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Zoltán Molnár

The Role of Women in the Armed Forces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War

doctoral dissertation

Supervisor:

Lieutenant Colonel Gábor László Hausner, Ph.D.

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The relevance and novelty of the research theme, and formulation of the scientific issue

The First World War, one of the most defining historical events of the 20th century, marks an era boundary not only in military history but also in terms of the fundamental change in the role of women in society compared to previous periods. It is an undeniable fact that during the First World War, it was the role of women in society that changed to the greatest extent in Hungary. In parallel with the mobilization of the male population throughout the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and their deployment in various theatres of war, women took over men's tasks in the war economy and in the hinterland in many areas – they took part in the work of military administration, as well as in health institutions and hospitals, and some did not shy away from actively participating in the fighting. During the World War, similar processes took place in the belligerent states allied with Austria-Hungary and in the Entente countries. It should be noted that the trend had already started in Western and Central Europe from the last third of the 19th century, and thanks to the dynamic economic development and the resulting social changes, women increasingly joined public education, obtained qualifications and found employment in the labour market, and more and more careers and university degrees became available to them. The First World War marked a turning point as in addition to strengthening their traditional roles, women also appeared in segments where they had previously been represented less or only in minimal numbers.

Although many were forced to return to household chores after the war, the world was no longer the same as before, as women gained the right to vote in many countries and their presence became permanent in many jobs and university courses. This change is well illustrated by the appearance of the first female pilot instructors (Lilly Steinschneider, Aemelia Mary Erhart, and later Jacqueline Auriol). This was the beginning of a process that continued through the Second World War (see novel *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* by Boris Vasiliev, published in 1969, about the tragic example of Soviet female soldiers) to the present day in terms of the presence of women in the army. In 2023, for example, 225,119 women served in the US armed forces, which accounted for 17.7% of the total personnel.[1] According to the Central Statistical Office, in 2024, 3,513 women served in the Hungarian Armed Forces

[1] U.S. Department of Defense: *2023 Demographics Profile of the Military Community*. Washington, D.C., Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy), 2024. 18.

as officers and non-commissioned officers, which accounted for 23.6% of this personnel category[2].

However, no matter how important a role women played, they did not become equal in the period under discussion, as they "merely" supported the efforts of heroic men. Current social discourses on and objections to women's involvement in military clearly illustrate the ideological tensions related to gender roles. This is reflected in the following lines of the work by the renowned British military historian John Keegan, entitled *A History of Warfare*, in which he discusses: "Warfare… is the one human activity from which women, with the most insignificant exceptions, have always and everywhere been excluded… women… do not fight. They rarely fight each other, and they never fight men in any military sense. If war is as old as history and as universal as humanity, then we must now enter upon the all-important limitation that it is an entirely masculine activity."[3]

Pastor Doug Wilson, co-founder of the Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) in Idaho, made a similar statement: *"I don't think women should be in leadership positions in the military or that they are suitable for high-level combat roles."* This same view is reflected in several public statements by the current US Secretary of Defence, Pete Hegseth. In August 2025, for example, he shared a video in which several pastors claim that women should no longer be allowed to vote.[4] In November 2024, Hegseth even discussed that he believed women should not be in the military because their exclusion is one of the keys to efficiency.[5] In 2025, he was more nuanced when he stated that he would allow women to continue serving as long as they meet the same criteria as men.[6]

Conservative perceptions of gender roles therefore continue to live on in the 21st century, and they do not only have an impact on the political, but also on the social and family levels. Stereotypes against women serving in the military appear as a deterrent for some families, which is why they do not support their female relatives choosing a military career, while for others these circumstances are a motivation and strengthen their commitment to military

[2] Hungarian Central Statistical Office: *Magyar statisztikai évkönyv, 2024.* Budapest, KSH, 2025. table 5.7.1. 416.
[3] Keegan, John (2002): *A hadviselés története*. Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, p. 80.
[4] *The US Secretary of Defence shared a video in which stance is taken against women's right to vote.* Online: https://24.hu/kulfold/2025/08/10/pete-hegseth-vedelmi-miniszter-amerika-nok-szavazati-jog-botrany/
[5] Flaherty, Anne (2025): *Hegseth softens stance on women in combat, calls for policies already in place.* ABC News. Online: https://abcnews.com/Politics/hegseth-softens-stance-women-combat-calls-policies-place/story?id=117669190
[6] U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services: *To Conduct a Confirmation Hearing on the Expected Nomination of Mr. Peter B. Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense*. Washington, D.C., 2025. 11–13., & 54.

profession. All of this affects the military and political opportunities for women, which I examine from military and social historical perspectives, paying special attention to the opportunities and limitations of women's role, thereby emphasizing the topicality of the issue.

