centenary events and publications can be traced back to the influence of those initiatives that have practiced "women's history" in the past two decades in Hungary. At the same time, gender aspects in (social) history are generally underrepresented and rather marginal still. Masculinity studies are relatively weak and involve only a few researchers.<sup>32</sup> Some few events, however, included men's studies in an innovative way, for example the exhibition organised by the National Museum and Institute of Theatre History, entitled "Soldier-actors, and PoW Prima Donnas. Front and Prison Camp Theatres in World War One".<sup>33</sup>

It is important to stress that no books or volumes on the war in Hungary from the perspective of feminist studies have been published in connection with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War One. The literary historian Judit Kádár has launched an initiative to collect and publish such papers. However, although the contributing authors submitted their draft chapters for this book project, the publication did not go ahead due to insufficient funding. As far as institutional initiatives are concerned, neither the recently founded Research Center of Women's History at University ELTE<sup>34</sup> in Budapest, nor the Women's History Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences<sup>35</sup> launched any programme or publication dedicated to the centenary of World War One.

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TNTeF, 5, 2 (2015), 1–20, open access at: <http://tntefjournal.hu/vol5/iss2/acsady.pdf>, access: 6 April 2018. The volumes, Eszter Kaba (ed.), *Háborús mindennapok – mindennapok háborúja* [War of Everyday Life and the Everyday Life of War], Budapest 2017 and *Völgyesi, Harctértől*, see note 19, also contain some references to the Feminist Association (1904 Budapest) and original sources, yet they do not refer to previous studies in this field.

31 The list of institutions that organised centenary exhibitons including those outside the capital is rather long.

32 One of the founders of men's studies in Hungary is Miklós Hadas (Corvinus University). Although he is an expert on the twentieth century history of masculinities, he was not involved in the centenary programme or any of its publications. Cf. Miklós Hadas, *A modern férfi születése* [The Birth of the Modern Man], Budapest 2003.

33 *Színészkatónák, fogolyprimadonnák. Front- és hadifogolyszínházak az első világháborúban* [Soldier-actors, PoW Prima Donnas. Front and Prison Camp Theatres in WWI]. The event was supported by the Centenary Committee. The soldiers performing female characters were discussed in the context of cross-dressing.

34 For more information on the centre cf. <https://womenshistory.wixsite.com/research-center>, access: 6 April 2018.

35 The committee (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Nőtörténeti Munkabizottsága) was founded in 2015 and consists of several historians specialised in various fields. Its president is Anna Fábri, retired professor of ELTE, Department of Cultural History, an esteemed expert on discourses and public debate on emancipation and women's issues.



### 3. Closer Examination of Case Studies

In the following part, we will provide illustrative case studies of selected significant World War One centenary commemoration events and projects in Hungary.

#### 3.1 “Europe’s Fraternal War” – the Central Event

Statues of two massive, super-sized soldiers in Austro-Hungarian World War One uniforms welcome the visitors at the entrance of the exhibition “1914–1918. A New World Was Born” at the feet of the Buda Castle facing the river Danube. The exhibition which took place in the Castle Garden Bazaar of Budapest was organised by the Institute of the Twentieth Century and financed by the Centenary Commemorative Committee.<sup>36</sup> Governmental representatives gave high prestige to the opening ceremony of the exhibition, which served as one of the key events of the centenary commemorations. Deputy Minister of Human Capacities, Bence Rétvári, referred to it as the most important exhibition of the year 2015. State secretary László L. Simon and senior curator Mária Schmidt, director of the Institute of the Twentieth Century, emphasised that the exhibition aims to present details of the war that have not been much discussed and displayed previously. The exhibition shows the war from various angles, using a variety of means that address different senses of the visitors<sup>37</sup>.

Both front and rear area are displayed according to the ‘total war’ concept. Women appear in the exhibition halls in photographs, short video films and other documents as serving their country in many ways during the war (e. g. through working in industry and agriculture, maintaining families, taking care of children, nursing, healing and providing sexual services in front brothels).<sup>38</sup> Data about changes in women’s social involvement (concerning education, employment, suffrage rights in Europe and Hungary) are also displayed, however, they are hidden behind touch screens providing information only if the visitor chooses to interactively select and click on certain items. Near the very entrance, enlarged contemporary postcards are displayed as decoration like a huge wallpaper depicting emotional scenes such as the soldiers’ farewell from their beloved ones, women writing letters to the front or smiling attractively in fancy, sexy military costumes – often without reference to the origin or the context and without any reflective notes.

