# Women, Children, and the Collective Face of Conflict in Europe, 1900-1950

Edited by **Nupur Chaudhuri** Texas Southern University **Sandra Trudgen Dawson** Berkshire Conference of Women Historians

Series in World History



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### Preface

#### Jean P. Smith

Through its attention to the experience of women and children in European conflicts across the first half of the twentieth century, this wide-ranging collection both adds nuance to familiar historical narratives and a broader perspective on important themes of gender and social history in the period. These range from the professionalization of nursing and aid work to the vital role of women in navigating the shortages of food and other crucial resources during times of conflict. While each chapter provides a rich and specific portrait, the collection as a whole and, in particular, its transnational scope, also highlights points of continuity in the challenges faced by women and children and, crucially, how they navigated them. It draws attention to the important, and often overlooked, roles women played in conflicts during this era, in the international brigades during the Spanish Civil War, as aid workers responding to the Armenian genocide and the Japanese invasion of China, in the Russian army during the First World War and the French military, the French resistance and the Free French during the Second World War.

Another important focus, of many, of the book's chapters is an exploration of how women and children were both subject to state ideologies and policies and were able to influence and subvert them. This was true in relation both to the Basque child refugees sent to the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union during the Spanish Civil War, the working-class families who were the targets of food relief programs in Spain under Franco and French women and children who navigated food shortages during the Second World War. Taken together, the chapters highlight the contradictions between state ideologies that sought to reinforce traditional family structures and women's domestic roles and the exigencies of conflict that both forced women out of the home whether to queue for food or to eat in state-run canteens and provided some women a wider range of opportunities than they might otherwise have encountered. Held together by a wide-ranging introduction with a comprehensive and engaging account of relevant scholarship, the collection breaks new ground in its attention to the experience and agency of women and children across Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

### Introduction

#### Nupur Chaudhuri

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#### Sandra Trudgen Dawson

Berkshire Conference of Women Historians

The opening years of the twentieth century in Europe were characterized by an optimism that, from a historical perspective, belies the widespread conflict and chaos that followed. The ostensible stability of this brief era, informed by the political projects of nineteenth-century liberalism and national unification, gave way to decades of increasingly complex crises. In the Great War (1914-1918), European Empires fought each other using new technologies and obsolete strategies that aggravated existing tensions within and between nations.<sup>1</sup> Despite efforts to reestablish peace, the crises continued: revolutions in Russia and civil war in Spain threatened parliamentary governments; the Armenian genocide began in 1915, foreshadowing the systematic destruction of European Jews in the 1930s and '40s<sup>2</sup>; and dictators seized power, establishing authoritarian regimes in Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal that stymied democratic expression and censored the press.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> John Keegan, The First World War (Vintage, 2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ronald Grigor Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide (Princeton University Press, 2015); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Volume I: *The Years of Persecution*, *1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), and *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews*, *1939 – 1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). Other groups were also targeted by Nazi Germany and other authoritarian regimes, including communists, Roma and Sinti people, homosexuals, and Jehovah' s Witnesses. See, for example, Anton Weiss-Wendt, ed., *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Benito Mussolini seized power in Italy in 1921, António de Oliveira Salazar took power in Portugal in 1932, Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, and Francisco Franco became leader of Spain at the end of the civil war in 1939. There were also authoritarian regimes in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and elsewhere. See John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

League of Nations, formed after the Great War as an arbiter of world peace, failed to prevent the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (1935-36), the militarization of the Rhineland (begun in 1936), or the annexation of the Sudetenland (1938) by Nazi Germany.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Europe descended into a second world war.

The scale and ubiquity of the suffering that marked the first half of the twentieth century often overshadows the rapid, progressive social and cultural changes that occurred during the same period. Broad shifts in public opinion expanded rights and freedoms for two interconnected demographics: specifically, women demanded and gained political enfranchisement, and childhood came to be widely seen as a discrete and significant period of the life cycle.<sup>5</sup> Just as the social and economic dislocations wrought by industrialization in the nineteenth century had led to philanthropy and the establishment of national charities for poor women and children, so the conflicts of the twentieth century saw the creation of international networks of care.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of the League of Nations created a space for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For the establishment of the League of Nations, see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). The remilitarization of the Rhineland was in direct contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, 1919. See Norman A. Graebner and Edward M. Bennett, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: The Failure of the Wilsonian Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Childhood has been described as an invention of the Romantic period. See Linda M. Austin, "Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy," *Studies in Romanticism* 42.1 (2003) 75-98. By the 1920s and 1930s, children's summer and holiday camps had emerged in France, Britain, and the Soviet Union. See Sandra Trudgen Dawson, *Holiday Camps in Twentieth-Century Britain: Packaging Pleasure* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) and Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880-1960* (Duke University Press, 2002). When Spanish refugee children were taken to the Soviet Union, many were housed in summer camps. See Karl D. Qualls, "From Hooligans to Disciplined Students: Displacement, Resettlement, and Role Modelling of Spanish Civil War Children in the Soviet Union, 1937-51," in *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915-1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*,"ed. Nick Baron (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See, for example, Susan Ash, *Funding Philanthropy: Dr. Barnardo, Metaphor, Narrative and Spectacle* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016); Christine Adams, Poverty, *Charity, and Motherhood: Maternal Societies in Nineteenth-Century France* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), and Rachel G. Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984).

