

## BOOK REVIEW

***Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses during World War II.*** Meghan K. Winchell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008; 240 pages; ISBN: 978-0-8078-3237-0; \$36.94 (cloth).

***Women in British Imperial Airspace, 1922-1937.*** Liz Millward. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008; xi, 249 pages; ISBN: 978-0-7735-3337-0; \$80.00 (cloth).

These books explore the different ways in which gender was constructed in relation to women in the early 1900s. *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun* focuses on the traditional femininities of United Service Organization (USO) hostesses in the US during World War II, while *Women in British Imperial Airspace, 1922-1937* focuses on the non-traditional femininities of female pilots from New Zealand and Britain between the world wars. The books are illuminating and interesting, drawing on feminist history and feminist geography, examining heretofore hidden histories of women's experiences. In general, they discuss the ways in which gender ideals and social expectations are constructed by the state, and are in turn variously accepted, resisted, and transformed by women (and men). The books also each explore the intersections of class, race, gender, and heteronormativity.

*Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun* is based on interviews with former USO hostesses and an analysis of archival data, focusing on "the ways in which quasi-state organizations such as the USO mobilized them [hostesses] to perform 'women's' work that did not challenge gender norms" (1) in order to "maintain the role of the virtuous woman in this time of crisis" (1).<sup>1</sup> Senior hostesses acted as chaperones and event organizers while junior hostesses functioned as dance partners and companions for young military personnel stationed away from home. The book is informative and generally well written, although it tends to be repetitive in some areas. It would have benefitted from a more cohesive argument in each chapter and a clear progression of ideas, with a consequent reduction in length. The content is illuminating and accessible, however, and draws on relevant theory throughout. The book is appropriate for both a general audience and for use in university settings.

Winchell explores how the wartime experiences of USO hostesses largely reproduced the gendered order of women as protected and men as protectors, with soldiers and the state benefiting from women's unpaid and undervalued caring labour. The book highlights how the US military and the USO encouraged hostesses to set aside their own needs to meet those of male military personnel. In doing so, differences were delineated between "good" girls who supported the war cause and "bad" girls who purportedly threatened it by

tempting men with alcohol and sex, possibly exposing them to venereal disease (in an era before penicillin). Hostesses (as substitute mothers or stand-in chaste girlfriends) were set-up as responsible for keeping men away from these bad girls, providing moral support, and reminding the men of what they were fighting for and protecting (i.e. American white middle-class womanhood). Winchell argues that this construction of USO hostesses was an attempt to emphasize traditional white, middle-class values to counteract the sexual freedom of “bad” girls, servicewomen, and the image of Rosie the Riveter. She explores the personal agency of the hostesses, examining how they were not unwitting pawns but, rather, both voluntarily conformed to and actively resisted the ways in which the USO and the state attempted to portray and control them.

*Women in British Imperial Airspace* reads as a denser scholarly work, drawing extensively on theory and providing a strong analysis throughout. It is nonetheless accessible for a general reader as it is very well written and clear, with a cohesive, well-structured argument and focus. Millward draws on various sources, including public media from the time in the form of novels, cartoons, and newspaper articles, as well as archival data. The book discusses the “struggle of women pilots to produce, define, and gain access to civilian airspace” (6) which was divided into “five complex and overlapping forms: the private, the commercial, the imperial, the national, and the body of the pilot herself, each of which contained particular relations of gender, class, race, sexuality, nationalism, and imperialism” (6). Millward begins her examination in 1922, when regulators began to attempt to regulate “whose bodies should occupy which forms of airspace” (4) and continues to 1937, which “ended the era of long-distance record-breaking British imperial flights by women” (4). Her work demonstrates how “the interwar period was a window of possibility for many young white women in the British Empire” (5), but men nonetheless worked to restrict women pilots by not only questioning their appropriateness and fitness to fly, but by creating regulations that excluded women. One argument against supporting women's training centred on the idea that civilian pilots should be a ready reserve force for any subsequent war, and as women could not serve as military pilots, it would be counterproductive to subsidize their flying lessons.

Millward discusses the ways in which women pilots had to balance accepted norms of masculinity and femininity in an era when airspace was largely being defined by those with fascist, misogynist, elitist, and imperialist leanings. Women's maneuvering in various forms of airspace contradicted these norms, challenging heteronormative constructions of women's bodies, as well as their use of particular spaces and places. Millward focuses a significant portion of her analysis on the experiences of Jean Batten, a New Zealand woman who broke several long-distance flying records while challenging conceptions that women should be dependent on men and remain in the home. Batten was wildly popular with women who flocked to her public appearances, taking “her up as an adored figure through which they could challenge their own gendered relation to the nation” (150) and to men.

Winchell's hostesses were represented in ways opposite to Millward's pilots, with the former largely conforming to the “proper femininity” of the era and the latter largely resisting it. Together, the books demonstrate the ways in which states attempt to subjugate women

to particular gender constructions. Although women often resist these constructions, global ruling relations nonetheless work to normalize women in traditional ways. Readers interested in Women's Studies will appreciate the differing contexts that are explored in these two books. Although initially it may appear that US hostesses and British imperial pilots have little in common, in reading these two books it becomes apparent that they are linked through time and space by militarized gender norms.

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