Several quotations from contemporary media are also displayed, printed in large letters, in other rooms. Two of them represent the central concepts of the way women

36 The committee is headed by Zoltán Balog, Minister of Human Capacities, who also sent his speech to the opening ceremony. Cf. <http://www.elsovilaghaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/dokumentumok/27-12/file>, access: 13 July 2018.

37 For example, by leading the visitor into a dark room emulating a dugout, with noises of warfare.

38 A video shows a short scene of a suffrage march without referring to the exact place and date.

are shown in the exhibition: “The war turns every member of the nation into a soldier, even women”<sup>39</sup> and “Working women are just as much heroic soldiers of the war as the fighting men on the front”.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 Women as Heroes

A similar topos is elaborated in the main concept of another significant exhibition of archival photographs and documents<sup>41</sup> under the title “(Wo)men are Heroes, too. The Lives of Hungarian Women in World War One”<sup>42</sup>, organised by the Balassi Institute at Budapest. The exhibition also counted as one of the central World War One centenary commemoration events.<sup>43</sup> It was financed by the World War One Commemoration Committee, however, it was realised “independently from the professional point of view”,<sup>44</sup> as Iván Bertényi Jr., one of the curators, points out. The photo collection of the exhibition later travelled on to several other cities, both in Hungary and abroad<sup>45</sup>, and was presented for example at the UngArt Gallery of the Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna under the title “Frauen als Heldinnen”. Here, a series of events and lectures on women’s history was also organised as side-events. For example, Austrian historian Christa Hämmerle (University of Vienna) was involved, giving a speech at the opening which took a critical perspective on the title of the exhibition by adding a question mark. Also, the curators of this exhibition based their main concept on the notion of ‘total war’.

The original sources shown in this collection are remarkable. The exhibits on display include contemporary journal articles, police files, private letters and diaries. The central issue of the exhibition, women’s heroism (sacrifice and devotion in the line of duty), is connected to the concepts of care, endurance and workload under the extreme circumstances of war. Women are portrayed almost exclusively in the context of their families or in relation to the men, fighting at the front. There are hardly any references

39 In Hungarian translation: “A háború a nemzet minden tagját katonává avatta, az asszonyokat is.”

40 In Hungarian translation: “A dolgozó asszony éppen olyan hős katona a háborúban, mint maguk a fronton küzdő férfiak.”

41 The photographs are from the collections of the following institutions and museums: Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library (Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár), Military History Museum (Hadtörténeli Múzeum), André Kertész Memorial Museum, Szigetbecse (Szigetbecsei André Kertész Múzeum), the Fortepan Collections and Károly Kincses private collection. The National Széchényi Library was also a contributing partner of the project.

42 “(N)ők is hősök. Magyar női sorsok az első világháborúban” [(Wo)men are Heroes, too. The Lives of Hungarian Women in World War One], photo exhibition. Curators: Iván Bertényi Jr., Zita Bodnár, Károly Kincses.

43 State secretary Bence Rétvári opened the exhibition.

44 Quotation from the authors’ interview with Iván Bertényi Jr.

45 The exhibitions were hosted at the Hungarian Institutes in Bucharest, Vienna, Sofia, Prague, Târgu Secuiesc (Kézdivásárhely) and Zagreb.

to emancipation and any attempts to deconstruct traditional concepts. The documents are organised around ten themes, depicting details of women's experiences during the war. Their narratives range from the farewell to the men going to war to the bitter mourning of the dead. Other central topics include expectations, "we miss you", acceptance, endurance, need, labour and education, morals, old and new types of men.

Yet, these experiences are told from the male rather than the female perspective. Women are portrayed through the eyes of the contemporary soldiers, casting a male gaze from the front to the home front. By this means, women can be seen in their roles as mothers, wives, carers, healers and prostitutes. This underlying perspective is also apparent (albeit most probably unintentionally) on the cover of the exhibition catalogue<sup>46</sup> that depicts a soldier in full size facing the camera with a small postcard-size photo of a woman in his hands.

