

This chapter presents three artifacts from the First World War militarized landscape of the Three Peaks (Tre Cime/Drei Zinnen) that were collected over the course of the “Written in the Landscape” project. What these artifacts have in common is that they invoke or refer to women in different ways. The artifacts, related to both the Italian and Austrian armies, include the use of women’s names for officers’ quarters, a female code name for a powerful searchlight, and a sketch made by a *pittore-soldato* as part of propaganda efforts that imagined the Three Peaks with three women’s faces. I argue that adopting a gender perspective to interpreting these artifacts fosters a deeper understanding of where and how metaphors of women circulated and the functions these metaphors may have served. Notions of masculinities and femininities embedded in these artifacts may have fed into war-time constructions of traditional gender roles with implications for hierarchies in the post-war gender order and social structures. Further, such metaphors that we find present in a First World War militarized landscape as well as in cultural heritage practices related to military memory can be linked to persisting gender dynamics of contemporary war and militarism. This research contributes to studies of the cultural history of war in analyzing objects, symbols, and discourses through a gender approach.

# Traces of Women on the Three Peaks Plateau

## Gender Approaches to the Militarized Landscape of the First World War

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**DE** In diesem Beitrag werden drei Artefakte aus der Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges vorgestellt. Sie stammen aus der militarisierten Landschaft der Drei Zinnen und wurden im Rahmen des Projekts „In die Landschaft eingeschrieben“ gesammelt. Allen Artefakten ist gemeinsam, dass sie sich auf unterschiedliche Weise auf Frauen berufen oder beziehen. Sie stehen dabei in Bezug sowohl zur italienischen als auch zur österreichischen Armee. Die Artefakte umfassen die Verwendung von Frauennamen für Offiziersquartiere, einen weiblichen Codenamen für einen großen Suchscheinwerfer und schließlich eine Skizze, die von einem *pittore-soldato* als Teil der Propaganda angefertigt wurde, sie stellt die Drei Zinnen mit drei Frauengesichtern dar. Ich stelle die These auf, dass die Betrachtung dieser Artefakte aus einer geschlechtsspezifischen Perspektive ein tieferes Verständnis dafür ermöglicht, wie Metaphern von Frauen zirkulierten und welche Funktionen ihnen in einer militarisierten Landschaft zukamen. Die in diesen Artefakten eingebetteten Vorstellungen von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit können in die kriegsbedingten Konstruktionen traditioneller Geschlechterrollen eingeflossen sein, was wiederum Auswirkungen auf die Hierarchien in der Geschlechterordnung und die sozialen Strukturen der Nachkriegszeit hatte. Darüber hinaus können solche Metaphern mit der anhaltenden Geschlechterdynamik heutiger Kriege und aktuellem Militarismus in Verbindung gebracht werden. Die Studie leistet einen Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte des Krieges, indem sie Objekte, Symbole und Diskurse aus der Perspektive der Genderforschung analysiert.

**IT** Il presente capitolo è incentrato su tre manufatti appartenenti al paesaggio militarizzato delle Tre Cime durante la Prima guerra mondiale, individuati nel corso del progetto “Scritto nel paesaggio”, che in modi diversi invocano o fanno riferimento alle donne. Tali manufatti sono riferiti sia all'esercito italiano che a quello austriaco e includono alcuni alloggi per ufficiali cui venne associato un nome femminile, un potente riflettore anch'esso dotato di un nome in codice femminile, e infine uno schizzo, elaborato da un pittore-soldato e destinato alla propaganda militare, che immagina le Tre Cime con tre volti di donna. Ciò che si vuole sostenere è che l'adozione di una prospettiva di genere nell'interpretazione di questi manufatti favorisce una comprensione più profonda di dove e come le metafore femminili circolavano negli anni di guerra e delle funzioni che tali metafore potevano rivestire. Le nozioni di mascolinità e femminilità contenute in questi manufatti possono aver alimentato le costruzioni belliche dei ruoli di genere tradizionali, con potenziali implicazioni per le gerarchie di genere e le strutture sociali del dopoguerra. Inoltre, le metafore che troviamo presenti nel paesaggio militarizzato della Prima guerra mondiale e nelle pratiche del patrimonio culturale legate alla memoria militare possono essere collegate alle persistenti dinamiche di genere della guerra e del militarismo contemporanei. La ricerca contribuisce dunque agli studi sulla storia culturale militare, analizzando oggetti, simboli e discorsi attraverso un approccio di genere.