international humanitarianism, which was largely taken up by white women and often focused on the plight of children.<sup>7</sup>

But women and children were not simply proponents of social progress, peacekeeping, or antiwar efforts. Often overlooked in early studies of European conflict, they experienced these tumultuous decades as political actors, civilians, workers, consumers, victims, exiles, humanitarian laborers, and combatants. Authoritarian governments often compelled women into subservient positions as wives and mothers, while children of all ages were corralled into political youth organizations that promoted the values and ideology of the state.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Eglantyne Jebb established the Save the Children Fund in 1919 after the Great War. Jebb went on to draft the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924. See Linda Mahood, Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876-1928 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also Tehila Sasson, "From Empire to Humanity: The Russian Famine and the Imperial Origins of International Humanitarianism," Journal of British Studies 55.3 (2016) 519-37, and Linda Mahood and Vic Satzewich, "The Save the Children Fund and the Russian Famine of 1921-23: Claims and Counter-Claims about Feeding 'Bolshevik' Children," Journal of Historical Sociology 22.1 (2009) 57-83. See also Bruno Cabanes, The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Caroline Shaw, Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Emily Baughan, "The Imperial War Relief Fund and the All-British Appeal: Commonwealth, Conflict and Conservatism within the British Humanitarian Movement, 1920-25," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 40.5 (2012) 845-61, and Gabriel Pretus, Humanitarian Relief in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See, for example, Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Dagmar Reese, Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany, trans. William Templer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); R. J. B. Bosworth, Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915-1945 (New York: Penguin, 2007); Gerhard Rempel, Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Victoria de Grazia, How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945 (Berkeley: University of California, 1993); Alan M. Ball, And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Julie Gottlieb, Feminist Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement, 1923-1945 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); Perry Willson, Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: The Massaie Rurali (London: Routledge, 2002) and The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alexander De Grand, "Women under Italian Fascism," The Historical Journal 19.4 (1976) 947-968; Wendy Goldman, Women, The State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Women at the Gates Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Adrienne Edgar, "Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective," Slavic Review 65.2 (2006) 252-272; Gisela Bock, "Racism and

Women, Children, and the Collective Face of European Conflict, 1900-1950 focuses on the experiences and behaviors of women and children as they navigated the multiple crises, conflicts, and ideological extremes of the first half of the twentieth century. It complements and adds to the existing literature on the experiences of women and children in European conflicts by bridging the histories of women, children, and conflict. The volume considers revolution, world war, civil war, and exile as overlapping categories. Chronologically, the conflicts of the first five decades are discrete events and often responses to economic, political, or cultural fissures and shifts. Many scholars have maintained continuities, particularly between the first and second world wars.<sup>9</sup> While some chapters in this collection do observe continuities between conflicts, the volume as a whole does not explore this larger historical question. Rather, it examines individual and group responses to the everyday stresses of conflict as they impacted the lives of women and children.

Since the rising interest in social history in the 1970s, scholarship on conflict has expanded to include histories of women, gender, and sexuality.<sup>10</sup> More

Sexism in Nazi Germany", When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany, ed. Bridenthal et al (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Gisela Bock, Antinatalism in National Socialist Racism," Nazism and German Society, 1933- 1945, ed. David Crew et al (New York: Routledge, 1994); Atina Grossmann, "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism," Gender and History 3.3 (1991) 350-58; Adelheid von Saldern, "Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State," Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945, ed. David F. Crew (New York: Routledge, 1994); Elizabeth D. Heineman, What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Jill Stephenson, Hitler's Home Front: Württemberg under the Nazis (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); Vandana Joshi, Gender and Power in the Third Reich: Female Denouncers and the Gestapo, 1933-1945 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Cynthia Crane, Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish-Christian Women in Nazi Germany (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), and Tim Mason, "Women in Nazi Germany," History Workshop Journal 1 (1976) 74-113.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Palgrave, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jutta Schwarzkopf, "Combatant or Non-Combatant? The Ambiguous Status of Women in British Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War," *War & Society* 28.2 (2009) 105–31; Gerard J. DeGroot and C. Peniston-Bird, *A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military* (London: Longman, 2000); Tessa Stone, "Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: The Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War," *Women's History Review* 8.4 (1999) 605–624; Melissa Herbert, *Camouflage Isn't Only for Combat: Gender, Sexuality and Women in the Military* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), and Nancy Goldman, *Female Soldiers–Combatants or Non-*

recent research on the history of childhood has broadened the field to include the experiences of children.<sup>11</sup> The education of children was the focus of authoritarian regimes that desired to reshape the future by indoctrinating the young with their ideology. Children were participants, politicized by propagandist literature, subject to sectarian education, and sometimes silent observers. Their experiences were shaped by politicians and leaders and by the politics of their families and friends. Many served as resistance couriers and even as underaged combatants. Others were refugees, exiled from their homes and countries, used as political pawns or the focus of international humanitarianism.<sup>12</sup> Like adults, children confronted authoritarianism, violence,

