various voices at various times. Perhaps because she did, Elshtain was able to break the glass ceiling separating academic discourse from public rhetoric and strong-worded women from a truly worldwide audience. My professional life and that of countless others have been enriched by all of Elshtain's voices, even if we found ourselves in dissent from at least one of them.

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Contending with Women and War

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The late Jean Bethke Elshtain was a difficult feminist, a public intellectual and scholar who drew on feminist thinking but interpreted or applied it so idiosyncratically that many feminists disavowed her. Elshtain's early works encapsulated the best hopes of 1980s' feminists to bring women and gender to the fore across many academic fields. She was influential in political

I wish to thank the University of Chicago for inviting me to speak at its Engaged Mind Conference on Elshtain, October 2103; the members of the Bethke-Elshtain family I met at that conference (especially Errol and Eric); and Nancy Hirschmann for organizing a tribute panel at the APSA conference, September 2014.

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theory, religious studies, and feminist analysis, and she was one of the leading lights of feminist international relations (IR) well into the 1990s. Yet she was moving in other directions and would let it be known that she disapproved of gay marriage and endorsed George W. Bush's war in Iraq as just. These positions were anathema to most western feminists, and Jean Bethke Elshtain slid down the feminist reputational ladder from pinnacle to the point where she was almost *persona non grata*, deemed an imperialist traitor to feminist causes. She did not draw back or go quiet under attack: to the last public address she gave shortly before her death, Elshtain was on the road defending her controversial political viewpoints openly and forcefully. Let it not be said that the difficult feminist is shy.

An early pre-difficult-feminist work, *Women and War* (1987), remains untainted by Elshtain's journeys rightward and downward. It exposes the gender fallacies of war when seen as a public realm of men supported by private women cheerleading, condoning, or weeping on the sidelines. I find it her most complex and satisfying work for a number of reasons, not least because she introduces important new themes to IR — ordinary people and their experiences of war — and suggests a formulation of gender that she could have expanded in later works but did not.

WOMEN AND WAR

War is commonly understood as a politics and set of armed practices that strongly implicate gender. Men across western history do war, and women are groomed to support the men, assume the position of the protected, and bear the burden of combat deaths in the privacy of their homes. Elshtain claims that this division of labor is the result of an imbalance in war narrating; people historically positioned to do war are the ones who then narrate it. Civilians grant considerable power to those who have been "there," often indicating that they themselves could never imagine what the narrators experienced. Through a variety of historical examples, Elshtain finds that men's narrations of war can be false in some cases, overheated in others, incomplete, and replete with stereotypical myths that do not hold up under scrutiny.[1]

1. Phil Klay's (2014a, 2014b) award-winning short stories about American veterans of the Iraq war — all men — tell of the strategies they devise to address questions about their war experiences. "Redeployed" to what can seem a clueless home front, the vets invent war stories that aim to shock, gratify, impress, or mislead, depending on who is doing the asking. The actual war experiences often stay locked inside them, unnarrated.

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As a foundational text, *Women and War* reveals gender stories that are not in the history and IR books or part of commonplace understandings of war. Three aspects of her renderings are particularly innovative. Elshtain places her own personal experiences front and center in the study as credentials authorizing her right to narrate war; this insertion of the personal was not thinkable in the 1980s in the conservative field of IR.[2] In addition, Elshtain bases *Women and War* largely on the war experiences of women and children (and only some men); most of her raconteurs are ordinary people long denied authority to narrate war. Finally, while framing her book around only two genders in a heteronormative framework, Elshtain shows resourcefulness in finding situations that blur usual wartime distinctions about men and women, raising the prospect of more nuanced conceptualizations of gender in later work.

Elshtain's War

One of the key moves in *Women and War* occurs in the first chapter, where Elshtain brazenly inserts herself into the historical war record. Titled "Not a Soldier's Tale: An Exemplary Tale," this Chapter 1 is an autobiographical account of Elshtain's relationship to war, starting as a small child at play and extending into her time as an academic. Today, that opening might not seem odd in a feminist-inspired study, given that establishing researcher positionality is a standard element of feminist methodology. Leading off a scholarly book in IR with an experiential herstory of 30 pages, especially one that indicates Elshtain was not at any time directly involved in war, is an audacious and memorable move. For her, however, that "exemplary" tale is the "springboard for my discourse" (Elshtain 1987, 14).