## Introduction

The classical understanding of the roles for women during the First World War follows the division between the home and front lines. Women were visible and important on the home front, entering the labor market to take the place of the male breadwinners and contributing to war efforts in weapons factories, along with the usual care roles of mother and wife. Near the front lines, women were also present in support roles, as nurses and sometimes as doctors, porters, cooks, and even as spies. With rare exception, women were not on the front lines fighting alongside male soldiers. Yet, looking closely at the militarized landscape of the Three Peaks (Tre Cime/Drei Zinnen), it is possible to find references to women that might have something new to tell us about how men responded to and behaved in their absence.

As part of the research for the “Written in the Landscape” project into the militarized landscape of the Three Peaks in the Sesto/Sexten Dolomites, there emerged three curious artifacts representing women. The first object is a sketch by an Italian painter soldier entitled *I volti delle Dolomiti* (*The Faces of the Dolomites*) in which the artist drew mountains that were personified by three women’s faces on their peaks. This was found by archaeological researcher Gianluca Fondriest in an album in the Museo Centrale del Risorgimento in Rome that held various visual materials related to the Dolomites and Tyrol during the First World War. The second is part of the cultural heritage of the historical period and consists of a photo featured in an exhibit organized by “Written in the Landscape” Partner Organization Bellum Aquilarum at the Fort Mittelberg that shows an Austrian railway company resting at their quarters in Bad Moos; one building has the name Anny Heim. Other examples of neighboring barracks named after women were supplied by the historian Peter Kübler from his archive. Finally, in a series of Austrian field posts found in the War Archives in Vienna by historical researcher Sabine Kofler, there is a reference to a searchlight that was installed on the Torre dei Scarperi/Schwalbenalpenkopf that had the codename “Ida”. These artifacts that invoke women in a mostly male world form a set of case studies that raises questions about the role played by such representations in the service of militarization in the Three Peaks area during the First World War and beyond. I argue that using a gender approach will enable us to interpret these artifacts beyond their obvious functions as propaganda, barracks, and a searchlight in order to think about how they circulated ideas about women (and men) in the form of gender tropes.

Adopting a gender approach to this material culture of the First World War will demonstrate how these representations of women reflected and reinforced gender stereotypes around masculinity and femininity and thus implanted men and woman in certain roles during wartime. A driving question when conducting gender research as Cynthia Enloe asserts is “What role is masculinity playing, and what role is femininity playing?” (Schouten & Dunham, 2012, p. 6). Thus, I follow Karen Hagemann and others in employing “gender as a methodology, as a category of analysis, for the study of military and war” (Hagemann, 2018, p. 2).

This research expands upon studies of the material culture of the militarized landscape, that is, the study of materials like bullets, mementos, or even tanks and airplanes. In his work on Trench Art, Nicholas Saunders declares that “the objects of war, like any artefacts, embody a diversity—but perhaps a unique intensity—of individual, social and cultural ideas and experiences” (Saunders, 2003, p. 1). He recognizes the “promiscuity of meaning” inherent in these objects that “bring to light long-forgotten and unexpected aspects of the conflict,” thus possessing “the potential for yielding new assessments and conceptualizations

of war which the weight of previous more traditional approaches has obscured” (Saunders, 2003, p. 3). I connect this body of work to feminist approaches within security studies, international relations, and peace research that has explored the ways in which masculinity and femininity are legitimated and maintained within hierarchical structures (Tickner, 2004). This research also contributes to the field of culture heritage, particularly recent work that investigates heritagization processes for how they incorporate gendered constructions in historical narratives (Åse & Wendt, 2022).

I argue that this analysis into three artifacts that circulated ideas about women in the militarized landscape will yield “unexpected aspects of the conflict,” following Saunders (Saunders, 2003), of World War I, particularly around the cultural and social constructions of masculinity and femininity. These constructions encompass men’s relationship to other men as well as to women, centering these relationships as they were experienced in the militarized landscape of the Sesto/Sexten Dolomites. In order to analyze the artifacts, I identify five metaphoric gendered themes and connect them to the production and reproduction of ideas and practices around militarism and women, both during war time and afterwards. Overall, this framework and research help us better detect not only how gender tropes are present, circulate, reinforced and sustained in wartime but also how these gendered dichotomies continue (or not) to support notions of militarism in the aftermath of war. This matters in the present era because “war-making still relies on gendered constructions and images of the state, state militaries, and their role in the international system” (Sjoberg & Via, 2010, p. 3). In this way, we arrive at a deeper understanding of how gender shapes war and how war shapes gender.