The above examples well support the general public opinion that warfare and war are men's business, and women only appeared in supporting roles in this regard, since this activity is so far from their character. One of the fundamental starting questions of my research was, precisely to what extent this widely held perception corresponds to historical reality.

On the other hand, I have always wanted to learn more about the history of the event that contemporaries only referred to as the Great War. This was the war of the generation of our grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents who experienced the horrors of the war both on the front and in the hinterland that supported it. There was hardly a family that did not have at least one of their males on the battlefield, so the First World War is truly part of our collective history. Textbooks typically described primarily the events on the battlefield, but I have always been interested in the fate of ordinary people. I have wanted to understand what the inhabitants of the hinterland had to experience, what difficulties they faced, how they tried to help those in need, and what factors made it possible for the war to continue for years.

I first addressed the topic in more detail on the occasion of the centenary in 2014. At that time, I wrote my National Student Research Conference (OTDK) thesis entitled *The Ordeals of the Wartime Hinterland*, which was among the ten best entries in the section and also became my thesis work submitted for the undergraduate course in history. Then, in 2018, I completed my master's thesis in history, focusing on women and relying primarily on primary press sources in addition to specialized literature. However, these works of mine mostly examine the social aspects of the issue, while during their preparation it became obvious to me that women played a decisive role during the conflict not only in the traditional areas previously assigned to them, but also in the war economy, arms industry plants, military hospitals, and even on the battlefields. All of this motivated me to apply to the Doctoral School of Military Sciences and to write my dissertation. My basic objective is to explore and analyse the military science aspects of the topic, detached from a civilian military history approach, and to draw the appropriate lessons and conclusions.

The theme of the dissertation is the role of women in the armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the period between 1914 and 1918. By the term “armed forces of the

Austro-Hungarian Monarchy" in the title, I mean the armed organizations of the dual monarchy, i.e. the joint army (*k.u.k. Armee*), the Imperial and Royal Navy (*k.u.k. Kriegsmarine*), the Hungarian Royal Honvédség, the Imperial-Royal Landwehr, and the popular uprising. The structure of this organization was determined by the defence laws following the Great Compromise of 1867, primarily Article XL of 1868.[7] The focus of the dissertation is on women who served in the armed forces of the Monarchy or in organizations and services directly related to their operation during the Great War. Accordingly, the study covers not only women employed by the military organization, but also female participants in the health, economic and other background services directly supporting the operation of the armed forces.

The analytical language of the dissertation consistently uses the concepts of "women", "female actors", "female personnel", "female assistants", "female employees" and "female auxiliary forces". The normative or paternalistic designations appearing in contemporary sources ("daughter of Hungary", "miss", student girl "lady") appear exclusively as quoted or analysed in the source language.

The dissertation is located at the intersection of military history, social history and women's history approaches, but it is important to note that it does not apply a gender-based analysis. There are two dominant directions in the thesis: classical women's history, which strives to make women visible, present their biographical and social roles, reconstruct the female experience, and integrate previously marginalized female characters into history. The other direction followed is a sociohistorical analysis, which focuses on structural processes, institutional functioning, social mobilization, division of labour, power relations, and social representations.

Accordingly, some chapters of the text use a traditional women's history approach, which primarily focuses on presenting women's experiences, roles, and social visibility. Typical concepts of these are *"the situation of women," "the role of women," "the contribution of women," "women's sacrifice,"* and *"invisible work."* Other chapters interpret the mobilization of women's labour and the operation of the military organization more within a sociohistorical and institutional historical analytical framework, with concepts such as *"labour mobilization,"*

[7] See: Balla, Tibor (2015): Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia fegyveres ereje a Nagy Háború kitörésekor. In: Szakály Sándor (ed.): *Egy ezred év viharaiban meg nem rendült törhetetlen hűség. Székesfehérvár, Magyarország és a Nagy Háború.* Budapest, L'Harmattan, pp 11–24. *Act XL of 1868 on the defence forces*. Online: https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=86800040.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei

"institutional integration," "social role expectations," "homeland division of labour," and *"war economy rationalization."* Such a dual analytical framework ensures that the study simultaneously interprets the subjective dimensions of women's war experiences and the objective operating mechanisms of the military and war-economy institutional system. The thesis primarily examines the role of women in World War I from a social and military historical perspective, while using the results of women's history research primarily as an analytical perspective and historiographical framework.

In my dissertation, I undertook to summarize the role of women in Hungary during the Great War from a military science perspective using primary archival and specialist literature sources. Since it has not yet been done in previous domestic specialist literature, it is precisely what makes my work novel. There can be no doubt about the relevance of the theme of the dissertation, since the number of women serving in the Hungarian Defence Forces is constantly increasing, and they are taking on an increasingly serious role, which is why getting to know the antecedents and aspects of military, economic and social history is of fundamental importance for understanding and processing the complex developments that are taking place in the Hungarian Defence Forces even today.

