

JPM718: Presentation Handout

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Reading's Title: Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscription, and War in Post-Soviet Russia

1. Summary of the Reading

Eichler aims to investigate the relationship between men's identities and the Russian state's conscription policy and waging war in Chechnya. Specifically, Eichler focuses on the three main questions. Firstly, what does the politics of militarized masculinity tell us about state-society relations in post-Soviet Russia and militarism as a source of legitimacy for the post-Soviet state? Secondly, how did the state and military leadership on the one hand, and societal actors and individuals on the other, reproduce or contest the link between masculinity and the military in post-Soviet Russia? And thirdly, how have the post-communist transformation and the Russian-Chechen wars affected the idea that a real man is one who has served in the military, if not fought in combat?

In her book, Eichler deals with the presence of militarism in Russia and Chechnya, which plays a central role in their state and society. Moreover, she describes the dilemma of young Chechen men, who must decide if they will risk life by obeying the draft call, or avoid the brutality and pain of Russian army life but take the chance of being seen as less of a man? After outlining the militarization of Chechen society, Eichler moves to the explanation of the post-communist transformation of the Russian state. Specifically, she describes the short period of neoliberalist reforms in Russia after the collapse of the USSR, which were followed by renewed state-supported nationalism and militarism at the end of the 1990s.

Lastly, Eichler focuses on the theoretical part of her work. Particularly, she explains gender roles in society and in international relations, gender order, and militarized masculinity present in Russian society. Since this reading is an excerpt from Eichler's book *Militarizing Men: Gender, Conscription, and War in Post-Soviet Russia*, where it functions as an introduction to the topic, there is no conclusion.

2. Critical Analysis

The main theoretical term in Eichler's work is *militarized masculinity*. The author presents some well and clearly formulated arguments, and some arguments with which I do not completely agree. Firstly, she defines militarism as an ideology that promotes a central role for the military and its personnel in the state and society. Subsequently, she defines militarized masculinity as gendered state policy such as compulsory military service. Specifically, according to Eichler, militarized masculinity could be explained as an idea that military service is central to men's identity. This could be in a form of men's citizenship duty or the necessity of male socialization (as a previous example, without service in the army men do not become men).

Secondly, Eichler states that women's and men's identities are constructed in relation to one another rather than biologically given. Furthermore, she elaborates that the pervasiveness of militarism is evident in the fact that most people intuitively accept the idea of men as more aggressive, violent, and willing to fight in war than women. For instance, in my opinion, Czech society is not militaristic as Eichler explains in the Russian example. Even though our society is not militaristic, I still believe that men are more aggressive and violent. It is visible in a group of male friends, in sports, etc. As for Eichler's rejection of the idea that men are willing to fight in a war more than women, we can look at the current example of the Ukrainian-Russian war. Most of the Ukrainian refugees who fled the country are women and children (and rightfully, because they need to be protected, they are the future of Ukraine) and mostly men remained to defend the territory.

3. Relation to the Main Reading

In the theoretical part of the work, Eichler draws arguments and information from fellow feminist scholars such as R. W. Connell or Joan Wallach Scott. At the beginning of the text, she even quotes Cynthia Enloe, the author of the main reading. In my opinion, in her work Eichler further expands the feminist theory and ideas presented in the main reading, moreover, she introduces them to the theme of militarized masculinity. Besides, Eichler expands on the topic mentioned by Carol Cohn, namely hegemonic masculinity. To conclude, Eichler's work supplements the feminist theory introduced by the main reading and shows the application of the theory in a real example.