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THE CARER, THE COMBATANT AND THE CLANDESTINE:  
IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN *WAR ILLUSTRATED* MAGAZINE

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## Introduction

Women's war history was, and often still is, overlaid with myth. They have their own stereotypical roles to fill. There is scope for them to be seen as victims, villains or heroines [...] The increasing interest over time in 'the woman worker' reflects a general shift towards those who did something *different* as a result of war, and in some way [sic] challenged the existing social order.<sup>1</sup>

This essay examines the reporting and visual representation of women in Britain and throughout Europe during the First World War in the weekly magazine *The War Illustrated*. *War Illustrated* was a popular pictorial record of the conflict, incorporating numerous maps, photographs and illustrations, and the work of war artists alongside weekly reporting and editorials on the conduct, events and consequences of the global conflict. Its articles included regular columns and commissioned contributions from notable figures such as Sidney Low, H.G. Wells, Jerome K. Jerome and Fred T. Jane. *War Illustrated* was published in London by William Berry (owner of the *Daily Telegraph*) and first appeared on 22 August 1914. By the end of the First World War, its circulation had risen to three-quarters of a million copies per week.<sup>2</sup> Through most of the conflict the magazine was sold at a price of two pence (2d.), increasing to three pence in 1918. At a time when daily newspapers sold

for a penny (1d.) this cover price, along with the length and vocabulary employed in its articles, implies that its target audience was an adult, middle-class readership. However, its conception as an extensively illustrated, and therefore highly visual and affective, record of the war equally suggests its accessibility to both lower-class and younger readers.

*War Illustrated's* reporting evolved to incorporate several consistent forms or serials as the war progressed. For example, within the first year weekly columns were added to convey the geographical span and technological change of the conflict, by reporting on the 'War by Land', the 'War by Sea' and eventually the 'War by Air.' The magazine's staples were, nonetheless, concise illustrated reports and summaries accompanying pages of visual representation (either one- or two-page artistic depictions or collections and collages of photographs) used to illuminate and actively interpret recent, important and topical events. In the current study, the magazine's images, captions and reports are analysed in relation to the interconnection of visual representation and verbal articulation of the facts of contemporary events, the influence of political stances, and the imperatives of dominant ideological positions. Interpretative distinctions are drawn between the editor's and writers' choices (aesthetic in terms of the use of photography or art work, linguistic in terms of diction) in the reading of their effects upon the developing representation of the conflict.

Although the frequently evocative and manipulative images permeating the pages of the magazine can be seen to accord consciously with wartime establishment discourses of recruitment, propaganda and commitment to the communal, national purpose, *War Illustrated* is more than simply an unquestioning propaganda organ. Indeed, the magazine's admission of a broad constituency of writers and its incorporation of various categories of visual representation reinforce its palimpsestic and polyphonic form. It can be seen to articulate as much as seek to form public opinion when it expresses concern and criticism

for the conduct and leadership of the war (for example in relation to Winston Churchill's responsibility for the disastrous 1915 Gallipoli campaign, and the significance of the inconclusive Battle of Jutland in 1916). In comparison with peer publications (such as the *Illustrated War News* which also appeared throughout the conflict), *War Illustrated* uses similar numbers of photographs but makes significantly greater use of war artists' work and illustrations. While illustrations are often used simply to depict incidents unrecorded in any other fashion, the privileging of vivid and dramatic illustrations is also frequently devoted to propagandist exaggeration or representations of events of doubtful veracity.

While the magazine is certainly capable of demonising the enemy and valorising the successes of Britain and her allies in conventional and predictable fashion, it also admits a spectrum of divergent and controversial opinions. In the case of the treatment of non-combatants such as women and children (whether or not these groups might have constituted or even been recognized as readerships), the magazine's exploration of the conflict as a fundamentally transformative experience both reflects and qualifies contemporary propaganda discourses. Identifying and interpreting the magazine's conscious utilisation or exploitation of female narratives and images (conforming to the pervasive stereotypes of victimhood, villainy and heroism noted by Gail Braybon) must be seen in comparison and contrast to both the recollections and retrospective writing by women exploring their war-time experiences and to the magazine's inclusion of women's personal perspectives and opinions on the conflict, in their own words.<sup>3</sup>

The roles adopted by women during the conflict took many forms in civilian and uniformed contexts, encompassing charitable work, paid employment, volunteer and professional nursing and recruitment to auxiliary military services. Some of the professional and charitable nursing organisations (such as the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military

Nursing Service, the Territorial Force Nursing Service and the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) which existed before the war had a far lower profile than the Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) which included a large proportion of upper- and middle-class female volunteers.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, women occupying forms of employment vacated by men recruited to the armed services, and particularly those women undertaking vital war work in munitions factories, were those from the lower classes who in many cases had already been in paid employment before the war began.<sup>5</sup> Although the female military services (the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, the Women's Royal Naval Service, and the Women's Royal Air Force) created in 1917 were more varied in their pattern of recruitment from British society, there was widespread criticism of and resistance to the notion and presence of British women in military uniform.<sup>6</sup>

In depicting the roles ascribed to women in wartime propaganda, the tasks impressed upon women by wartime circumstances and the responsibilities shouldered by women under the stimuli of national, political or individual needs, *War Illustrated's* coverage accommodates the competing if not openly contradictory narratives of female participation in and experience of the war. Within its pages some of the war's overlaying 'myths' (including examples of those surrounding women's involvement) can be seen at their moment of inception. Conversely, the magazine's accommodation of diverse perspectives and its contemporary treatment of still-evolving events mean that unorthodox and oppositional views occasionally occur, in spite of the demands of propaganda. Above all, the magazine's condensation, modification and magnification of contemporary opinion makes it a fertile source for reappraisal and retrospection in the light of the current centenary re-evaluation of the conflict, including reappraisal of the roles and experiences of civilians. As a primary source it is able to reflect the current consciousness (and inform more recent and retrospective revaluation) of the potential 'challenge to social order'

represented by women's involvement in and engagement with the conflict. Examining the continuities and developmental changes within *War Illustrated's* reporting of the roles assumed by women within the conflict, in the representational cross-section considered here, also provides a key contextualisation to understandings of the war's interpretation and narrativisation in other texts and by other commentators.

