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*Militarizing Men* offers a nuanced study of the crisis and revival of patriotic masculinity and militarism in post-communist Russia, unveiling the strategies used by the state to mobilize population for the military service and to engage people’s support for the two Chechen wars. While reminding readers that “[m]en are not naturally militaristic, they become militarized,” (2012:136) this interdisciplinary study combines international relations and feminist theories of nationalism and gendered citizenship to make insightful observations about the role of militarism in legitimization of political power in Russia under President Putin. The reliance on the military might and patriotism as a signature style of Putin’s governance becomes even more apparent when Eichler juxtaposes it with the crisis of the military masculinity prevalent in the country in the previous decade. The demilitarization of the 1990s and the ensuing remilitarization of the Russian society make a good case for historic comparison, but Eichler’s main argument goes further and proposes seeing the two processes as never unchallenged or complete, concurring in every given point of time. The ethnographic material included in the book helps to illustrate the puzzling ways in which the militarized masculinity can be contested and venerated by the same person as their story unfolds. *Militarizing Men* weaves together the discussion of the transformation of social relations, power structures, and gender order in contemporary Russia and broadens our understanding of the complexity of social processes in this post-Soviet state.

Eichler’s work should be credited for tracing the major factors behind the crisis of the military masculinity observed already in the late 1980s but taking an unprecedented scale after 1991. The weakness of the justification for the Afghan and the First Chechen wars, the decline of the economic and symbolic support for the military by the state, and the rampant hazing (dedovshchina) in the army all had their role in the devaluation of the military profession and the resulting growth in the number of draft evaders. Besides specific factors within the army, Eichler cites the socio-cultural changes taking place in post-communist Russia to explain the decline of the militarized masculinity. In the new logic of the market economy, success and prestige could not be derived from the notions of fulfilled patriotic duty. Universal and mandatory conscription conflicted with the demands of the “capitalist masculinity” (2012:60) and meant lost time and opportunities on the job market. According to some of Eichler’s interviewees, a shift to a volunteer army could have offered a solution. Yet patriotic masculinity continued to enjoy admiration of some war veterans and draft evaders alike as they questioned the sincerity of men who joined the military for a paycheck – protection of one’s motherland should be a sacred duty of every man, and the idea of it being a gainful occupation clashed with that maxim.

Giving space for the voices of men whose record of the military service could not have been more dissimilar (former army officers, Chechen war veterans, army deserters, and draft evaders), Eichler allows us to see the similarities in the discourses they reproduce when explaining their experience and choices. The army as an important rite of passage for young males, the uneasiness with the definition of the Chechen campaigns as “just wars,” the men’s duty to protect the motherland in a time of external threat, and the state’s (neglected) duty to take care of the home-front of those who are ready to accept that patriotic responsibility reappear as common threads in people’s reflections about their relation to the military. But *Militarizing Men*
also discusses the role of women in the (re)production of particular notions of gendered citizenship. Eichler’s decision to examine the work of soldiers’ mothers groups may initially appear unoriginal, since soldiers’ mothers movement has become a common reference point for discussions of women’s engagement with the demilitarization in the post-Soviet countries. However, by taking her fieldwork off the beaten track to the city of Samara, Eichler challenges our previous view of soldiers’ mothers associations as always anti-militarist and disruptive of the militarized gender order. In Samara, she finds grassroots organizations run by women who seem to be more ready to negotiate a better recognition for the soldiers’ sacrifice than to challenge the idea of men’s duty to die for their country. Dependent on the local government’s funding and having limited access to Western discourses, these soldiers’ mothers groups are less vocal in their criticism of patriotic masculinity compared to their counterparts in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In all these cases, however, mothers are among those few who have the authority to confront the state’s right to sacrifice men’s lives. Their activism is legitimized in the public eye through the socially accepted norm of “responsible motherhood” which justifies the mothers’ right and duty to protect their children. This extension of women’s familial roles into public domain allows them to enter the discussion about the militarization of society, but at the same time it strengthens the gendered division of civic duty which obliges women to mother and men to soldier and casts it as unmanly to speak up against the conscription or war.

Along with the analysis of the changing popular attitudes toward the military, war veterans, and Chechen campaigns, Militarizing Men foregrounds the effort that was invested by the country’s leadership into remilitarization of the Russian society starting from the late 1990s. The widely circulated pictures of bare-chested President Putin, on horseback, holding a gun, were a part of that effort. But the revival of a strong connection between masculinity, militarism, nationalism and citizenship involved many levels: from militarization of political elites, where people with military or security service background took a considerable number of positions in the presidential administration and the government, to the close monitoring of the information that could reach the general public and influence their opinion about the Second Chechen war. In the light of the emergence of Russia as a world power prepared to use its military capacity to revise the system of international agreements and threaten territorial integrity of its neighbors, the book and its insights about the militarization of the Russian society is more relevant than ever.

The accessible writing style and ample contextualization make the book a recommended reading for undergraduate and advanced students of Russian and East European studies who want to get a new perspective on the post-communist transformation in Russian society and to learn about the role that militarized patriotism came to play in the legitimization of state power. Militarizing Men will also become a valuable addition to the reading lists on gender and masculinity as it makes a fine case-study to illustrate the connection between state power, masculinity, nationalism and militarism.