### Studying militarism and gender

Connecting war and gender is a growing field. In one definition put forth by the United Nations, gender is understood as “socially constructed identities, attributes and roles for women and men and society’s social and cultural meaning for these biological differences.” Further, these differences are not neutral but instead produce “hierarchical relationships between women and men and in the distribution of power and rights favouring men and disadvantaging women” (United Nations, 2010, p. 2). These hierarchical relationships are based on the ways in which men and women are differentiated and permeate various sectors of society. In their volume on gender, war, and militarism that looked at a range of conflicts across the 20<sup>th</sup> century including the First and the Second World War, Sjoberg and Via drew conclusions on how war making continues to rely on gendered constructions, even when women take on roles as active participants (2010, p. 3). The authors sketch out broadly the distinctions between genders: “Characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity include strength, protection, rationality, aggression, public life, domination, and leadership. On the other hand, weakness, vulnerability, emotion, passivity, privacy, submission, and care have been traditionally associated with femininity” (Sjoberg & Via, 2010, p. 3). The gender hierarchy is pervasive with normative implications: to “feminize something or someone is to directly subordinate that person, political entity, or idea” (Sjoberg, 2006, p. 34). While the relationship between gender and war is not static and there may be shifts in the roles of women in war-making, this research is a reflection on how certain conventions of gendered hierarchies continue to pervade debates and sustain constructions of how states and other actors engage in militarism.

Feminist security and peace researchers have long been attentive to such gender myths that undergird the military order and militarism in general. In waging war, as Cynthia Enloe theorizes, military masculinities are justified in order to protect women and their femininity with the consequence that the superior culture of war and militarism elevated men over women (Enloe, 1983, 1989). What drives this justification are multiple gender constructions—for example, “ideals of peaceful, weak, and vulnerable women help to define a hypermasculine military” (Mackenzie, 2015, p. 10). This also leads to an emphasis on “male bonding”, in the absence of women, that is connected to notions like troop effectiveness (Mackenzie, 2015, p. 15). Militarized environments are thus shaped to conform to gender hierarchies based on the myth of combat exclusion, the notion that women can’t or shouldn’t serve. We shall see how feminizing the names of military quarters and weapons may serve “male bonding” purposes while circulating ideas about maternal protection and female vulnerability.

Within militarized environments, scholars have detected a variety of gendered discourses and speculated on their effects in maintaining hierarchies. Beginning in the 1980s, Carol Cohn started to explore the language around nuclear strategic thinking, noting the diffusion of discourses connected to sexual imagery, intimacy or affectionate domination, domestic bliss, imagery of male birth, religious imagery. The strategic language links masculine sexuality and arms as familiar; in consequence, this language “can also be heard as a way of minimizing the seriousness of militarist endeavors, of denying their deadly consequences” (Cohn, 1987, p. 696). Words that harken domestic images may be a “form of distancing” but may also “serve to domesticate, to *tame* the wild and uncontrollable forces of nuclear destruction” (Cohn, 1987, p. 698). She observes how “the imagery that domesticates, that humanizes insentient weapons, may also serve, paradoxically, to make it all right to ignore sentient human bodies, human lives” (Cohn, 1987, p. 699). The circulation of gender tropes therefore makes it possible to conduct war, by helping to soften and distance the violence driving militarism and war through feminization. In this chapter, I apply these insights on gender and war to the militarized landscape of the First World War in the Sesto Dolomites.

### **Gender approaches to the material and discursive culture of the First World War**

The history of the First World War is continually being revisited and discussed, more recently with a gender perspective. As a body of work, gender studies of World War I examine “the blurring of the borders between feminized home lands and masculinized battle zones” (Grayzel, 2018, p. 2). For example, the volume by Hämmerle et al. (2014) discussed the propaganda that relied on a gender rhetoric that represented woman being in need of protection; fears about the masculinization of the *portatrici*, women from Friuli who were mobilized for war; and the ways that visualizations of wounded men challenged the concept of soldiering; meanwhile, the presence of homosexuals and threats to hegemonic masculinity by homoerotic relations were deemed “feminine” or “deviant”. Other research has looked at women’s labor in the war industries (Hagemann, 2018, p. 8) as well as at women who served in a combat battalion in Russia (Shipton, 2023).

This approach has demonstrated the “importance of gender for mobilizing both fronts—battle and domestic” (Grayzel, 2018, p. 2). Circulating ideas around gender roles was necessary to bring “unprecedented numbers of men

into armies and civilians into the war effort” (Grayzel, 2018, p. 4). That these gender-based stories were used to justify the First World War (Elshstain, 1987) and wars ever since confirms how these constructions of womanhood and soldierly masculinity manifested during World War I endure in influential ways (Hämmerle et al., 2014, p. 1). The implications of gender constructions during war have therefore been implicated in the “hegemonic gender order and the structure of society in all belligerent nations” and likely beyond (Hämmerle et al., 2014, p. 1). Moreover, following wartime, there are heritagization practices that may sustain these gendered orders; feminist analyses of military heritage are considering how this memory making is implicated in contemporary understandings of national security and masculine protection (Åse & Wendt, 2022).