### 3.3 War and Sexuality

Questions of intimate relationships, sexuality and personal interactions between the troops and the civilian population are undoubtedly part of the discussions on the Great War. The Institute of Habsburg History<sup>47</sup> organised a roundtable talk on "War and Sexuality"<sup>48</sup> in the context of the centenary events presenting genuine research papers based on archival documents. The participants had diverse approaches to sexuality and prostitution. The historians Tibor Balla and Gábor Kiss, whose work is based on research in military archives, interpreted the establishment of auxiliary military brothels as "inevitable parts of warfare". They presented the regulations of the Monarchy's army on brothels and measures to prevent venereal diseases among soldiers. In embarrassing detail, Tibor Balla<sup>49</sup> described the rules, instructions and hygienic precautions given to soldiers by the leadership of the Austro-Hungarian army for their brothel visits. These texts were presented without any analytical or evaluating comments. Thus, the explicitness of the dominant male discourse was not reflected at all. Balla also quoted the

46 Cf. <https://www.scribd.com/document/320642371/Balassi-Intezet-N%C5%91k-is-h%C5%91sok-Kiallitas-katalogus>, acces: 6 April 2018.

47 The Public Foundation for Habsburg Studies ([www.habsburg.org.hu](http://www.habsburg.org.hu)) was founded on 25 May 2003 by the Government of the Republic of Hungary. The Minister of Education and Culture is the official representative of the founder. The main aims are to engage in academic activity and research in the field of the Habsburg Empire and its legacy. Its director is the historian András Geró, who is an internationally acknowledged expert in the field.

48 A háború és a szexualitás [War and Sexuality. Roundtable Discussion], Institute of Habsburg History, Budapest, 15 January 2015. Participants: Tibor Balla, Judit Forrai, Gábor Kiss, Mihály Szécsényi, moderator: Beatrix Nagy. Cf. [www.elsovilaghaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/esemenyek/xx-szazad-intezet-esemenyeies-a-habsburg-torteneti-intezet-esemenyei/haboru-es-szexualitas](http://www.elsovilaghaboru.com/centenariumiemlekbizottsag/hu/esemenyek/xx-szazad-intezet-esemenyeies-a-habsburg-torteneti-intezet-esemenyei/haboru-es-szexualitas), access: 6 April 2018.

49 Tibor Balla, Military History Museum.

rules about how many “visitors” women at the front brothels were expected to have per day and how long such a “visit” was allowed to last, according to the military rank of the “guest”. The contributors showed slides of a contemporary cartoon, which could be seen as mildly pornographic, making fun of a nurse. However, neither this cartoon nor postcards euphemistically depicting jovial scenes of soldiers “approaching” local female civilians were analysed or reflected upon.<sup>50</sup>

The roundtable, however, also allowed for a different discourse. Judit Forrai, for example, outlined the organisational structure of the military health service and how diseases (including venereal diseases) and epidemics were treated.<sup>51</sup> She defined prostitution as violence against women and called attention to the issue of rape. Although little is hitherto known about this topic due to the lack of archival documents, it is fair to assume that rapes did in fact happen in World War One. Her reflections on sexuality and prostitution were rooted in a critical feminist approach. Mihály Szécsényi’s presentation was also characterised by reflexivity and awareness.<sup>52</sup> From the perspective of gender history, it is remarkable that Szécsényi regarded soldiers’ neurotic illnesses (after having suffered different traumas of war) and therapeutic cures as important research topics. He also presented data about the consequences of war on the mental health of women who acted as prostitutes in military brothels.

### 3.4 Remembrance of a Summer Night

From the perspective of innovative gender representations in war studies, an interdisciplinary two-part conference entitled “Remembrance of a Summer Night”<sup>53</sup> and “On this Great Debauch”<sup>54</sup> and the forthcoming publication of the papers presented at these conferences are noteworthy. Both events were organised by the Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The interdisciplinary approach of these commemoration events was in line with the basic research concept of the Institute for Literary Studies focusing on aspects and

50 Cf. e.g. photographs of soldiers hugging women in traditional folk costumes in the countryside outside a village as part of the slide presentations.