In contrast to interpretations that see women's participation in war as an exclusively supplementary or temporary phenomenon, I argue that the presence of women had a structural significance in the operation of the armed forces, even though this was not formally accompanied by full institutional recognition.

The female auxiliary personnel of the Monarchy's forces have been analysed in Hungarian military historiography only to a limited extent, with most research focusing on general women's history, health history, or memory politics, while a complex analysis of women's roles integrated into the operation of the military organization is lacking. International research has long been concerned with the issues of *"women and war"*, *"military gender history"*, *"home front studies"*, and *"total war mobilization"*, but there are still gaps in the context of Austria-Hungary, which we can address together as Hungarian researchers.

The starting point in the course of my research is the basic military historical assumption that the operation of modern mass armies during the Great War required an unprecedented level of mobilization of society, which facilitated the integration of female labour into the military organization and the war economy as well. The central scientific problem of the thesis is the examination of how and under what constraints the military organization of the Austro-

Hungarian Monarchy integrated female labour during the First World War, and what institutional and social consequences this process had. One of the novelties of the work is that I do not examine women's role exclusively from a socio-historical or memory-political perspective, but rather analyse it in connection with the operation of the military organization of the Monarchy. The dissertation may also contribute to the nuanced image of the operation of the military organization of the Danubian Empire, especially through the examination of the personnel composition of the support and administrative functions in the hinterland.

The novelty of the research lies not only in the fact that I explore the different forms of women's role in the First World War, but also in the fact that it is interpreted in the context of functioning of the military organization and the resource management of modern mass warfare. I examine women not merely as passive victims of war or as actors who provide extraordinary individual achievements, but as functional elements of the personal and economic resource system of warfare. Accordingly, I analyse the different forms of women's role through the examination of the functioning of the military organization, the war economy, the hinterland and the theatre of war.

According to the classical theories of military science, the First World War was an era of mass armies and total mobilization, where the rigid demarcation between the front line and the rear (*Front und Heimat*) was broken down.[8] In the context of total war, the involvement of women in the armed forces is not a marginal episode but a strategic condition for maintaining the capability of waging war. In my work, I make attempts to highlight that the Monarchy's military leadership was forced to radically restructure its human resource management as the war dragged on, and to systematically fill unarmed and administrative functions in the hinterland with female labour (replacement of manpower and rationalization of service) to directly ensure the replenishment of the frontline fighting formations. The military employment of women in the First World War was not merely a temporary and marginal emergency solution but a structural cornerstone of the sustainability and operational efficiency of modern, industrial mass armies.

[8] The term has its origins in Carl von Clausewitz's theory of war, particularly in his concept of absolute war (*absolute Krieg*), which represents a theoretical endpoint where all available resources are mobilized by the warring parties. The term became popular in military thought in the interwar period, and its best-known interpretations were given by the French writer and journalist Léon Daudet and Erich Ludendorff, a key figure in the German military leadership of World War I. The latter characterized modern warfare as involving the political, economic, and psychological resources of society as a whole. See: Clausewitz, Carl (2013): *A háborúról.* Budapest, Zrínyi Kiadó, pp 37–57.; Léon Daudet (1918): *La guerre totale.* Paris: Nouvelle librairie nationale, pp 8–18.; Ludendorff, Erich (1935): *Der totale Krieg.* München: Ludendorffs Verlag, pp 3–35.

Research questions and hypotheses

The dissertation seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. In what ways were women involved in the operation of the armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War?

2. In which areas did women's involvement appear in the direct and indirect support system of the armed forces, especially in the operation of military medicine, administration, auxiliary services and the Red Cross?

3. What problems and difficulties were generated by women's service in the armed forces, and in which areas did their activity prove to be of particular significance?

4. How did the previous image of women and their role modify and alter due to and as a result of the war?

5. What similarities and differences can be observed between the women's mobilization practices of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and other belligerent states?

At the beginning of the research, I set up the following hypotheses:

H1: During the First World War, the institutional use of female labour in the war economy and in the army's support services in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy became a fundamental condition for the sustainability of the war economy and military organization.

H2: The military leadership of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy gradually integrated the use of female auxiliary forces into formalized service frameworks.

H3: During the First World War, wartime violence against women, internment, and military coercive measures applied in occupied territories were not isolated events, but rather institutionally interpretable phenomena stemming from the military functioning of modern mass warfare, which served as instruments of military control over the civilian population.