Within studies of material culture of the First World War, we can see the beginnings of the application of a gendered approach. In his volume *Trench Art*, Saunders made mention of the “highly gendered” nature of trench art that was constructed from ordnance produced in munitions factories by women (Saunders, 2003, p. 53). In another example, Becker introduces a sewing kit used by soldiers to demonstrate the ways in which the war “reversed traditional gender roles” and how men “had to assume the activities of women” (Becker, 2004, pp. 26–27). Meanwhile, there has been more activity in examining the gendered nomenclature of weaponry with the most famous example being the “Dicke Bertha”/Busy Bertha, a German gun that shot 42-centimeter mortars and was responsible for military successes such as the destruction of the fortifications in Liege and Namur.<sup>1</sup> The English also knew Bertha well; for them, she was “Busy Bertha” or “Big Bertha” but this may be less commendatory and perhaps more in the service of “patterns of subversion (and morale-boosting mockery)” (Mugglestone, 2015). Other artifacts from elsewhere confirm the tendency: in Austria-Hungary, there was the Rosa, a 36.5cm mortar made by Skoda and Slim Emma, a 30.5 cm mortar also made by Skoda, but neither were popularized like the “Dicke Bertha”. There were some cases of personalizing weapons: a Canadian soldier inscribed his rifle with the name Rosalie, the title of a popular song (Bui, 2018, p. 6). Beyond pointing out these curiosities, Walker asks, “how are we to interpret the gendering of the names given to the large guns, shells, mines, tanks, even the bayonet and rifle?” (Walker, 2017). I argue that feminist insights drawn from security studies, international relations, and peace research can offer a means to better interpret these and other examples of material culture connected to women in militarized landscapes that may be applicable for the First World War, other military histories along with military heritage.

### Studying the material and discursive culture of militarized landscapes through gender tropes

In the absence of women, representations of women loom large as references to the world outside of the militarized landscape. Drawing from research on gendered stereotypes and popular understandings of gender hierarchies in war across various military contexts mainly in Western Europe and the United States, the following five tropes can be used to show how material culture that represents women may reflect and shape thinking about the relationship between men and women. Tropes are useful for illustrating common and familiar ways that gender shapes interactions between people and with surrounding objects, symbols, or terminology. They are further useful for considering representations of women in public spaces, as opposed to private.

Firstly, the exclusionary male aspects of military life will lead to the need to foster male bonding and camaraderie, as discussed by Mackenzie (2015) in her work on the US armed forces. This can also be connected to myths of heroism that are often seen as essential for conducting a war. Thus, references to women in general can firstly be seen to support the fraternal atmosphere, where men bond among themselves by discussing, reminiscing, or objectifying women. These bonds sustain male camaraderie in the absence of women and also support strategies to achieve group cohesion.

Second, the heroic masculinity of men in the militarized landscape is emboldened by the motherly protection of women, also enacted by the nurses who tended to the wounded. Bui (2018) explored how soldiers in the Second World War would put a cropped photo of a loved one inside the handle of their pistol, in what was called a sweetheart grip, thus instilling a tool of war with “the sense that the picture subject was protecting its wielder in combat, much like how a crucifix would divinely protect its carrier in battle” (Bui, 2018, p. 6). This protective guise extends to the naming of weapons, a practice that has a longer history in the Western context; the naming tradition is evocative of a “heroic culture, part of a process of collective memory and understanding” (Mugglestone, 2015). Schmitz-Gropengießer explores how a specific depiction of femininity was present in German First World War propaganda and how this shaped the discursive culture surrounding the mortar gun “Dicke Bertha”: there was pride of course, as well as the notion that the weapon was “the protector of the German soldiers, who embodies a military superiority and thus German superiority” (2016, p. 278). For the British during the First World War, the terms “Granny”, “grandmother” and “mother” were deployed for larger guns. “Mother” was also the name given to the first tank; one soldier recounted that “it takes good care of our infantry and comforts them considerably” (Walker, 2017). Following the work of Cohn (1987) on language cited above, the female personification can be interpreted as serving “to relieve anxiety of war,” in the sense that these objects will protect and succor the men (Wayland, 2014, p. 79). And further, the more the metaphorical relationship invests the object with intimacy and ethics of care, the less emphasis is placed on the violence that is implied (Wayland, 2014, p. 85): think of the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb in the Second World War, which was named after the pilot’s mother.