51 Cf. Judit Forrai, *A szexuális vágyak, igények és a nemi betegségek kezelésének militarizálása a fronton és a hátszágban* [Sexual Desires and Venereal Diseases on the Front and the Home Front], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oVlEWBuNiY>, access: 13 July 2018.

52 Mihály Szécsényi, *Egészségügy, eugenika és a prostitúció* [Health Care, Eugenetics and Prostitution], see note 48.

53 “Emlékezés egy nyár-éjszakára”: Interdisciplinary conference about 1914 (MTA BTK Irodalomtudományi Intézet), 15–17 September 2014. Programme: [www.litera.hu/hirek/emlekezés-egy-nyar-ejszakara-interdiszciplinaris-konferencia-1914-tol](http://www.litera.hu/hirek/emlekezés-egy-nyar-ejszakara-interdiszciplinaris-konferencia-1914-tol), access: 6 April 2018.

54 “E nagy tivornyán”: Interdisciplinary conference on the cultural history of World War One, 8–10 June 2016. Programme: <https://iti.btk.mta.hu/images/tivornya-program-3hasab-keppel.pdf>, abstracts: [https://iti.btk.mta.hu/images/tivornya\\_absztraktfuzet-javitott.pdf](https://iti.btk.mta.hu/images/tivornya_absztraktfuzet-javitott.pdf), access: 6 April 2018.

methods of micro-cultural and social history in literary studies. The starting point of the organisers was to interpret World War One in the context of the processes of modernisation.<sup>55</sup> Thus, gender aspects were integral parts of their examinations and the presentations at the conference. The roles of women and men were discussed from hitherto less common perspectives and with a focus on women's activities in public, political or cultural life, rather than as survivors at the home front and carers of the vulnerable. For example, the works of the Hungarian writer and poet Margit Kaffka (1880–1918) on the war were analysed through the lens of narratology and in reference to her explicit pacifism. Kaffka was one of the founders of Hungarian modern prose and in her works she subverted the previous hegemonic social values based on patriarchal hierarchies.<sup>56</sup> Feminist literary criticism was applied in the study of the scholar Györgyi Földes, who discussed marginalised and forgotten women authors in their relations to avant-garde movements and the First World War.<sup>57</sup> Studies of war and masculinities were also presented at the two conferences<sup>58</sup>, for instance on the male and the disabled body.<sup>59</sup>

55 Cf. interview with András Kappanyos (Head of Modern Hungarian Literature Department of the Research Centre for the Humanities, HAS) by Zsolt Mészáros. The Centre applied for state funds for World War One commemoration events, but their proposal was refused without explanation. Thus, the events were financed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

56 Beatrix Visy, *A frontvonal mögött. Női nézőpont, formakeresés, poétikai elmozdulások Kaffka Margit háborút tematizáló prózai műveiben* [Behind the Front Lines. Women's Point of View. New Forms in Margit Kaffka's Novels], in: András Kappanyos (ed.), *Emlékezés egy nyár-éjszakára: Interdiszciplináris tanulmányok 1914 mikrotörténelméről* [Remembrance of a Summer Night. Interdisciplinary Studies about the Micro History of 1914], Budapest 2015, 117–125. Cf. also Orsolya Rákai, "Nem vagyok igazi apostol jellem" ["I am not an Apostolic Character"], in: *ibid.*, 127–141.

57 Györgyi Földes, *Avantgárd, nők, háború. Újvári Erzsi és Réti Irén az aktivista folyóiratokban* [Avant-garde, Women, War. Erzsi Újvári and Irén Réti in Activists' Journals], in: Kappanyos, *Emlékezés*, see note 56, 195–208. In another paper Földes discusses Valentine de Saint-Point's (1875–1953) and Mina Loy's (1882–1966) futurist manifestos. Cf. Györgyi Földes, *Nők, háború, avantgárd* [Women, War, Avant-garde], in: András Kappanyos (ed.), *E nagy tivornyán: Tanulmányok 1916 mikrotörténelméről* [On this Great Debauch. Studies of Micro History of 1916], Budapest 2017, 405–415.