Combatants?: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982). See also: Cynthia Enloe, Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Linda Grant De Pauw, Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Julie Wheelwright, Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness (London: Pandora, 1994); Jeanne Holm, Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution (Novato: Presidio, 1982); Jean Bethke Elshtain, Women and War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Cynthia Enloe, Does Khaki Become You? Militarisation in Women's Lives (Boston: Pluto Press, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Mischa Honeck and James Marten, eds., *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Karl D. Qualls, *Stalin's Niños: Educating Spanish Civil War Refugee Children in the Soviet Union, 1937-1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), and Nick Baron, ed., *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915-1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Vera K. Fast, Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Mark Jonathan Harris and Deborah Oppenheimer, Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); John Welshman, Churchill's Children: The Evacuee Experience in Wartime Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Muriel Emanuel and Vera Gissing, Nicholas Winton and the Rescued Generation: Save One Life, Save the World (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002); Bertha Leverton and Shmuel Lowensohn, I Came Alone: The Stories of the Kindertransports (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1996); Bob Moore, Refugees from Nazi Germany in the Netherlands, 1933–1940 (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986); Vicki Caron, Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933-1942 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Paul Weindling, "Medical Refugees in Britain and the Wider World, 1930-1960: Introduction," Social History of Medicine 22.3 (2009) 451-59; Louise London, Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). For Australia, see Michael Blakeney, Australia and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1948 (Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985); Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt, eds., Jewish Exile in India, 1933–1945 (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

hunger, famine, and starvation. This volume seeks to complicate the distinction between child and adult in order to present a more collective understanding of conflict in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

*Women, Children and Conflict* complements and adds to the existing literature by straddling the fields of women's history, women and war, histories of childhood and conflict, as well as war and consumption. Recent anniversaries commemorating the start of the Great War and the end of the Second World War have renewed scholarly and popular interest in both conflicts, expanding the hitherto narrow category of women's war work.<sup>13</sup> Early studies had explored the idea that war changed women's social and economic positions irrevocably.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, later research maintained that war, revolution, and conflict altered little for women and certainly did not bring about lasting change.<sup>15</sup> More recent studies explore the way women

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Perry Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: The Massaie Rurali* (London: Routledge, 2002) and *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alexander De Grand, "Women under Italian Fascism," *The Historical Journal* 19.4 (1976) 947-968; Wendy Goldman, *Women, The State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See, for example, Harold L. Smith, "The Effect of the War on the Status of Women," *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See, for example, Penny Summerfield, Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Adrienne Edgar, "Bolshevism, Patriarchy, and the Nation: The Soviet 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women in Pan-Islamic Perspective," Slavic Review 65.2 (2006) 252-272; Gisela Bock, "Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany," When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany, ed. Bridenthal et al (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984) and "Antinatalism in National Socialist Racism," Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945, ed. David Crew et al (New York: Routledge, 1994); Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Atina Grossmann, "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism," Gender and History 3.3 (1991) 350-58. Adelheid von Saldern, "Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State," Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945, ed. David F. Crew (New York: Routledge, 1994); Elizabeth D. Heineman, What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Jill Stephenson, Hitler's Home Front: Württemberg under the Nazis (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); Vandana Joshi, Gender and Power in the Third Reich: Female Denouncers and the Gestapo, 1933-1945 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Cynthia Crane, Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish-Christian Women in Nazi Germany (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), and Tim Mason, "Women in Nazi Germany," History Workshop Journal 1 (1976) 74-113.

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Sandra Trudgen Dawson is Executive Administrator of the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. She received a PhD in History and Feminist Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2007. Her first book, *Holiday Camps in twentieth-century Britain: Packaging Pleasure*, was published by Manchester University Press in 2011 as part of their Popular Culture Series. Dawson co-edited (with Erika Rappaport and Mark J. Crowley) *Consuming Behaviours: Identity, Politics and Pleasure in twentieth-century Britain* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015) and edited (with Mark J. Crowley) *Home Fronts: Britain and the Empire at War, 1939-45* (Boydell, 2017). Her current project, *Midwives and Mothers: Reproductive Labours in Interwar and Wartime Britain* is forthcoming with Lexington Books.

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