On the other hand, there are references to women as sexualized objects of male lust as part of heteronormative masculinity. This activates the notion of channeling “sexual desire into aggression against the enemy” (Wayland, 2014, p. 78). We see this gender trope in the soldierly tradition within the Western context “that stylized the weapon as a soldier’s lover” (Schmitz-Gropengießer, 2016, p. 283); German soldiers had rifles called *Braut des Soldaten* or *Bride of the Soldier* (Walker, 2017). Indeed, in postcards and songs, Schmitz-Gropengießer (2016, p. 289) finds that “Dicke Bertha” was more often presented as a sexual object rather than as a maternal figure with the destructive power of the gun linked to the “irresistibility of an attractive women.” Photos and pictures of women might also have circulated among soldiers as “surrogate objects of sexual desire” (Westbook, 1990, p. 596); during the Second World War, pin-up pictures of women, which were put on the walls of barracks, the bulkheads of ships, and on the fuselages of planes, even had official sanction. Wayland looked at the iconicity of “nose art,” the paintings on the fuselages of US World War II aircraft that often depicted women. These paintings were



often “alluring, erotic representations of women” and their official acceptance is explained based on the fact that they “boosted morale” (Klare, 2003, cited in Wayland, 2014, p. 74).

Then there is the notion of representing women as the vulnerable feminine object that requires the protection of men and thus justifies the need to conduct a war. Westbrook argues that pin-up pictures functioned in the US context during the Second World War not only as sexualized objects but also as “icons of the private interests and obligations for which soldiers were fighting” (Westbrook, 1990, p. 596), connecting these pictures to the liberal state’s exploitation of private obligations. In this case, photos of women who might be your sister, wife, or sweetheart reminded soldiers of their “moral obligations of the ‘protector’ to the ‘protected;’” a reminder of whom they were “fighting for” (Westbrook, 1990, p. 592). The interaction between men and the object would become similar to a relationship, wherein the object takes on a personhood. This is demonstrated through an “expression of affection,” the tenderness when talking about the personified object with which one is intimate and has a deep connection (Wayland, 2014, p. 81). This sentiment extended to the landscape itself as a *terra madre* that demands service and sacrifice, as we will see in the sketch below.

Finally, the representations of women present in the gendering of weaponry can be connected to ideas of masculine dominance over what is seen to be female weakness or complexity. In his work on airplane nose art, Wayland found that naming the aircraft after women as objects of desire situates the planes firmly in the “province of (heterosexual) men” and under their control (Wayland, 2014, p. 76–77). The relationship to the object can sometimes be characterized as difficult: this is the notion of “working on” the object, where maintenance becomes an allusion to the “conception of women [as] difficult and capricious” (Wayland, 2014, p. 81). The author concludes that these metaphors are then used “as a model for relationships with women,” women as complex machines requiring care and maintenance for success (Wayland, 2014, p. 82). Interestingly enough, the practice of gendering weapons is even encouraged to this day by the US Marine Corps whose recruits are expected to “equate their rifles with women” (Guffey, 2013). As Guffey writes, “inherent in these rifle rituals is a paradoxical vision of women as objects which needed care, but which, when treated right (i.e. kept clean, well maintained, and battle ready), were singularly capable of not only saving a Marine’s life, but also that of a nation” (Guffey, 2013). Thus, the stakes become revealed and this gendered language results in reinforcing the “hierarchy of gendered spheres, with the masculine sphere predominating” (Wayland, 2014, p. 84). Now we turn to the militarized landscape of the Three Peaks in order to see the ways in which these gender tropes are represented in various artifacts and to conjecture what ideas they might have circulated.

### Case studies of representations of women on the front lines at the Three Peaks

Three case studies of objects representing women were excavated as part of research conducted on the material, sociological and historical past of the high plateau of the Three Peaks in the Dolomiten Alps and the nearby town of Sesto/Sexten during the “Written in the Landscape” project.<sup>2</sup> This portion of the militarized landscape of the First World War has already begun to be interpreted through a gender lens. By way of example, in his account of the First World War in the Alps, Michael Wachtler (2006) included a section on women

entitled “Sweethearts and whores,” neatly summing up the typical dichotomy of women’s roles in the militarized landscape. The description of brothels that were organized by hierarchy for the Austrian army is accompanied by the line “Girls became mere playthings of the soldiers” (Wachtler, 2006). Meanwhile, women were also “angels”, the often unnamed nurses tending to men on the front (FIG. 1),



**1** Infirmary station with head Doctor Palla and nurse, 1916. Foto by Anton Trixl. From: Collection Werkmeister Anton Trixl, L92, Tiroler Archiv für photographische Dokumentation und Kunst, Lienz-Bruneck. © TAP. Reprinted with permission.

in a propaganda war to raise morale in which the figure of womanhood was “elevated to a pure, immaculate object of desire” (Wachtler, 2006). This type of gender reading is especially significant for a front that was called the “lonely war” by German military historian Heinz von Lichem (cited in Wachtler, 2006).

