In 2001 the »Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift« (MGZ) published Karen Hagemann’s essay »Tod für das Vaterland. Der patriotisch-nationale Heldenkult zur Zeit der Freiheitskriege« that presented a new approach to studying the Napoleonic Wars. In a journal that traditionally featured mostly 20th-century military history, Hagemann’s article addresses Prussia’s role in the Napoleonic Wars by drawing on the methodologies of cultural and gender history to analyze new modes of warfare and their afterlife. This essay and others published in the MGZ’s first thematic issue focus on the cultural, social and »everyday life« aspects of warfare in articles on soldiers, veterans, and civilians, illustrating exciting directions of contemporary military history. Of all the modern wars, the Napoleonic Wars remained the undisputed realm of »drums and trumpet« military historians, as new military and cultural historians concentrated their energies on the twentieth-century wars. Military historians continue to publish important findings on this subject.


Kontakt: Katherine B. Aaslestad, West Virginia University, Morgantown, USA, 
E-Mail: Katherine.Aaslestad@mail.wvu.edu
studies on Napoleonic warfare, but Hagemann’s article heralds an expansion of the field to include the role of civilians, noncombatant experiences, gender, and the intersection between military and commemorative culture.3

My brief overview outlines some of the key themes in Hagemann’s essay from 2001 and draws on it as a point of reference to illustrate the transformation in Napoleonic military history in the last fifteen years.4 Like studies on the Prussian Reforms after 1806, Hagemann emphasizes the importance of the military reforms, in particular conscription and the volunteer movement.5 In fact, Prussia fielded an army of 280,720 men in 1813, mobilizing twice as many men as in 1806 (p. 315). An army this size also generated high numbers of war casualties, and Hagemann focuses on the war wounded, the dead, and the veterans in this essay. She also points out that the Reformers understood long before 1813 that »Wehrbereitschaft« and »Opferwilligkeit« needed to be cultivated in Prussian society to support the war with valorous and eager volunteers, higher taxes, and systematic care for the war wounded, crippled, and war widows (p. 313). Propaganda in the form of print media, lyric poetry, sermons and communal rituals prepared Prussian society for the deep cost of war: the patriotic sacrifice of their sons, brothers, husbands and fathers. She argues that publicists succeeded in styling the wars of 1813 to 1815 as a »heilige Kriege«, and the war dead as a »Blutopfer« on the »Altar des Vaterlandes« (p. 321). Furthermore, the image of the soldier and war hero, as Hagemann discusses, shaped enduring popular understandings of masculinity. Thanksgiving festivals and post-war memorial commemorations demonstrated cooperation between the state, church and military in celebrating the war dead as martyrs and creating a »patriotisch-nationalen Heldenkult«. The rhetoric, festivals, rituals, symbols and practices celebrating the »gefallene Krieger« had an enduring influence on nationalist and military culture throughout the nineteenth century.6


4 This essay provides examples of recent literature but is in no way comprehensive.


6 René Schilling, »Kriegshelden«: Deutungsmuster heroischer Männlichkeit in Deutschland 1813–1945, Paderborn 2002 (= Krieg in der Geschichte, 15).
Hagemann’s emphasis on wartime mobilization contributes to a broader understanding of the Prussian Reformers, but it especially highlights the experiences of civilians. The mass armies and broad mobilization of the Napoleonic Wars put new strains on civil society as well as provided opportunities for civilians to engage in new ways with the state. Hagemann’s essay underscores the role of the Church, the press, and women – as patriotic war supporters and mourners. Other recent studies on civilian experiences compliment her work and reveal the fate of ordinary people negotiating the wartime economy, life under military occupation, and the mobilization of non-combatants. Recovering the often overlooked experience and voices of civilians during the Napoleonic Wars, these works explore civil-military relations and provide a holistic understanding of the war experience. They examine how society reacted to the dramatic challenges of the wars and the unprecedented expansion of the state as it pursued »total war«. This scholarship reveals that the wars generated conditions that blurred the boundaries between civilians and soldiers, and fostered integration between civil society and the military. Historians still seem to disagree if these decades of war presented transformative ruptures in the way people lived or if patterns of continuity helped society face new challenges. Despite these scholarly debates, the experience of non-combatants has become part of the narrative of the Napoleonic Wars in ways it was not fifteen years ago; even books written for Anglo-American students now address civilian wartime experi-

9 David Bell pursues this argument in The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It, Boston, MA, New York 2007, see also Mark Hewitson, Absolute War, Violence and Mass Warfare in the German Lands, 1792–1820, Oxford 2017.
ences. One area of civilian life identified in Hagemann’s essay that remains underexplored, however, is the wartime role of the Church.