### **European War and European Women**

Through collating the representation of women (both in images and in print) in *War Illustrated*, the intentions and objectives of propaganda and development of public opinion can be discerned in the publication's reporting. Women appear to be as useful to the achievement of war aims on the basis of their representation in popular culture as they are in uniformed auxiliary service, nursing or war factory work in actuality. Depictions of women (as spouses and mothers) stoically sending their menfolk off to war, which appear in the magazine in September 1914, epitomise the expected and appropriate sacrificial, supportive attitude to the war inculcated by contemporary propaganda.<sup>7</sup> In these examples the civilian (female) population is shown to be mobilised in terms of sympathy and support rather than in parallel activity alongside the uniformed (male) combatants. Images of women are also used to symbolise civilised, human values understood to be synonymous with the characteristics of national identity. As the victims of war's effects (as the targets of atrocity and sufferers of hardship), European women become a visual justification for British involvement in the continental war in the defence of the putatively universal moral standards and collective humane responsibilities. However, portrayals of women's active involvement in the conflict prove more difficult to accommodate within such prescriptive or

pragmatic constructions of gender and nationality. Women's war service, in or out of uniform, their presence in or near the front line, and their participation in actual combat represent difficult and double-edged subjects or images for stable representation and reading. Examples of these categorisations and utilisations of women within *War Illustrated's* pages reflect the elaboration of their place within the magazine's evolving interpretation of the conflict, balancing propaganda, commentary and acknowledgement of the changing circumstances of British women in its reactive reportage.

The depiction of womanhood as the symbol of a threatened domestic peace, and the image of the vulnerable family standing metaphorically for the beleaguered nation, can be seen in an example from 1915 showing the suffering of civilians in Europe (Fig.1). Juxtaposing the invading German soldiers accused of barbaric behaviour with a scene of destroyed domesticity emblematic of French and Belgian suffering (which the accompanying text describes simply as 'cause and effect'), this page's caption reads:

What words could tell a more complete story of the tragedy than is depicted by the grass-grown ruins of the little French cottage, the tears of the woman, and the dejection of the peasant who has returned, after months of weary wandering as a refugee, to find his home an empty shell?<sup>8</sup>

Both of these images evince a stilted and posed quality which underlines the problematic nature of the photographic as much as the artistic images employed within the publication. The apparent realism of photographic reproduction belies the artifice with which the images



Fig.1 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1915 - 'The Teutonic Wave and the Wreck it Leaves' (University of Sheffield, Special Collections).

appear to have been produced. The use of illustrations substitutes for the absence of photographic records of many of the events the magazine describes, yet even the photos it does include often appear self-consciously staged, or doctored subsequently for effect. In this instance, the emphasis upon the woman's status as wife and mother, and her observable vulnerability and grief, are mirrored and enhanced by her proximity to the ruined home. A similar example from the same year, describing the 'annihilation of a family' during the flight of refugees in Serbia, uses a war artist's work to illustrate the story of a mother who, after her six children 'fell down one by one to perish by the road side', became



'distracted with grief' and threw rocks at the German lines until she was cut down by a machine gun.<sup>9</sup> Although this story is located specifically in Eastern Europe within one widely reported occurrence of civilian suffering, its exaggerated tone and the vivid, sensationalised full-page illustration exemplify the treatment given to contemporary accounts of German 'frightfulness.'<sup>10</sup> Such stories became associated particularly with the atrocities allegedly committed by German soldiers in the so-called 'Rape of Belgium', which permeated the popular press in the wake of the publication of the Bryce report in 1915.<sup>11</sup>

The plight of vulnerable, feminine Europe was used as one reinforcing justification for British involvement in the conflict, but other depictions from the first half of the war also romanticise the contact between European women and British troops. An illustration from March 1916 (Fig.2) provides a light-hearted representation of an amorous encounter behind the lines between emblematic national figures. The accompanying caption reads:

Not infrequently a fascinating Belgian or French peasant girl will brave the stray shell to bring fodder to the horses, and if Tommy is in the offing a pretty though somewhat incoherent flirtation will ensue. But who cares about neatly-polished phrases when youth, beauty and gallantry are eloquence itself?<sup>12</sup>

Here the distribution of gender and class characteristics between British and European incarnations (the emblematic 'Tommy' and the embodiment of 'fascinating', coy, continental femininity) underlines the affirmed righteousness and perceptible paternalism of Britain's cause. The war artist's romantically imaginative scene echoes a similarly sentimentalised photographic rendering from the previous year, showing European women



Fig. 2 11<sup>th</sup> March 1916 - 'Fortune of War at the Estaminet Fortune' (University of Sheffield Special Collections).

fraternising with off-duty British soldiers.<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere imperilled European womanhood, as emblematic of domestic ideals and civilised, moral principles, has been an integral part of the imagery supporting propaganda discourses justifying Britain's involvement in the war, but in this instance, the depiction of romantic continental femininity is used to suggest an amorous dividend for as well as a validation of Britain's mobilisation. *War Illustrated's* inclusion of many such examples of war artists' work is crucial to the construction and

assertion of concepts of national identity, morality and duty for both sexes, and here couches defended and defending nationalities in strictly conventional, gendered terms.