The case studies from the “Written in the Landscape” project are situated in and across a traditional understanding of women during the war with its typical home front/front line divide. The men were off fighting on the front lines and the women, children and elderly assumed responsibility for their tasks, importantly agriculture, and provisioning of the men at the front. As one illustration of the home front, Sigrid Wisthaler recounts the story of Anna Egarter, a Sesto/Sexten mother who fled with her large family to take refuge with relatives (Wisthaler, 2006). Wachtler’s book (2006) also includes photographs of wives sending their men off to war, women mending war uniforms, then as war widows who have grown thin from deprivation or who taking part of the reconstruction. In addition to their curative roles, there was the support women gave in maintaining the psychological health of soldiers through epistolary activities that recounted tidings and connected families (Grote, 2019, p. 215). Within historical accounts, the conjured scenes of women writing letters and taking care of the family as part of the home front stand in contrast to the men posed in “action” with their weapons or simulating battle or in friendly camaraderie.

Further research has expanded on the roles of women during the war (see Fornari, 2014). For example, we know that women were present in support areas of the fighting on the Three Peaks. In the Vienna War Archives, “Written in the Landscape” historical researcher Sabine Kofler found a manual for the zone of the Three Peaks that dealt specifically with female auxiliary staff who worked as cooks, tailors, housekeeper.<sup>3</sup> The manual describes the types of employment and payment, but there are also references to moral conduct suggesting that this work force was also treated in a special manner.



**2** Angelo Landi, *I volti delle Dolomiti*  
(The Faces of the Dolomites), 1917.  
From: Museo Centrale del Risorgimento,  
Rome, album S17\_04.  
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More exceptionally, there are the accounts of women who fought alongside the men. At the Three Peaks there is the celebrated story of 16-year old Viktoria Savs who served in the Dolomites dressed as a man named Viktor Savs. She had requested permission to fight from Archduke Eugen and this request was accepted; her subsequent injury and unveiling as a “hero girl” would be heralded in propaganda (Gerbert, 2015). Finally, there is research on and commemoration of the women who worked as porters in the Carnic region (*le portatrici Carniche*).<sup>4</sup> These examples enrich our idea of women’s roles in wartime and complicate previously held conceptions of divisions between the home and military fronts. But for the most part, there existed a near absence of women on the front of the Three Peaks. Therefore, detecting the gender tropes embedded in the three artifacts under study here will reveal additional ways in which ideas of women, femininity, and masculinity were present and circulated.

### *I volti delle Dolomiti*

In the Museo Centrale del Risorgimento, there is a sketch called *I volti delle Dolomiti* (in English this would be “The Faces of the Dolomites”) in an album that held various visual materials related to the Dolomites and Tyrol (FIG. 2). The album was created as part of the celebration of Italy’s victory in the First World War and included various pieces of propaganda art produced by the military. The sketch was made by an artist named Angelo Landi in 1917. An accomplished painter known for his portraits, Landi also demonstrated a strong patriotic-historical streak (D’Attoma, 2005, p. 85). In 1916, he was called to arms with the rank of artillery corporal and was attached to the Press and Propaganda Office of the Supreme Command. He rendered numerous war scenes as one of many *pittori-soldato* hired by the Italian Supreme Command to record the events of the war as well as produce artwork for propaganda purposes (Fondriest, 2022). While at the front, Landi was equipped with pencils and notebooks where he not only depicted “battles, soldiers at rest, trenches, troop movements, figures with landscapes behind them, but [...] also lingered on grand natural scenes, the scene of the war events” (Stilearte, 2015). As one catalog recounted, his illustrations “narrated the war with epic realism, highlighting the suffering of the Italian military” (Stilearte, 2015).

The setting of the *I volti delle Dolomiti* sketch is the Three Peaks, which was the craggy border between the two armies. From the perspective of the viewer, Austria is on the right and Italy is on the left. Towards the bottom of the picture, there are two soldiers in the middle, who, according to their helmets, are identifiable as Italian soldiers. This is a typical winter picture and there are no obvious traces of military installations. But in a place where there are few (if any) women around, the sketch centers the rendering of three women’s faces on the peaks. These faces draw the gaze of the soldiers upward in an act of reverence. The women are wearing shrouds or veils and their faces are etched on the top part of the peaks, infusing these mountains with a mythical feminine character. The personification of the three women on the peaks may be reminiscent of the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. This is a common motif seen in sets of three women statues and they are often characterized by each female figure having a different gaze, which is also seen in the *Volte*. We don’t see the men’s individual expressions but they are standing before this display of female virtues embedded in an iconic mountainside.