H4: The use of women in the war economy and military auxiliary service transformed the social perception and institutional acceptance of female employment.

H5: The forced modernization of the Monarchy, the formalization of female auxiliary troops, and the rationalization of labour in the hinterland were not isolated phenomena; the same thing happened in the mobilization practices of the Central Powers and the Entente states.

Research objectives and methodology

The dissertation can be classified as applied military science research in terms of its nature,[9] as it examines social and organizational phenomena related to the operation of the armed forces. The work focuses on the functions of female labour in the army and in the hinterland, with particular attention to how it contributed to the maintenance of the military system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during World War I. Due to the nature of the topic, it lies on the border between military science and social history.

By applying the research methods of military science (exploratory, analytical, comparative), my aim is to present the significantly altered role of women compared to their predecessors, as well as their sacrifice during the First World War. I explore and analyse the legal background of everything, the positive and negative effects and consequences on the forces, the economy and society with the help of the analysis, evaluation and synthesis of the collected primary archival material covering the theme, and the latest literature research findings. I illustrate the changed roles of women through specific examples.

The specificities of the sources used during the research necessitate their critical treatment and the explicitness of the limitations of the investigation. One of the fundamental difficulties of archival research is that the vast majority of surviving documents are linked to the operation of military and administrative institutions, so they primarily convey an institutional perspective. As a result, the appearance of female characters is often indirect, fragmented, and subordinated to the given organizational logic.

Military administration sources also carry structural biases, as the primary purpose of documentation was not to record social processes but to maintain functioning. As a result, women's presence often only becomes visible when it is relevant to the functioning of the army, which can distort the proportions and nature of their actual involvement.

[9] This part is based on Gőcze István: A tudományos kutatás módszerei. *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 2011. 3. pp 157–166.

The use of press sources also requires caution, as they functioned as a tool for war propaganda and social mobilization. Accordingly, the depiction of women's roles often appears within normative and idealized frameworks that do not necessarily reflect everyday experiences.

Another characteristic feature of recollections and memoirs is that they are retrospective constructions that embed individual experiences in retrospective interpretative frameworks. At the same time, these sources are indispensable for the understanding of women's experience to reconstruct, but the selective and narrative nature of memory must be taken into account when using them.

Consequently, the thesis strives to compare and critically synthesize different types of sources in order to achieve a more nuanced and multi-aspect reconstruction of women's roles.

The hypotheses are verified and evaluated through critical analysis and comparative examination of historical sources (archival documents, diaries, memoirs, press sources, decrees), using theoretical-logical methods (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction and analogy).

The analysis maps the patterns of women's institutional role in an inductive way, starting from individual sources (nurses' diaries, recruitment applications, garrison reports), and then draws more general conclusions about the organizational-disciplinary logic of the Imperial and Royal Armed Forces in a deductive manner; the analysis and synthesis are realized in the exploration of the internal structure of individual archival units (e.g. documents of divisional headquarters) and their summary interpretation, while analogy is primarily used in the comparison with parallel phenomena of the German war economy.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of eight chapters and primarily examines the role of women in the theatre of war and forms of their activity within the framework of the armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, with an international perspective. The research focuses on the roles in which women directly or indirectly participated in the war effort – especially in the field of medical nursing service, the use of female auxiliaries, medical and intelligence work in the theatre of war, and military administration in the hinterland. Another important part of the dissertation is the social perception of women's military service and its institutional regulation.

The analysis focusing on the Monarchy is complemented by an international comparative perspective, primarily through the examples of Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Russia, which creates an opportunity to examine how the belligerent states involved women in the division of wartime labour, and what differences and similarities can be observed in the organizational and social perception of women's military service.

For quantitative reasons, the dissertation focuses primarily on those areas that were directly related to the operation in the theatre of war and the supply of the army. Accordingly, special attention is paid to the use of female labour for military purposes, the military medical service, the operation of the war economy, and the issues of military administration and social mobilization. The research does not strive to process the entire socio-historical background of the hinterland, as it primarily examines phenomena and institutions relevant to military science. The operation of the Austro-Hungarian hinterland is analysed not in isolation but in an international comparative framework, especially in comparison with the examples of Great Britain, Germany and France. This approach provides an opportunity to explore how the various belligerent states organized the mobilization of the hinterland, their involvement of female labour and the support of the army, and the specific features that characterized the system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in comparison with international trends.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on the issues of women and sexuality, and the confrontation with war-generated violence. The chapters address the phenomenon of sexual violence, the power asymmetries that developed under military discipline and occupation, and how that was reflected in contemporary discourses and institutional responses. The reason for addressing this topic is that women’s war experience cannot be understood solely through labour or service roles, but it is also essential to examine how women became victims of war violence. This approach allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the social effects of war, with particular regard to the transformation of gender relations and the vulnerability of the civilian population. The dissertation concludes with a concrete examination of the hypotheses, which points to the scientific utilization of the findings, and finally, recommendations are formulated for further research directions and professional work.