### **The Nurse and/as the Combatant**

While vulnerable female civilians in Europe are portrayed in *War Illustrated* for propaganda purposes in close contact with combatants, and affected by or actually involved in combat, the reporting of a deliberate transformation of women's circumstances through intentional participation in the conflict gradually gains in importance and frequency as the war continues. An early example of this trend is a page of varied photographs depicting 'War's Diverse Effects on Feminine Temperament.'<sup>14</sup> Of the seven photographs assembled on the page, three are portraits of women of high society whose acts of beneficence inspired by and in support of the war span the charitable to the idiosyncratic. The captions note that Baroness Reitzes 'sold her pearl necklace for £17,000 to buy bread for Vienna's poor'; Countess Manon von Drumreicher 'supplied five thousand cork legs for Austria's maimed soldiers'; and Luise Elrich, the wife of an Austrian millionaire, 'for charity entered a circus lions' den and fed them.' These high profile, individual or peculiar acts by aristocratic women (notably all representatives of the Central Powers) are contrasted with a photograph of British volunteer 'women gardeners' growing vegetables for military hospitals who remain modestly unnamed. The page's central image is of a wounded soldier tended by a French nurse, whose contribution is described as 'the most noble form of woman's wartime work.' The contrasts between virtuous 'Allied' and eccentric 'enemy' women in these images are apparent in the forms their involvement in the war takes, and the associated foregrounding or obfuscation of class. The activities of selfless, subordinate

and class-less Allied women are contrasted with the egotistic and condescending acts of the enemy's aristocracy. However, both sides are juxtaposed with the page's other photographs, which show Italian women 'in militant mood', learning to use rifles and forming a 'Corps of Amazons.' These photographs of women spontaneously arming and training are more remarkable since they precede Italy's entry to the war. The women's actions appear to anticipate Italy's involvement and perhaps implicitly criticise their nation's reluctance to mobilise, yet the caption's tone (perhaps reflecting ambivalence in the British public and media to the active mobilisation of women) seems neither to condemn or condone them.<sup>15</sup>

In comparison with whimsical or mundane reporting of female contributions to the war, celebratory depictions of nurses at the front appear to justify and require enhancement with heroic endeavour and endangerment. A vivid illustration from late 1914 accompanies the account of an incident alleged to have occurred in Poland, in which a Red Cross nurse is carried away on horseback by a German officer.<sup>16</sup> Although she is 'bruised from her struggle and in despair of her fate', the caption tells how she is rescued by a gallant Cossack. Another Russian nurse, identified as Mira Miksailovich Ivanoff, is portrayed and described as a 'modern Joan of Arc.'<sup>17</sup> In a desperate moment of battle she ceased her caring duties and rallied her countrymen to drive back the attacking Germans, losing her own life in the process. Such captioned pictures, eulogising extraordinary examples of male and female heroism in essentially unverifiable narratives, proliferate in *War Illustrated*, with the hyperbolically described masculine and feminine virtues embodied in representatives of the allied nations throwing into sharper relief the craven inhumanity, barbarity and immorality of the enemy.

These examples foreground the figure of the military or Red Cross nurse, depicted as the perfect amalgam of the female in a nurturing role, sharing male frontline hardships, yet

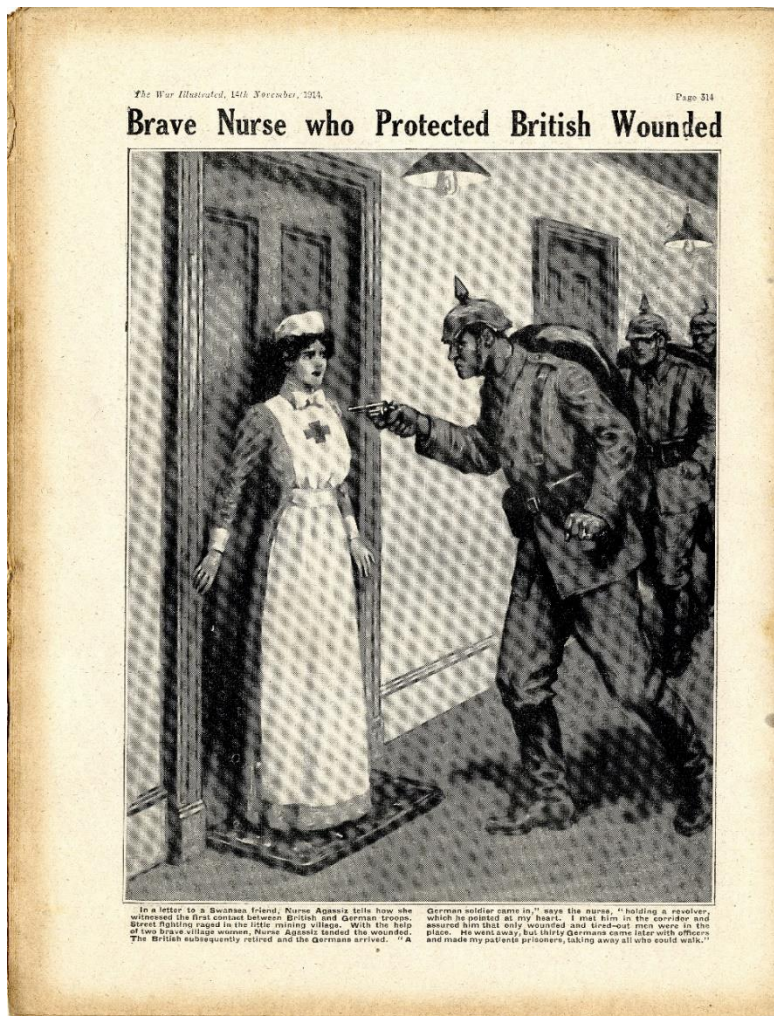


Fig.3 14<sup>th</sup> November 1914 - 'Brave Nurse who Protected British Wounded' (University of Sheffield Special Collections).

also susceptible to enticingly gender-specific peril. A story from November 1914 (Fig.3) tells of a nurse who defends British wounded soldiers she is tending from German troops trying to take them prisoner. The account and picture again juxtapose the fearless, vulnerable female figure with the threatening, martial Teutonic male, with the nurse appearing almost saintly or chivalric with her white apron bearing a red cross, at which the German aims his

revolver.<sup>18</sup> A comparable story from a year later, also accompanying a full-page war rendering by a war artist, recounts what is labelled 'one of the most heroic episodes of the war', when nurses from a transport ship sunk in the Aegean implore sailors in lifeboats to rescue the fighting men shipwrecked with them first. The caption reports that 'ten of these unnamed heroines were drowned.' Here, the elevation of the nurses' maternal duty and sacrifice results, paradoxically, in active gender inversion and reversal of the adage 'women and children first.' These hyperbolic examples from early in the war exemplify the use of illustrations rather than photographs in the crafting of impactful, propagandist narratives.