Elshtain initially appears in the chapter as a shoot-em-up leader of a cavalry of kids in Colorado and exits as the battling mother-theorist producing fighting tracts on international relations. The boss of her prairie "hood" is "the determined, athletic eight-year-old prepar[ing] to surround her enemies" and "fight until one of us dies or gets hurt" (15). Elshtain's early performances of war stem from her mother's "determination to make war, to fight when fighting seemed necessary" (Elshtain 1997, 320). That spirit will be important when Elshtain is hospitalized at ten — "bedridden, unable to stand or to walk" (18) and requiring full-time nursing from her warrior mother. Part of the pack of

2. Some of the best known theorists of IR leave no trace of their personal histories and influences in some of their works. The exemplar is Kenneth Waltz (1979; see Sylvester 2014).

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youngsters who contract polio before the vaccine all but wipes it out in the western world, Elshtain, like many others so afflicted, thereafter will walk with a noticeable limp. She had dreamed of joining the military or at least of becoming a correspondent embedded with troops in a war zone. The unfathomable ailment that crashes those dreams leaves her with "pictures and stories [which] *were* the war to me . . ." (22).

As an academic, Elshtain will eschew approaches to war that zero in on abstract causes, categories, and strategies and go instead to the heart of war — people and the scripts they perform or refuse. Her sense of where women are supposed to be vis-à-vis overseas wars and what they are expected to be doing goes like this:

> The woman on the home front just waits, I concluded, waits for letters, waits for the war to be over, waits for "her man" to come home, waits for a telegram she hopes never comes. The man comes home, and he has stories to tell, or so it seemed given the popularity of war movies and stories, but she has no story to tell because "nothing happened," no life and death conflict has challenged her (Elshtain 1987, 22).

Nothing happens at home? Elshtain's life challenges the trope of the stay-at-home woman waiting for the political to become more personal when the warrior brings it home to her.

She enters marriage at the early age of 18 and motherhood soon after, experiences that could have placed Elshtain smack in that feared life of "nothing happens." Elshtain leaves the early marriage and trains in an academic field that will often disappoint her childhood yearnings for a lived career of or near fighting. "Encumbered," she writes, "with lifeless jargon, systems and subsystem dominance, spirals of misperception, decision-making analysis, bipolar, multipolar, intervening variables, dependence, interdependence, cost-effectiveness, IR specialists in the post-Second World War era began to speak exclusively to, or 'at,' one another or to their counterparts in government services" (89). Claiming the ontology of her life as the basis of a gender epistemology on war, the early warrior, early mother, IR specialist, and feminist theorist writes about meanings and actions that spring from a private sphere that is not a nothing-happening place of waiting for men. Elshtain associates it instead with imparting lessons on "civic virtue as armed and ready to do battle" (43).

The roots of the difficult feminist will start there, in her portrayal of the private sphere assigned to women as a place worth preserving. It is a view that puts her on a collision course with western feminist thinking at the

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time, which, in Elshtain's words, showed "an animus toward maternal woman's voice as pronounced as that of any *realpolitiker* male from seminars in the past" (40, emphasis in original). To follow the feminist canon, Elshtain must write off the private sphere, along with established religion, as the frontlines of patriarchy and its war on women. Elshtain does not bow before that command but swings hard against a feminist community that she claims is "not only at war with war but with one another, as well as being locked in combat with women not self-identified as feminist" (233). She sees a contradiction between arguing against war — the Vietnam legacy — while unloading on feminist and nonfeminist "sisters" who chose motherhood as a career. Elshtain's feminist manifesto, front and center in *Women and War*, is "*a way of being* in the world that promotes civic identity and connection, even — at times, especially — if the form it takes is to reject the politics of the day or many of its central features" (247, emphasis in original).

Since that way of being is nurtured in the private sphere, Elshtain assails the popular and powerful feminist idea that the personal is political. In her view, "if politics is power and power is everywhere, politics is in fact nowhere and a vision of public life as the touchstone of a revitalized ideal of citizenship is lost" (Elshtain 1997, 146). Elshtain, the difficult feminist, defends the untold strengths of a sphere filled with mothers and children at a point when many feminists encourage (Western middle-class) women (like themselves) to leave the household for liberated life in the public realm (heretofore of men).