Summary conclusions

The dissertation aims to explore in what ways and to what extent women were involved in the functioning of the military system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War, and how they contributed to the maintenance of the armed forces, the operation of the

war economy, and to ensuring the stability of the hinterland. The research focused on the examination of women's activities from a military science perspective, which, complementing traditional sociohistorical and women's historical approaches, sought to answer how women's work and service changed and became an indispensable element of modern warfare. The dissertation primarily examined the military, social and economic contexts of women's role, using archival sources, contemporary press materials, legal acts, diaries, memoirs and international literature.

The research clearly proved that the First World War is a fundamental turning point in the history of women's social status and roles. Under the conditions of modern total war, the belligerent states had to carry out a human, economic and social mobilization of a scale that would have been unimaginable before. As a consequence of the mass deployment of male labour force to the front, the running of the hinterland, the maintenance of war production, and the operation of the military administration and healthcare system increasingly relied on female labour. Therefore, the role of women increased significantly and extended to many areas that were essentially male-dominated spheres in the period preceding the military conflict. The early precursors of this process include the pioneering pilot instructors who appeared before the war, whose activities contributed to the later development of women's aviation. The longer-term significance of all this is indicated by the fact that women's aviation developed further in the interwar period, and then during the Second World War it extended to military tasks in several countries – in different forms.

One of the most important segments of the dissertation is the examination of the role of female auxiliaries and administrative employees. Based on the Ministry of War and public administration sources, it can be stated that as the war dragged on, the military leadership increasingly consciously sought to replace male labour in the hinterland with women, who appeared in military administration, office and registry jobs, postal and telegraph services, and various logistical and support roles. The use of female auxiliaries enabled the redeployment of further male personnel to frontline service, thus being directly linked to the operational capability of the army. Women's role thus extended to almost all areas of the military, economic, medical, and social background of warfare.

The contemporary social perception regarded the battlefield as a particularly dangerous space for women, where, according to conservative views, it was men who were primarily able to face various forms of violence and their consequences. The employment of women within the

army therefore represented not only a practical but also a significant social and cultural challenge, as it disrupted the prevailing gender-based order that bound women primarily to home service and men to frontline service. This change also required a new kind of adaptation and acceptance on the part of the military personnel.

I reveal that the establishment of female auxiliary forces was a fundamentally necessary measure, which the military leadership considered essential for successful warfare. Accordingly, the military leadership subordinated all other aspects to maintaining the operational capacity of the army, and as part of this, it organized targeted recruitment campaigns to involve female labour. In order to increase the efficiency of recruitment, the institutional framework of the state women's auxiliary service was established, which operated under the central control of the armed forces' resupply system.

The administrative and organizational background was also strengthened by the fact that a separate department within the central office dealt with the affairs of women's auxiliary personnel. At the same time, it became necessary to develop a unified and detailed regulatory system that comprehensively regulated the framework for the recruitment, employment and service obligations of women serving in the army.

Another important step of the military leadership was the institutional development of women's auxiliary personnel and increased consideration of their needs and requirements. In this process, various women's organizations were involved as partners, recognizing that the social acceptance and practical success of the mobilization of female labour significantly depended on the support and cooperation of these organizations.

The examination of women's auxiliary forces disclosed that their use was not only a military-organizational issue but also a socio-historical phenomenon. Based on the available sources, the social background of these women was not uniform: among them there were both more educated women performing administrative tasks – such as typists or telephone operators – while others were employed in jobs requiring lower level of education, such as laundresses, seamstresses or kitchen staff. The recruitment opportunities were significantly influenced by local social and economic conditions: in more developed urban areas it was easier to find suitable labour force, while in agricultural areas with labour shortages, women were difficult to be employed by the military. This shows that the use of female auxiliaries was determined not only by the needs of the armed forces but also by the social and economic structure of the hinterland.

In parallel with all this, women were continuously present in other ways on the battlefields and in various aspects of the war zone as well. Female doctors, nurses, and female auxiliaries associated with the Red Cross and the military medical system played an indispensable role in caring for the wounded and sick, running field and reserve hospitals, and treating epidemics. Their activities were an integral part of the army's medical supply chain and directly contributed to maintaining combat capability.

The dissertation also pays special attention to examining the role of female war correspondents and propaganda. The activities of female war correspondents connected the world of the front and the hinterland in a unique way, offering a new perspective for presenting war events. The accounts of female authors often placed more focus on the wounded, civilians, and the suffering of war. However, propaganda continued to underpin the traditional female role, and typically portrayed women in the context of care, self-sacrifice, and patriotic duty.