The linking of three feminine figures with the militarized environment of the Three Peaks offers a “renegotiation” of the physical and spiritual space (Saunders, 2003). The picture was most likely made for propaganda purposes (though it was not reproduced as far as we know), and we can presume that reinscribing the mountain with female bodies and a gauzy femininity served a function for the war. The depiction of women remakes the mountains into the motherland, literally, a territory that needs to be protected and fought for by the soldiers. Rather than showing the women on the home front, three female figures have been transported to the militarized zone, imbuing the mountains with a feminine and religious character. The male soldiers’ service and heroic sacrifice during the long harsh winters would be thus justified by this elision of women with the landscape. Alternately, the women’s faces on the peaks could be regarded as casting the mountains in a protective, maternal role. In this reading, the mountains become part of the defense of the beleaguered soldiers, and not the dangerous force of nature that the mountains often proved to be through avalanches and weather. These watchful mothers or three virtues, with a Christian quality signaled by the veils, become female allegories with an emotional and symbolic charge. This hovering angelic role would elevate the heroism and sacrifice of the men, offering some comfort to them in this place, “the lonely war” as described by von Lichem that was bereft (for the most part) of female company. As demonstrated, a variety of gender tropes flow from the remaking of a militarized landscape as a set of feminized mountain peaks.

### Officer quarters named Anny Heim

In a war album of the 35<sup>th</sup> railway company of the Austrian army, there are some photos of downtime at the officer’s quarters at Bad Moos. This was the company responsible for building the high alpine cableways in the Sesto/Sexten Dolomites and elsewhere. The quarters for this company were in an area with fields and forests that sat at a safe distance from the Three Peaks, where the front lines were located. The photos show a log cabin that is better constructed than the usual barracks with some nice touches like a balcony and with some flower boxes affixed out front. The photos appear to catch the railway company men in moments of relaxation, drinking, smoking, cleaning up. One of the structures is clearly labeled “Anny Heim”, which in English translates to Anny Home (FIG. 3). Heim refers to home but also in the sense of a care or rest home with additional succoring features.

These quarters were constructed as part of the support areas for the front lines. These are simple log constructions, which were well adapted to the conditions and which also offer a certain degree of protection against splintering. There are a handful of examples of military barracks and accommodations in the Three Peaks area that had proper names (Fondriest & Kofler, 2022). Some were named for officers and commanders while “Villa Berta” is named after a woman. There are also examples of humorous or ironic names like “Villa zum kalten Wint” on the Sextner Rotwand in 1915 or “Villa Offensivgeist” (location unknown).

The photo of “Anny Heim” is featured in an exhibit in Fort Mittelberg and can be considered part of heritagization of the war in Sesto/Sexten. As the placard for the photo recounts, “The quarters are often given a woman’s name, an attempt to give a human face to daily life during the war.”<sup>5</sup> But that this human face was personified as female pushes us to think further. Giving the military quarters the cozy name of “Anny”, a diminutive for the name Anna, may have



**3 Officers' quarters at Bad Moos, 1915–1918.**  
Unknown photographer. From the album of the  
35th Railway Company, Dolomitenkriegsarchiv.  
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served the purposes of male bonding and camaraderie. As discussed above, the gender trope around naming things can be seen as part of fostering group cohesion that heralds a “heroic culture” and “collective memory and understanding” (Mugglestone, 2015). The shelter provided by “Anny Heim” may also have been a welcome source of comfort following assignment to the battlefield area of the Three Peaks. This further suggests that the naming evokes a maternal, protective guise where men are cared for and looked after by women. Or in a more lustful vibe, “Going home to Anny” at the end of the day may hearken to a man’s frenzied return to a wife or sweetheart. On the other hand, there is also a sense of dominance and control over a feminized object. The company may have been invested in making sure that Anny “behaved” and kept them warm in the winter, for example. These are some of the interpretations we might imagine in feminizing the living quarters in the militarized landscape.

### **A searchlight named “Ida”**

The third item to discuss is a searchlight named “Ida” that was installed on the Three Peaks by the Austrian army in July 1917 to illuminate and monitor the Italian position on the side of Monte Piano. Searchlights were a key feature for the frontlines of both armies (Fondriest & Kofler, 2022). These instruments were installed in high perches and caves to illuminate large sections of the enemy front and were used to thwart nighttime attacks and disrupt activities. Telephone lines linked the searchlight posts to the command stations and, due to





5 Window from the Kawrza tunnel under the Torre degli Scarpieri/Schwalbenalpenkopf with a view of Monte Piano. Photo of the archaeological documentation, Arc-Team and Gianluca Fondriest, Summer 2021.  
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- 1 Some argue that the gun was named after Bertha Krupp, the daughter of the Friedrich Krupp whose factory produced the guns; some claim this connection has not been sufficiently established (Storz, 2015).
- 2 For more information on the Written in the Landscape project's search and excavations as well as details on the sites where the searchlight and barracks were located, see the project's website: <https://writteninthelandscape.projects.unibz.it/>.
- 3 Kriegssarchiv Wien [KA], K.u.k Rayonskommando V. zu Op. 771/1/G, Subbeilage 1. Dienstordnung für