"Not a Soldier's Story" is a testament to the idea that power is decentralized and surprising in its manifestations: women who take up traditional gender positions are not necessarily out of the loop of practical civic knowledge or backward in their thinking or action (she uses Greenham Common as an example). More, Elshtain inserts herself into the war text, not as a victim or follower of gender tropes but as a fighter whose childhood introductions to war are as legitimate as any soldier's or philosopher's tale. Little wonder that in justifying her views on the war on terror nearly 20 years later, Elshtain (2003, 7) will insist, "I am a woman who believes women must have scope to exercise their educated powers to the fullest. . . ." Elshtain is insistently present in *Women and War* as a gendered individual with a salient history and an earned right to offer her home-honed political views on war, even if IR might find her experiences irrelevant and even if her views run against the grain of feminist "truth."

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Elshtain and the Ordinary

As a related second matter, Elshtain elevates the ordinary, the everyday, and "mere" dailiness to salience in *Women and War*, gracefully weaving unexpected people (like herself) into its narratives. She is among the first feminists in IR to insist that "the man, and the woman, 'in the street' often knows how fragile it all is, how vulnerable we all are" (Elshtain 1987, 91). Knowing such things about war and security qualifies them, in her eyes, to be in the lineup of actors reckoned with by IR, rather than black-boxed entirely, hidden in blandly reported casualty numbers and data points, and stuffed into large political groups — terrorists, guerillas, protesters, lobbies, the UN. In IR, ordinary life experiences *within* international relations should not be assumed to have little to teach a field *about* the nature of any international relations (Sylvester 2013a).

In giving credence to the experiences of ordinary women, and the ordinary experiences of occasionally famous women, Elshtain finds defenders of peace as well as women who patiently wait for men to return from war. Many ferocious fighters turn up in her tales of war; indeed, relatively few people are where they are narrated to be in wars past and present. Elshtain roams Athens and Sparta as well as Homer's and Plato's words on war in *The Iliad* and *The Republic*, noting how tough and warlike in discourse or deeds the women are. She analyzes historical changes that appear to have little or nothing to do with women. With respect to the European Reformation, she notes that removing images of martyrs and saints from view means that women who once stood up to assaults or wielded the sword and led French armies (e.g., Elshtain's patron saint Jeanne d'Arc) can be forgotten. She notes that Rousseau avoids the Machiavellian argument that states can be ruined on account of women, but does foolishly argue that women should be assigned the household and children, being naturally body bound and sweetly incapable of politics. The master theorist of war, Clausewitz, emerges in *Women and War* as a plagiarist who leans heavily on his wife as he writes and posthumously on her as she assembles and edits his works for publication. Jumping to Elshtain's favorite habitat, the USA, the reader confronts pioneer and civil war women fiercely protecting their families and properties, masquerading as men in war zones, or taking on industrial and home defense jobs. She argues that all these tales of women in war disappear from history and philosophy because western society has no social institution that channels violence by women and memorializes it as heroic — and western philosophy seems content with the void.

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That ordinary people of war are not where the grand narratives of gender and war situate them, that they slide around their assigned roles and places, stands as one of the notable insights *Women and War* brings to the fore in 1987. While suggesting that real gender activities are not the ones that war tropes elevate, however, Elshtain creates bottlenecks for herself as her book and its project of civic virtue proceeds.

Elshtain Blurring Gender Lines

In *Women and War*, Elshtain tends to ignore the complexities of some gender issues while simultaneously recognizing the intricacies of others. She takes care to avoid falling into stereotypes about war and women. Yet her Hegelian framework can seem to give advance notice that she herself divides two genders into Beautiful Souls and Just Warriors. That impression gains ground when she offers the British Greenham Common women — who left their family spaces and entered the public world of war protest with stamina and conviction — as exemplars of the type of civic action she endorses. It all becomes more complex, however, when she develops the idea that men in war and women dwelling in the private sphere show concern for many of the same maternally based things. The good soldier, she says, is the good mother. He "is expected to sacrifice for his country as mothers are expected to sacrifice for their children" (Elshtain 1987, 222). "Soldiers, like mothers, are involved with food, shit, and dirt" (223) and become preoccupied by stomachs, bodily fluids, and physical protection. "Soldiers and mothers frequently talk about war and mothering as a force beyond or greater than themselves . . . the correct reading of which [i]s a matter of life and death" (224). "The war lover on a killing binge was someone who had 'lost it' just as the defensive mother who batters her child has lost it, having gone from protector to attacker" (224). For more than four pages, Elshtain lays out prosaic examples of two seemingly opposite gender assignments that link up through mutualities of duty and guilt. The good soldier as the good mother is potentially progressive in refusing binary gender roles.