I also address the issue of female espionage and intelligence gathering, which is a specific area of modern warfare. Based on the sources, it can be concluded that women participated in information-gathering and intelligence activities in several belligerent states, partly because social stereotypes considered them less dangerous or militarily insignificant. At the same time, the activities of female intelligence officers clearly demonstrate that the boundaries between the theatre of war and the civilian sphere have become increasingly blurred during modern warfare. The role of women who carried out espionage activities was of strategic importance in many cases, since the acquisition and transmission of military information or even the deception of the enemy could have a direct impact on the development of military operations. This role was often combined with a highly dramatized dimension in contemporary perception; we only need to think of the stories of Edith Cavell or Mata Hari.

Although it was not officially permitted, the presence of women fighting with weapons can also be demonstrated based on the sources, especially in the Ukrainian and Polish volunteer units. Or in the South-Eastern European region. In their case, they often joined the combat operations in disguise, identifying themselves as men, which particularly sharply demonstrates the crossing of the boundaries of traditional gender roles. In addition, the steadfastness, perseverance and, in many cases, personal risk-taking of women serving in the theatre of war can also be interpreted as the female manifestation of the military virtues of the

time – sense of duty, discipline, self-sacrifice and courage. These features earned women in the forces recognition of their superiors, several of them were even awarded military ranks.

An important part of the dissertation is the examination of the issue of prostitution and venereal diseases. During the war years, the military leadership and the state administration paid special attention to the regulation and control of prostitution, primarily in order to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. The operation of camp brothels, health inspections, and law enforcement measures clearly demonstrate this. However, the issue did not only appear as a health or law enforcement problem, but was also closely related to the moral and social crisis phenomena of wartime society.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the issue of war violence against women. Women living in occupied areas and near the front lines were in a particularly vulnerable position and often became victims of sexual violence, looting, or other atrocities. Based on the sources, it can be stated that sexual violence emerged as a concomitant of modern war, which was a consequence of military occupation, power asymmetries, and wartime brutalization.

During the war, the everyday life of the civilian population was increasingly militarized, which particularly affected women. Internments, restrictions on movement and various police measures clearly show that the wartime state gradually extended its control over society as a whole. Women became both active participants in wartime mobilization and victims of increasing state control. This was manifested, among other things, in the loss of family members, increased existential uncertainty, and the restriction of their own freedom. This experience is one of the most serious and often neglected female aspects of the Great War, which also raises issues of vulnerability, violation of corporeal integrity, and social stigmatization.

The importance of female labour in the war economy was also decisive. Without the work of women labouring in war factories, munitions factories, transport companies, and agricultural farms, maintaining war production would have encountered serious difficulties. Based on contemporary statistics and official reports, it can be stated that women's employment increased significantly during the war years, especially in industrial production and in the field of state services, and the effect of this increase remained noticeable even after the war. At the same time, women's service and presence in war were accompanied by numerous other difficulties, such as overload, low social and financial esteem, dangerous working conditions, and continuous physical and mental strain.

In my dissertation, I also examine the issue of women's mobilization from an international comparative perspective. I present that the practice of the Monarchy had similarities with the system of other belligerent states in many aspects, but at the same time, due to the specific social and political structure of the Monarchy, the institutionalization of women's participation was realized in more limited ways in many cases.

Based on the analysis of the contemporary press and official discourse, it can be stated that the assessment of women's participation in war was fundamentally ambivalent. While women's work became indispensable for maintaining war efforts, society continued to interpret women's presence primarily within the framework of traditional female role concepts. Typically, the image of a caring, self-sacrificing, and supportive woman was underpinned, while the military and organizational significance of women's work was relegated to the background. The expansion of women's role did not therefore go hand in hand with a rapid and complete transformation of social norms about gender roles.

At the same time, war experiences also had a significant impact on the development of women's identity and self-image. The mass employment of women, their independent decision-making, and their presence in public life resulted in experiences that were previously inaccessible to many. For many women, the war period was the first opportunity to have an independent income, manage official affairs or become the de facto head of the family. Although attempts were made to restore the traditional social order in many areas after the war, the experience of the transformation of women's roles was no longer fully reversible. The war experience contributed to the gradual transformation of the perception of women's employment and social role.

Women stood their ground in factories, in their households, and in the field of charity. They proved that their mass employment was not a mistake, and that they were just as useful members of society as men.

Overall, it can be stated that during the First World War, women became not only complementary actors in the war-fighting system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but also fundamentally supporting and sustaining factors in its operation. The extent of women's role transformed both the social background of warfare and the contemporary social image of women. The prominent female actors I presented played a significant role in this.