The figure of the selfless, nurturing and endangered nurse, at the heart of and attuned to the needs of combat and the combatant, perhaps reaches its apotheosis in the coverage of the death of Edith Cavell. *War Illustrated* devotes its inside cover to 'the murder of Nurse Cavell', extracting propaganda value from this episode's converging threads of German brutality and injustice, and feminine courage, integrity and vulnerability. Accompanying an artist's illustration of her death, the caption reads:

The civilised world, which had become almost apathetic to recurring German outrage, suffered a severe shock on hearing of the execution of Nurse Cavell by the Huns at Brussels. Nurse Cavell was charged with helping to smuggle Belgian men across the frontier, and found guilty by a German court-martial. A summary sentence of death was passed, and though Nurse Cavell had worked consistently to alleviate the suffering of wounded German officers at the hospital in Brussels, the penalty was inflicted under circumstances of peculiar brutality. The ill-fated woman had no strength to face the firing-party, and swooned away, whereupon the officer in charge approached the prostrate form, and, drawing a heavy Service pistol, took his murderous aim.<sup>19</sup>

This account accentuates the shocking application of the death penalty, but glosses over the truth of German allegations against Edith Cavell, and the consequent indefensibility of her conduct from a British as well as international perspective. Edith Cavell's compassion for German officers as much as Belgian civilians and allied soldiers is presented as British, Christian, feminine benevolence which transcends the specificities of nationality and legality in war. Conversely, feminine duplicity, in the guise of the spy or collaborator, precipitates a transformation of the female figure into a violent, unpredictable adversary. A sensational story, also from 1915, describes the discovery of female collaboration and clandestine intelligence-gathering behind the French lines. The caption accompanying the dramatic illustration reads:

A French officer and private were participants in an exciting adventure which reads more like some romantic French novel than actual fact. Having lost their way, they proceeded at nightfall to a French farmhouse in quest of food. The proprietress tearfully complained that the Germans had ransacked the place, leaving her destitute. The two French soldiers, however, insisted on searching the cellar, to discover a secret German telephone in charge of a German soldier who had hidden himself in a barrel. In the course of the struggle which ensued the woman sprang upon the French private and tried to throttle him. The innocent farmhouse was in communication with the German lines.<sup>20</sup>

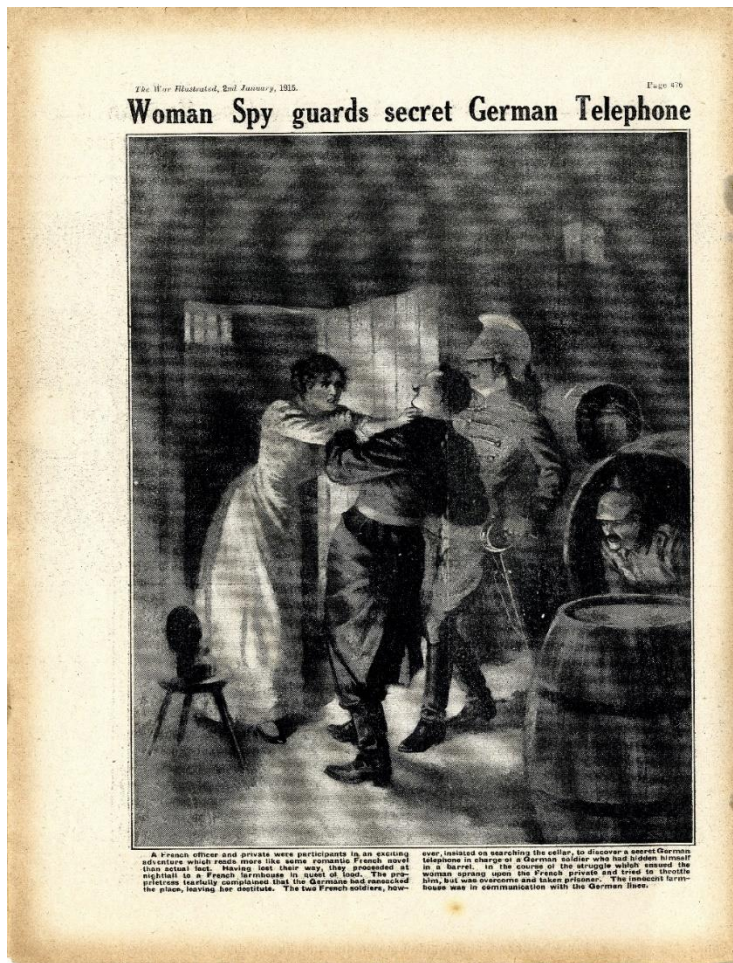


Fig.4 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915 - 'Woman Spy guards secret German Telephone' (University of Sheffield Special Collections).