58 Similarly, the topics of wounded and disabled soldiers and the medical care for them were explored at other events as well, cf. e. g. the exhibition "1914–1918. A New World Was Born. Europe's Fraternal War", see note 12.

59 Cf. the papers: Tímea Jablonczay, *A "késedelmeskedő" háború. Maszkulin sztereotípiák és Habsburg-Közép-Európa haláltusája Joseph Roth Radetzky-indulójában* [Delayed War. Masculine Stereotypes and the Agony of Habsburg Monarchy in Joseph Roth's Radetzky March], in: Kappanyos, *Emlékezés*, see note 56, 353–365; Eszter Balázs, "Belevetjük a saját testünket a történelembe". A saját és a másik test reprezentációi magyar íróknál az első világháborúban, különös tekintettel az egodokumentumokra ["We Cast our Bodies into History". Representations of the Male Body in Hungarian Writers' Ego-Documents of WWI], in: Kappanyos, *E nagy*, see note 57, 303–325; Lilla Erdei, *Világháborús testreprezentációk* [War and Body Representations], in: *ibid.*, 327–337; Balázs Kellner, *Androgün ökológia – hadiprimadonnák a Nagy Háborúban* [Angrogyn Ecology], manuscript, and Júlia Vallasek, "Hőst ne csak legendszerű vértetben ...". *Hadirokkantak megjelenítése*

In her analysis on experiences and representations of the male body in the war, Eszter Balázs also applied new aspects in analysing ego-documents of Hungarian writers (such as letters or diaries).<sup>60</sup> Similarly to the above-mentioned authors, she contributed to including innovative gender approaches to war studies. These recent research examples apply new concepts of cultural history and literary theory to the examination of dominant narratives and reveal controversies, conflicts and ruptures in perceptions of the war.

#### 4. Conclusion

Beyond the usual functions of reaffirming previous knowledge and representations that contributed to the creation of common elements of national identity, the recent commemorations of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great War in Hungary seem to include new features, which might broaden or alter previous images. A large number of the centenary projects – public exhibitions, conferences, round table discussions, film clubs and publications – aimed at disseminating and popularising knowledge on the social, economic and political impact of World War One. Many of them discussed matters of the home front and cultural representations of the war.

Gender aspects addressed in centenary publications and events were connected to these issues and aimed to create innovative approaches. However, most of the centenary projects discussed gender in a rather limited way, focusing on details of certain changes in social roles seen as dichotomous and on the question of whether and how these changes affected women at the home front. Sexuality and sexual practices in the military/armed forces, nursing, diseases and health issues were explored within the frameworks of the allegedly essential ‘caring’ roles of women.

The main funding of the commemoration events in Hungary came from the Centenary Commemorative Committee of World War One and was predominantly centralised. The main hosts of the events formed an overlapping network of state-funded Hungarian institutions, foundations, research centres and exhibition halls. According to our observations, there is, in many cases, an ambiguity between the intended aims on the one hand and the realised contents and focuses of the actual centenary projects on the other. The realised projects were presented mostly in the framework of traditional historical approaches, yet sometimes challenged previously accepted discourses. Most centenary events and publications portrayed women as ‘auxiliary subjects’, often without any theoretical framework or reference to previous feminist studies. The discussion of ‘gender’ in many projects remained mostly limited

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az első világháborús magyar sajtóban [Body Borders. Representations of the Wounded and Disabled in the Media during WWI], in: *ibid.*, 349–375.

60 Cf. Balázs, Belevetjük, see note 59.

to the explorations of details of gender roles and gendered practices in society and the discussion of how certain roles have changed for women. Yet, it must be noted that adding women as a 'special topic' is already an innovation in Hungarian war studies or social history.

Our review included reflections on both academic and public events. While academic publications might reach a limited audience, their role is still significant among the dominant group of intellectuals. Centenary public events and major exhibitions reach a wider public and together with academic studies they contribute both to maintaining and changing significant aspects of former discussions. They thus might have the potential to challenge the positions of the dominant public discourse on the Great War.