The gendering of the Napoleonic Wars is key to Hagemann’s work. In her essay she argues that the construction of a dominating masculinity associated with valiant soldiering, state loyalty and patriotic sacrifice emerged during the wars. The qualities that constitute soldiers often seem obvious, but Hagemann convincingly points out that contemporary publicists articulated a virile and martial masculinity that resonated among men and women during the extended conflict. Other studies have likewise identified the importance of the war in shaping the gender order and the emergence of the gendered citizen soldier. As in France, the brotherhood of soldiers formed the basis of citizenship rights. The gendered meaning of political citizenship, therefore, emphasizes the importance of military service with expanding political rights and representation from the revolutionary era throughout the nineteenth century. In addition to the growing literature on masculinity, the emphasis on gender reveals women’s opportunities to participate in public life as patriotic supporters of the war and state, even as they are denied formal citizenship.

---


16 Some of Hagemann’s contributions include Female Patriots: Women, War and the Nation in the Period of the Prussian-German Anti-Napoleonic Wars. In: Gender & History, 16, no. 3 (2004),
Hagemann’s analysis of the gendered political and military cultures that emerged during the Napoleonic Wars stresses the importance of a versatile and gendered wartime rhetoric located in the public sphere – in the press, sermons and popular song. In print media Hagemann identifies a »national-patriotic« discourse that employed vague but emotional concepts of »Volk« and »Vaterland« and called for sacrifice and honor as central to the enduring Prussian cult of heroism. Self-sacrificing patriotism from men and women was central to a »Volkskrieg«, and therefore mobilization of public sentiments in civil society through print media is central to understanding the nature of the war (p. 316). My own study of Hamburg – a republic unlike monarchical Prussia – argues that the crisis of war fractured traditional notions of communal patriotism and provided men and women with new martial patriotic roles for themselves to defend their city-state. Despite differences between the two polities, print culture played a key role in articulating new visions of patriotic action. Publicists, therefore, played a key role in social mobilization and militarization during the wars, and they perpetuated wartime mythologies and hero cults after the conflict. In France the creation of the myth of the citizen soldier of the Year II – the ideologically committed republican warrior – resonated in Napoleon’s armies and persisted into the twentieth century. Post-war commemorative ceremonies, veteran autobiographies, and communicative memory fostered a long legacy of heroic wartime ideals, symbols and practices, another area that scholars have recently explored in a proliferating literature on the public memorialization of these wars. In the


17 Katherine B. Aaslestad, Place and Politics: Local Identity, Civic Culture, and German Nationalism in North Germany during the Revolutionary Era, Leiden 2005 (= Studies in Central European histories, 36).


course of the nineteenth century, these wartime legacies intersected with growing regionalism and nationalism to provide an arsenal of myths for nation-building, demonstrating the long legacy of the Napoleonic Wars.20

In the last two decades projects like Tübingen University’s special research program (SFB) »Kriegserfahrungen, Krieg und Gesellschaft in der Neuzeit«, the 10 volume series by the Research Institute for Military History (MGFA) »Germany and the Second World War« and the Free University of Berlin’s »Making War, Mapping Europe: Militarized Cultural Encounters, 1792–1920« have contributed new insights and approaches to the study of the new military history. In combination with those boarder projects, Hagemann’s work as co-director of the research project on Nations, Borders, and Identities, as editor of many collected volumes, as organizer of numerous international conferences, and as an editor with Rafe Blaufarb and Alan Forrest for the series »War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850« at Palgrave Macmillan, has contributed to foster a new military history for the Napoleonic era. Thus, Karen Hagemann’s article »Tod für das Vaterland: Der patriotisch-nationale Heldenkult zur Zeit der Freiheitskriege« signals a shift in the scholarship on the Napoleonic Wars, a shift explored contemporaneously and collaboratively by many scholars, in the study of war beyond the battlefield.