Consequently, the First World War was a turning point in this regard, which launched a longer-term historical process that expanded further during the Second World War and has contributed noticeably to the increased presence of women in the military environment to this day.

Results of the examination of the hypotheses – new scientific findings

The main objective of the dissertation was to examine the role played by women in the armed forces and war economy of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War, with particular attention to theatre and hinterland activities, as well as their social and institutional embeddedness. The research examined the relationship between female labour, auxiliary forces, and social representations along five hypotheses, which were supported by the analysis of archival sources, legislation, press materials, and organizational documents.

1st scientific result - the structural role of female labour force

I explored and systematized the organizational mechanisms through which the integration of female auxiliary personnel (weibliche Hilfskräfte) ensured the functional stability of the background institutions of the Imperial and Royal Armed Forces. I documented that the involvement of women in military medicine and administration directly enabled the release of combat-ready, armed military personnel to front-line service, and that women’s labour not only replaced the lost male labour force in quantitative terms, but also developed new operating patterns that were adapted to the specifics of the war economy. A new scientific result is that I proved that the mobilization of women’s labour force was not an additional or ad-hoc measure, but rather the primary organizational condition for the sustainability of total war of attrition. As a result, women’s employment became one of the fundamental structural elements of modern, total war.

2nd scientific result – normative continuity and post-war accelerated emancipation

The research results completed the hypothesis that during the First World War, women's participation in the war economy and military auxiliary service transformed the social and institutional perception of women's employment in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The processing of the contemporary state and press discourses produced the result that women's military service was still interpreted as an extraordinary, temporary, and war-related role, and the legitimization of women's involvement was primarily through the narrative of patriotic duty, sacrifice, and the extraordinary war circumstances, rather than through the

demand for a permanent social redefinition of gender roles. It was proven that the war did not result in a direct change in norms, but rather in a structural turning point that created the conditions for the subsequent acceleration of emancipation. (This finding is in line with the latest findings of international historiography, and at the same time, based on primary sources revealing the specifics of the military and social relations of the Monarchy, it also supports their regional validity.)

3rd scientific result – institutionalization

The results of the research underpinned the hypothesis that the military leadership of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy gradually integrated the use of female auxiliary forces into a formalized service framework during the war.

By collecting and analysing archival documents and decrees, I explored the phases of the military institutionalization of female labour in the military organization of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. I demonstrated that the military leadership was forced to move from a model of spontaneous and informal female volunteerism (e.g., the charity and nursing movements of 1914) to a highly bureaucratized, formalized, and militarized state recruitment and service model as the war dragged on (e.g., the establishment of the Women's Department of the Ministry of War in 1917, the Field Manuals for women assistants in 1918).

4th scientific result – Structural interpretation of wartime violence in the operational system of the Monarchy

I was the first to examine the interconnections between wartime violence against women, internment, occupation policy, relationships with prisoners of war, and wartime sexuality in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy within a unified military and social historical framework. By comparing and analysing archival documents, press sources, laws, and ego documents, I demonstrated that violence against women cannot be interpreted as a series of individual abuses, but was a structural component of the military and occupation practices of modern mass warfare.

I also demonstrated that internment, restrictions on the movement of the civilian population, and increased state and military control over women's bodies were part of the security policy and administrative tools of warfare. As a result of the research, it can be stated that women should not be understood exclusively as passive victims of war, but as social actors directly affected by the system of military occupation.

5th scientific result – The formalization of women's auxiliary troops and the rationalization of labour in the hinterland took place in the mobilization practice of the Central Powers and the Entente states with regional differences

I also examined the issue of women's mobilization in an international comparative perspective, the new research result of which is that although the practice of the Monarchy had some similarities with the system of other belligerent states in many aspects, at the same time, due to the specific social and political structure of the Empire, the institutionalization of women's role was realized in many cases in a more limited way than in other European belligerent states, e.g. Great Britain or France.

Recommendations

I recommend the findings of the dissertation primarily to researchers dealing with military history, social history, or gender research, since the work contributes new aspects to the interpretation of the functioning of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War through the integration of women's labour in military organizations. The findings can be especially useful for historians and researchers who examine the social embeddedness of modern mass armies and the role of non-combatant personnel.

Utilisation of the research findings

The research findings can also be used by specialists in the history of military institutions, as they shed light on the legal status of female auxiliaries, their service regulations, and the specifics of their integration into the military bureaucracy.

From the point of view of pedagogical and educational usability, the dissertation can be used in the teaching of military history at the Faculty of Military Science and Officer Training of the Ludovika University of Public Service, since an increasing number of women can be found among doctoral students.