The condemnatory convergence of femininity and espionage in this example of exaggerated early war propaganda resurfaces later in an article (written by novelist and journalist Tighe Hopkins) on the training of spies:

In time of war many (of both sexes) are cajoled or forced into the ranks whose preparation has been of the rough and ready sort [...] it is now also well known that the Germans have made scandalous use of women of no character attired as war nurses.<sup>21</sup>



While this 'report' might be dismissed as no more than propagandist fiction, the insistence with which it erases any sympathy for these implicitly vulnerable females 'cajoled' into devious service, not only by their being described as 'women of no character' but also by their shameful adoption of disguise as war nurses, underlines the strictly defined parameters of and connections between female war work and female morality. This denunciation of subterfuge is as severe as the censure of unbridled sexuality levelled at 'Mata Hari' in a report of her execution (accompanied by a photograph of her in an exotic dancing costume) describing her as 'one of Germany's most skilful women spies.'<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most serious challenge to such restrictive constructions of wartime gender identity is occasioned by the depiction of women not only engaged in dangerous, unprecedented war roles but dressed in military, as opposed to medical, uniforms. The adoption of military uniforms by British women joining volunteer and auxiliary services was subject to severe popular criticism, because of the apparent insult it represented to male uniformed services, its inappropriateness in comparison with proper female activity in nursing and support, and because of the immoral and coarsened conduct it was alleged to encourage.<sup>23</sup> Pointedly, *War Illustrated* includes many more depictions of British women engaged in nursing, voluntary or factory work than it does of women serving in military auxiliaries. (A cover devoted to an illustration of members of the 'Sister Services' the Women's Royal Naval Service and Queen Mary's Army Auxilliary Corps, appears only in 1918, a year after the creation of both services.<sup>24</sup>) An explanation for this may be found in the combination of perplexity and prurience with which examples of foreign women in uniform are described in its pages. The caption accompanying an image of an Austrian woman in army uniform, which describes her as a 'modern Amazon' in the service of the 'Teutonic cause', is peculiarly ambivalent, presenting this example as neither an admirable

precedent British women might imitate nor simply an unnatural foreign aberration to be reviled.<sup>25</sup> The only officially organised unit of female combatants during the war which operated on the Eastern Front, the Russian 'Legion of Death', appears in an illustrated report from 1917. The women's masculine attire and hair styles, and their markedly greater courage than male regiments, are diffidently noted in the accompanying captions. However, given long-established assumptions about acts of sexual violence committed by German soldiers, the article emphasises meaningfully that the only thing the unit's members fear is capture, stressing the particularities of the women's peril entailed by their service. Although a policy to admit women to the armed services was instituted in response to numbers of women volunteering to serve, the creation of Russian female units became a mark of equality, along with the right to vote, celebrated in the country after the 1917 revolution.<sup>26</sup>

The examples highlighted so far exhibit the role and utility within propagandist reporting of female participants and victims of the conflict at the front or in occupied Europe, as embodiments of virtue, service and sacrifice, and as targets for brutality, desire and suspicion. Despite an assumed universal commitment to the needs of the conflict, women's difference is constantly emphasised and utilised within dominant discourses. However, the exploration of the specific experiences of women behind the lines gains in importance and coverage to the relative detriment of these earlier exaggerated and emotive stories as the war progresses. The socio-political and economic effects of women's gathering involvement in the war on the British home front become the subject of frequent articles and commentaries. In June 1915, a typical page of captioned photos, showing female postal workers, underground railway conductors and porters and recruiters, frame an anonymous, celebratory pronouncement on the beneficial, transformative effects of the conflict for the feminist cause:

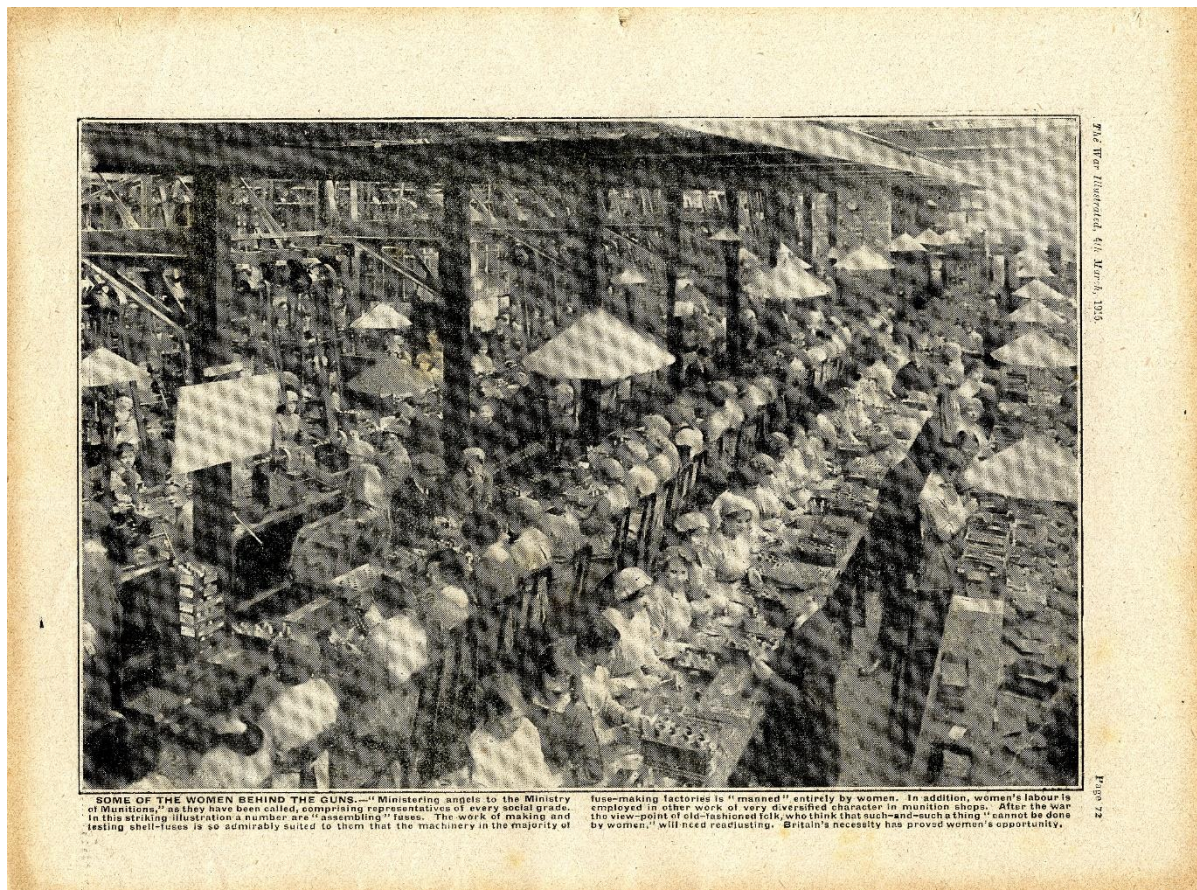


Fig.5 4<sup>th</sup> March 1916 - 'Some of the Women Behind the Guns' (University of Sheffield Special Collections).

Undoubtedly the war has done more to enable Woman to prove her capabilities in wider spheres than all the Suffragette and feminist propogandas of those days that seem so long ago. Now, indeed, the true Awakening of Woman is come. She has gained much of that freedom for which so many agitated, and she is using it with grand patriotism for the benefit of the state in this great crisis.<sup>27</sup>

Not only are 'Awakened women' now at one with the state, its objectives and needs, but apparently at one with each other across regional and class divides. The same endorsement of women's war work is found in the caption for a full-page photo of female factory workers, dubbed the 'Ministering angels of the Ministry of Munitions', for whom 'Britain's

necessity has proved women's opportunity.'<sup>28</sup> Emphasised femininity is nonetheless shown to be consistent with the war aims of the patriarchal establishment at a crucial juncture.

Although it might be assumed that the author of these captions is the male editor of *War Illustrated* J. A. Hammerton, their tone is echoed in the summary accounts of the war's importance in female experience and feminist politics written for the magazine by prominent campaigners for women's rights. Writing in November 1915, the suffragist Cicely Hamilton anticipates the scale and significance of women's post-war role in what she describes prophetically as the 'Manless Homes of England.' She proposes legal frameworks for female guardianship of a generation of orphaned children and the offspring of widowed mothers, and stresses the influence that women must expect to wield after the war:

The public opinion of the next few years will be chiefly the opinion of women. It would be well, however, if we realised the position and its meaning, realised that upon the women of Britain will fall much of the work of reconstruction, and that the folly and wisdom of the next few years will have the feminine touch. The responsibility for education will be more and more in their hands – and by education I do not mean only the accepted methods of instruction and school routine; but that newspapers and books will be written for women, and react on the new generation. Then, whether they have direct representation or not, public measures will be taken with a view to the approval of women. If I am right in this, the opportunity we asked for has come, the power we clamoured for so long and so earnestly now lies very close to hand. One can only hope that we shall know how to use it aright – scrupulously, with patience, and with tolerance.<sup>29</sup>

Hamilton's observations temper optimism with caution in the exercise of the sway women will have as members, rather than necessarily leaders, of the post-war populace. Her conviction that women should dedicate themselves to the needs of the country through care (conceived of in very broad but still largely conventional terms) of the future generation even without the assurance or reward of the vote, appears as much as a concession to the good will of a masculine establishment as an exhortation to dutiful British womanhood.

A more forceful essay, written for the magazine in 1917 by the President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies Millicent Garrett Fawcett, vigorously criticises of the perceived waste of women's potential in the pre- and early war periods, and proposes reciprocal benefits to women and society at large if the model of war work is maintained. Notably, Garrett Fawcett's article inaugurates a new series of essays for *War Illustrated* entitled 'The Great Issues of the War' (later essays addressed the war's impact on the Empire, labour relations, literature and religion<sup>30</sup>). After censuring the government's failure to act on the advice of the NUWSS in 1914 to find suitable employment for women in order to free up the male labour force, and lamenting the enduring obstacles within the professions and trades union movement to the equal employment of women in vital occupations, Fawcett goes on to consider the common sense and innate justice of appropriate employment opportunities for all in the post-war world:

A great many women whose husbands are now in the Army or Navy will, if their men come back at the end of the war, return to ordinary domestic work in their own homes. On the other hand, many women will, unfortunately, not get their husbands back; they will be widows or wives of permanently disabled men. These women will have to

remain in industry as the main breadwinners of their families. No decent man could possibly urge the return of a system which excluded them from the possibility of earning good wages. Women have shown their industrial capacity during the war in a way which has shattered many anti-feminist prejudices and preconceptions [...] They have known the sweets of economic independence and the joy of service to a cause they love. They have gained in dignity and self-reliance, and the country has found in their labour an asset which will not be neglected in future as it has been in the past.<sup>31</sup>

Although generally considered to be a liberal and acceptable representative of the cause of British women, Garrett Fawcett's arguments and assertions are nonetheless redolent of the individual and communal losses inflicted by the war, while they avow the need and justification for social change.<sup>32</sup> Here, as the war enters its closing phases, the mobilisation of women representationally for propaganda purposes has given place to (albeit restricted) political representation, in challenges to the very prejudices and stereotypes which have rendered a service to the war effort valued initially at least, it seems, above women's military and economic participation. *War Illustrated's* coverage of women's place within the male perspective and pursuit of war, and their iconographic and ideological place inside its justification and momentum, have to a limited degree been replaced by acknowledgement and articulation of their expression and experience of the conflict, and its anticipated consequences for them in peace.