Elshtain tops off that discussion with the claim that "[w]omen are excluded from war talk; men from baby talk" (225). Of course, much has happened to interstate war, parenting, and militaries since Elshtain made those gender-convergent statements. The United States has ended the official exclusion of women from combat roles and gays from the military. Mothers of all genders regularly cross into soldiering, and many

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soldiers are mothers. Elshtain refuses a dominant narrative of her time about who owns war and who is outside it — with women required to be outside it for soldiers to do their jobs properly — by making a journey across the war and gender divide with twinned soldiers and mothers. It is a pity that she will later have difficulty broadening out from the heteronormative model that informs *Women and War* to a more encompassing discussion of gender that features mothers as men and soldiers as women, lesbian dads and two gay moms, and transgender and bisexual people in the gender mix of war. Despite her sense that good soldiers and good mothers share key private-sector qualities, it seems that gender stories from outside the heteronormative trope threaten her model of the private realm. Writing a few years after *Women and War*, she says, "[F]amilies in modernity coexist with those who live another way, whether heterosexual and homosexual unions … communalists … *But the recognition and acceptance of plural possibilities does not mean each alternative is equal to every other with reference to specific social goods*" (Elshtain 1990, 60, emphasis in original). She indicates that living "another way" does not inform her ideas on the private sector as a place where "complex filiations of *private conscience*" are nurtured and then "brought to bear on public lives and action" (26, emphasis in original). Yet if gender lines can admirably blur across motherhood and warriorhood, cannot other gender categories refuse binary civic culture? Oddly, there is no mention in *Women and War* of good fathers and fatherhoods. Is Elshtain's private sphere a private party, a separatist place that women only own? If so, there is a tiny unexpected point of tangency there with the radical feminism that Elshtain rejects.

Often unremarked about in *Women and War* is the section where Elshtain (1987, 144–45) offers six questions that researchers should ask when interrogating a text about gender: Are women presented in opposition to men? Does the author set up responses that are self-congratulatory and prone to sentimentality? Is there space for debate and disagreement, or is the narrative closed? Does the text enable uncertainty or encourage certainty at the cost of critical reflection? Does the text reassure or disturb, settle or take apart, affirm or make ambiguous? Here she entertains ideas about textual analysis and gender that resonate with the openness and criticality of poststructuralism (Sylvester 1994). Elshtain is not quite where we expect her to be here; but the difficult feminist does not tarry in this effervescent spot very long.

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ELSHTAIN AT THE END?

Jean Bethke Elshtain becomes increasingly difficult as her deepening religious views intersect with her devotion to an ideal-typical America and family way of life. That she could justify interventions in Iraq by a U.S.-led coalition stands at quite a distance from her early admiration of John Lennon's efforts to imagine other politics and give peace a chance. This good theorist does not end up resembling the good feminist or the good critical theorist or the good postcolonial analyst or the good poststructuralist. Indeed, Elshtain's later views of America-the-good are difficult to distinguish from the uncritical hypernationalism of the moment.

Elshtain seems cocooned, or perhaps marooned, in America with her dream of armed civic virtue. Departing from concern in *Women and War* with ordinary people and their tales of war, Elshtain does not source her later views of America's just wars in war tales that ordinary people living outside the U.S., or experiencing America through a different gender, class, or race configuration at home, might tell her. The larger world affected by America's "virtue" is largely out of range, experientially remote for Elshtain given the physical constraints lingering from childhood polio. I would say that Elshtain overextends her personal story until it becomes an exemplar of American exceptionalism. We are drawn to ask, what are the filiations of private spaces where women dwell in animosity to Elshtain's America? In what ways are some private spheres seriously disrupted by wars waged by good American soldier-mothers?

My critique notwithstanding, there is much to laud in Elshtain's early writings and fearless professional interventions, as I note in a tribute to her after her death (Sylvester 2013b). In some areas her views even align with aspects of contemporary feminist thinking: today, western feminists no longer insist on the importance of women escaping the private sphere for liberation beyond. I do wonder, however, whether Elshtain brought her private sphere knowledge to bear on Bush's Iraq war or whether neoconservative public politics swallowed up those private filiations.

Jean Bethke Elshtain has gone now, so we cannot know the answer to that question and others. Her many narratives are bequeathals, however, and this particular tome is alive in my projects on war and for my undergraduate and graduate students, who still read, and report great appreciation of, *Women and War*.

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