New research directions

A further research direction could be a comparative study of the female auxiliaries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with the First World War experience of other belligerent states - especially Germany, Russia, France or Great Britain. In my opinion, one of the strongest focal

points of the dissertation is its military organizational dimension. Here, further research could examine the legal status, service regulations, administrative integration of female personnel, or their relationship with the military bureaucracy.

Another perspective for future research could be the analysis of the extent of impact of female military service and auxiliary service that developed during the First World War on the military and social role perceptions in the interwar period.

Since the time frame of the dissertation covers the years of the First World War, an important direction for future research could be to examine the proportion of women who remained in the military medical service and the Hungarian Defence Forces at the end of the war, and what tasks and roles they could fulfil in the post-war period.

Future research could also take the opportunity of a further analysis of contemporary press and propaganda sources, specifically by examining the social representations and memory of women's military service in greater depth. How did the press portray women's military service? What ideal types emerged? How did the image of the “patriotic woman” change?

Finally, the findings of the dissertation may contribute to the sociohistorical and institutional historical reinterpretation of the military organization of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, especially through the examination of the role of the support functions in the hinterland and the non-combatant personnel. The dissertation completes the image of the military organization of the Monarchy, presents the operation of the support and background functions, and contributes to the understanding of the social embeddedness of the modern mass army. In addition, the findings may also be relevant for military sociology studies, as they shed light on how the operation of modern mass armies transformed the social division of labour and the institutional framework of gender roles.

Author's publication list

1. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2024): A nők szerepe az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia fegyveres erejének kötelékében az első világháború időszakában. [The Role of Women in the Armed Forces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War] *Hadtudomány*: A Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság folyóirata, 34: E-szám 72–85.

2. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2024): The role of Women during the First World War in Great Britain,1914–1918. *Hadtudomány*: A Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság folyóirata, 34: E-szám 133–147.

3. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2024): A hadiözvegyek és hadiárvák segítése Magyarországon a Nagy Háború időszakában (1914–1918). [The Assistance to War Widows and War Orphans in Hungary during the Great War (1914–1918)]. *Hadtudomány*: A Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság folyóirata, 34: 1. sz. 107–122.

4. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2023): A nők szerepe a kémkedésben a nagy háború idején, 1914–1918. [The Role of Women in Espionage during the Great War, 1914–1918]. *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 16:1. sz. 59–72.

5. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2022): A nők részvétele a hadiiparban az I. világháború időszakában Magyarországon. [Women's Participation in the Military Industry during World War I in Hungary]. *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 15:1. sz. 125–137.

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9. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2020): A női szerepek megváltozásának társadalmi és katonai vonatkozásai a dualizmus időszakában, 1867–1914. [Social and Military Aspects of the Change in Women's Roles During the Period of Dualism, 1867–1914] *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 13:3. sz. 133–146.

10. MOLNÁR, ZOLTÁN (2015): Mindennapi sorsok: A háborús hátország megpróbáltatásai. [Everyday Fates: The Ordeals of the War Hinterland]. In: SZAKÁLY, SÁNDOR (ed.): *Egy ezred év viharaiban meg nem rendült törhetetlen hűség*: *Székesfehérvár, Magyarország és a Nagy Háború.* Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 209–233.

Professional curriculum vitae of the author

Zoltán Molnár conducted his studies in the History undergraduate program at Kodolányi János College between 2012 and 2015. In 2014, he won 3rd place in the Carpathian Basin competition organized by the Rákóczi Association entitled *"Horse and Rider in Hungarian History".* As early as his university years, his scientific interest turned to the social and military history of the First World War, especially the issues of the hinterland and civil society. He also participated in the OTDK on this topic, and with his thesis entitled *"The Ordeals of the War Hinterland 1914–1918",* he won 10th place in the Humanities Section of the XXXII OTDK. In 2015, one of his studies was published in the volume entitled *Székesfehérvár, Hungary and the Great War* edited by historian Sándor Szakály, and he also published papers in an international scientific journal in a foreign language.

Between 2016 and 2018, he continued his MA studies in history at Pázmány Péter Catholic University. He spent his professional internship at the Military History Library, where he gained experience in legacy- and document-processing.

In 2019, the author began his doctoral studies at the Doctoral School of Military Sciences of the Ludovika University of Public Service, where his research theme is the role of women in World War I, with a focus on its Hungarian aspects and military history contexts.

The author has had a total of nine papers published relating to the topic in journals of military science.

In addition, between 2020 and 2022, he studied at the Master's degree program in International Studies at Kodolányi János University. Then, from 2023, he studied at the Master's degree program in International Public Service Relations and Security Policy at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of the Ludovika University of Public Service, from which he graduated in 2026. In 2025, he completed an internship at the National Policy Research Institute.