- 4 Köchinnen. Neue Feldakten, Artilleriekommando der 21. Gebirgsbrigade, 3321.  
<http://www.portatricicarniche.it/>
- 5 The photo is on display at Fort Mittenberg, in an exhibit organized by Bellum Aquilarum. The photo is part of the Dolomitenkriegsarchiv, the collection of Peter Kuebler and Hugo Reider.
- 6 For more information on the location and current state of the archeological site, see the project website: [https://writteninthelandscape.projects.unibz.it/en/point\\_of\\_interest/riflettori/](https://writteninthelandscape.projects.unibz.it/en/point_of_interest/riflettori/)





**6** Remains found in the Kawrza tunnel under the Torre dei Scarperi/Schwabenalpenkopf. Photo of the archaeological documentation, Arc-Team and Gianluca Fondriest, Summer 2021. © 2021, unibz, WiL Archive. Reprinted with permission.

to wage war. This special care and maintenance of “*Ida*” would be the key to its success, rendering the feminized object “difficult” at times to manage (Wayland, 2014). In all instances, the gendered understanding of the searchlight characterized the relationship of the men with an important object in the militarized landscape that might shape their encounters with women later on.

Similar to the “*Dicke Bertha*” cannon, the searchlight’s code name “*Ida*” has been an object of some curiosity for historians. In his research on the Three Peaks and the ways in which vision was militarized, Anton Holzer discussed the strategic use of searchlights and noted the presence of “*Ida*”. He writes, “who ‘*Ida*’ was, we don’t know” but connects the female naming of weaponry and personal items to the prevailing gender tropes, as “incantations between eroticism and motherliness” (Holzer, 1996, p. 77). Intriguingly, he speculates that the searchlight “*Ida*” might be connected to the iconicity of Saint *Ida*, a 11<sup>th</sup> century figure known for performing miracles and for having a dream where the sun came to rest on her bosom, after which she had a son who led a holy crusade and became the king of Jerusalem (Holzer, 1996, pp. 77–88). Thus, the name “*Ida*” could also be linked to the act of bringing or bearing light as well as a maternal figure who produced a Christian crusader who later achieved a glorious victory. This reference to the crusades may well feed into the heroic narrative that justifies warfare as a type of holy mission. This contextualization offered by Anton Holzer of the female naming of a weapon in the familiar spiritual grammar of the soldiers demonstrates the importance of context when interpreting this phenomenon amid the material culture of war.

## Conclusion

This chapter used a gender approach to explore three artifacts of the militarized landscape of the Three Peaks. I excavated unexpected aspects of conflict that heretofore have been overlooked or understudied. As Walker (2017) remarked on surveying gendered weaponry, “the preponderance of female names and references remains uncomfortable.” I endeavored to investigate this discomfort by concentrating on three examples of representations of women that show how gender metaphors circulated and the functions these tropes served. I argue that by adopting a gender perspective it is possible and necessary to surface new understandings of the roles that masculinity and femininity play in the militarized landscape. Focusing on a sketch, a photograph of barracks, and a searchlight, these artifacts were presented and interpreted through five gender tropes. This analysis yielded insights into how the feminization of an iconic mountainside, military quarters, and searchlight constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity. This presents possible ways that male soldiers might have interacted with the objects and by extension to women and other men.

Most conventionally, notions of women protecting men and men protecting women have long fed into certain heroic cultures of militarism. Western militaries continue to support the fashioning of feminized objects through sentiments of sexual desire as part of male bonding that serve the functions of aggression and troop cohesion. Further, it is important to take into account the ways in which dominance and control over a feminized object through care and maintenance might be connected to presumptions about how to achieve success and reward in battle. These gender tropes reveal some of the ways in which representations of women in the militarized landscape may have the overall function of founding, embedding, and sustaining separate spheres. Future research could investigate the response to and engagement with these feminized objects through examination of soldiers’ letters and other official correspondence, which lay outside of the scope of the “Written in the Landscape” project.

Finally, it’s important to remember the official sanction given to the presence and circulation of these representations, that these practices are sustained and even reinforced by military command structures. The identification of these objects and their interpretation through gender tropes therefore demonstrate how militarized landscapes can contribute to constructions of womanhood and soldierly masculinity. The practice of gendering spheres that became manifested during the First World War has been recognized as enduring in influential ways (Hämmerle et al., 2014). The resulting hierarchy of relations between men and women becomes reinforced as a natural and accepted part of war-making that then feeds over to social and cultural relations beyond the front lines. In addition, these tropes then become present in persisting gender dynamics of contemporary war and militarism.

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