### **Conclusion: 'Manly Heroism' vs. 'Womanly Devotion'**

From the consideration of only a limited number of examples, the critically important, pervasive but also constantly evolving depiction of women within *War Illustrated* can be

discerned and appreciated. Within the magazine's recording and reading of the influences and effects of the war, women have been accepted and shown as carers, lauded or criticised as combatants, and censured for clandestine, deceitful feminine espionage. Specific aspects of gender definition and representation are crucial to both celebratory and condemnatory examples. Women have been celebrated as workers within specified environments and employments, and rendered romantic, exotic, eccentric or endangering when they have assumed military duties or martial dress. However, their official, predictable, and pragmatic roles in the conduct, iconography and narrativisation of the war have been succeeded by the establishment's topical acceptance and accommodation of women's desire and deserving of more challenging, fundamental change, signalled by the accommodation of the views of high-profile female commentators and campaigners within its pages. Here *War Illustrated* appears to diverge (and develop) from its highly visual, exaggerated and propagandist use of female objectification to become a positive platform for feminist representation. By contrast, the longstanding weekly feature 'Women and the War' by Claudine Cleve in the *Illustrated War News* (included from June 1916 onwards), while celebrating a wide range of women's wartime activities, skirts controversy and eschews commentary on women's rights, as the following excerpt from Part 23 of the series shows:

This article is not in any sense intended as a plea for Women's Suffrage. Like its predecessors, it merely aims at recording a fraction of the part that women are playing in the greatest war the world has ever known.<sup>33</sup>

The extent to which representations of women within wartime publications such as *War Illustrated*, in their manipulation and reinforcement of certain stereotypes and imagery

alongside their accommodation of a spectrum of opinion, might merely comment upon and record social change, assist and stimulate it or criticise and actively oppose it, is plainly open to considerable variation. Although depictions and commentary in *War Illustrated* do not appear to replicate the popular objections to women's adoption of military uniform or recruitment to military auxiliaries, they do not appear to support or celebrate these developments either, preferring instead to portray women as nurses and factory and agricultural workers, females replacing males in home front employment, and female civilian members of volunteer organisations and recruitment campaigners. While it is exalted as surely 'the noblest and most beautiful sphere of womanly activity', the role and representation of nursing is nonetheless expanded in *War Illustrated* to embrace contact with the enemy in front-line peril, and literal or metaphorical leadership and protection of male combatants.<sup>34</sup> By contrast the association of other allegedly innate feminine traits with covert, duplicitous action in the clandestine world of espionage represents the polar opposite in gender pigeon-holing and the most drastic distinction from moral, masculine uniformed service.

What these examples also suggest is a constant juggling of not just arbitrarily applied moral standards, but also the criteria and anticipations of the extraordinary or the simply expected in the conduct of women in wartime roles. This is significant to the debates preceding and running parallel with the conflict itself, in relation to the establishment of gender equality and women's suffrage. Perceptions of women's roles, as much as the environments, values and details of the roles themselves, required (and underwent) change during the war.<sup>35</sup> Paradoxes and contradictions inevitably emerge in the recognition afforded to women's exceptional achievement within roles deemed gender specific and dependent upon innate, natural feminine qualities, while universally applicable notions of



responsible and patriotic citizenship are understood to require all members of society to commit themselves to national duty:

After years of struggle, why did feminists accept only partial women's suffrage, not suffrage on the same terms as men? In part because they believed, correctly, that once women had some form of suffrage further reform would follow. They also proved willing to compromise and unwilling to cause a public stink during the war. Some have suggested that it was ironic that the franchise failed to extend the vote to those women workers under age of 30 who had so valiantly served the nation and proved themselves 'worthy of citizenship.' Suffragist leaders acknowledged this but suggested, in the words of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, that what British women had obtained was a 'motherhood franchise.'<sup>36</sup>

The paradoxes and prejudices attending the recognition and interpretation of female wartime service can be seen in instances in *War Illustrated's* reporting where notions of difference and equality, and grounds for celebration and discrimination converge to startling effect (Fig.6). Marking the recent extension of the award of the Military Cross ('for exceptional bravery') to women, a page of photographs representing the presentation of medals for gallantry juxtaposes male and female recipients.<sup>37</sup> Two of the pictures are taken at ceremonies at which General Joffre has conferred decorations on a young colonial soldier

## For Manly Heroism and Womanly Devotion



Nurse Norah Easby, among the first women to receive the Military Medal for bravery in the field. Nurse Easby was wounded in the course of her valiant work.



General Jeffrey, notwithstanding his arduous duties as Generalissimo, still finds time to decorate gallant officers of the British Army who took part in the Somme Battles.



Nurse Beatrice Alice Allsop, who was also decorated by the King for bravery in the field. The Military Cross is now being conferred on women for exceptional bravery.



Honour for a brave Colonial soldier. At an investiture of heroes held in the Garrison of Vincennes, *Vo Thanh Mong*, an Annamite volunteer, received the War Cross and *Medaille Militaire*, which is accompanied with a pension. (French official photograph.)

Fig.6 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1916 - 'For Manly Heroism and Womanly Devotion' (University of Sheffield Special Collections).

and two British Army officers for their service in the recent Battle of the Somme. The other two pictures are individual portraits of British nurses who are 'among the first to receive the Military Medal for bravery in the field.' Both women were decorated for their bravery when their casualty clearing station was shelled, with the male-equivalent award reflecting the comparability of their conduct under fire.<sup>38</sup> However, the women are apparently not

honoured for the male quality of heroism, but for the female virtue of devotion, transforming the page's title from a new equation to a persisting segregation.

Irrespective of the national, military or political objectives and opportunities occasioned by the war, on the basis of this outcome from the period of conflict for women's circumstances Susan Grayzel identifies what she considers to be the 'failure of the war to free the majority of women from being held responsible for their households and children.'<sup>39</sup> Inevitably, disputable perceptions of comparability rather than notions of genuine equivalence mark the consideration of distinctive gendered war-time work in contemporary popular debates, in co-existing examples of popular culture, and in retrospective evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Gail Braybon (2003) *Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story*, in Gail Braybon (Ed.) *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books), p.88.

<sup>2</sup> Anon. (1939) *The press: war weeklies*, *Time Magazine* (25 September). Accessed 9 April 2013. Available at <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,761998,00.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of women's varied war roles, responses and experiences explored through the reports and recollections of individuals, see Janet S. K. Watson (2004) *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Paul Ward (2001) *Women of Britain say Go!: Women's Patriotism in the First World War*, *Twentieth Century British History* 12 (1), pp. 23-45. For examples of contemporary evaluations of women's activities in wartime writing, see Susan R. Grayzel (1999) *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (London: University of North Carolina Press).

<sup>4</sup> Christine E. Hallett and Alison S. Fell (2013) *New Perspectives on First World War Nursing*, in Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett (eds.) *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge), p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Gail Braybon (1989) *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge), p.49.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard A. Cook (2006), *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present* vol.I (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLIO), p.238.

<sup>7</sup> Anon. (1914) *Grenadiers and Scots Guards off to the Front*, *The War Illustrated* (26 September), p.127.

<sup>8</sup> Anon. (1915) *The Teutonic Wave and the Wreck it Leaves*, *The War Illustrated* (22 May), p.323.

<sup>9</sup> Anon. (1915) *The Annihilation of a Family*, *The War Illustrated* (19 February), p.16.

<sup>10</sup> Nicoletta Gullace (1997) *Sexual violence and family honor: British propaganda and international law during the First World War*, *The American Historical Review* 102, pp.714-747 (pp.716-7).

<sup>11</sup> James Bryce (1915) *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (London). For a reappraisal of the pervasiveness and inevitability of destruction, brutality and gender-specific violence in the conflict, see Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Anon., (1916) *Fortune of War at the 'Estaminet Fortune'*, *The War Illustrated* (11 March), p.85.

<sup>13</sup> Anon., (1915) *Phases of Women's Interest in Men at Arms*, *The War Illustrated* (17 July), p.519.

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- <sup>14</sup> Anon., (1915) War's Diverse Effects on Feminine Temperament, *The War Illustrated* (10 April), p.184.
- <sup>15</sup> Krisztina Robert (1997) Gender, Class, and Patriotism: Women's Paramilitary Units in First World War Britain, *The International History Review*, 19 (1), pp. 52-65 (p.54).
- <sup>16</sup> Anon., (1914) Cossack to the Rescue of a Red Cross Nurse, *The War Illustrated* (28 November), p.343.
- <sup>17</sup> Anon., (1915) A Modern Joan of Arc, *The War Illustrated* (23 October), p.217.
- <sup>18</sup> Anon., (1914) Brave Nurse who Protected British Wounded, *The War Illustrated* (14 November), p.314.
- <sup>19</sup> Anon., (1915) The Murder of Nurse Cavell, *The War Illustrated* (30 October), p.241.
- <sup>20</sup> Anon., (1915) Woman Spy guards secret German Telephone, *The War Illustrated* (2 January), p. 476.
- <sup>21</sup> Tighe Hopkins (1917) The Training of the Spy: How the Tools Were Chosen for Doing Dirty Work, *The War Illustrated* (24 November), p.289.
- <sup>22</sup> Anon., (1917) Agents of Prussia's World-Wide Espionage, *The War Illustrated* (17 January), p.277.
- <sup>23</sup> Janet S. K. Watson (1997) Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain, *The International History Review* 19 (1), pp.32-51 (pp.36-40).
- <sup>24</sup> Anon., (1918) Sister Services, *The War Illustrated* (29 June)
- <sup>25</sup> Anon., (1915) Snap-shots by the Way in War-Time, *The War Illustrated* (10 July), p.493.
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- <sup>27</sup> Anon., (1915) War and the Real Triumph of Feminism, *The War Illustrated* (26 June), p.447.
- <sup>28</sup> Anon. (1916) Some of the Women Behind the Guns, *The War Illustrated* (4 March), p.72.
- <sup>29</sup> Cicely Hamilton (1915) The Manless Homes of England: British Womanhood Fills the Gaps while its Manhood Lines the Trenches, *The War Illustrated* (13 November), p.292 (my emphasis).
- <sup>30</sup> Sidney Low (1917) The British Empire After the War, *The War Illustrated* (13 January), p.506, p.508; Clement K. Shorter (1917) Literature After the War, *The War Illustrated* (10 February), p.611, p.614; George Barnes (1917) Labour After the War, *The War Illustrated* (24 February), 26-28; R.F. Horton (1917) Religion After the War, *The War Illustrated* (17 April), p.107, p.110.
- <sup>31</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1917) The War's Effect on Women's Work, *The War Illustrated* (6 January), p.482, p.484.
- <sup>32</sup> Jo Vellacott (1987) Feminist Consciousness and the First World War, *History Workshop* 23, pp.81-101 (p.87).
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- <sup>34</sup> Anon., (1915) War's Diverse Effects on Feminine Temperament, *The War Illustrated* (10 April), p.184.
- <sup>35</sup> David Monger (2014) Nothing Special? Propaganda and Women's Roles in Late First World War Britain, *Women's History Review*, 23 (4), pp.518-542 (p.535).
- <sup>36</sup> Susan Grayzel (2002) *Women and the First World War* (Longman: Harlow), p.103.
- <sup>37</sup> Anon., (1916) For Manly Heroism and Womanly Devotion, *The War Illustrated* (23 September), p.143.
- <sup>38</sup> Anon., (2012) Gallant Nurses, *Great War London: London and Londoners in the First World War* (26 September). Accessed 26 March 2016. Available at <https://greatwarlondon.wordpress.com/2012/09/26/gallant-nurses/>
- <sup>39</sup> Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.118.