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Paul Ward

Empire and Everyday: Britishness and imperialism in women's lives in the Great War

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This essay examines the processes by which the experience of war in everyday life led to many women feeling a greater allegiance to both Britain and the British Empire, developing the British World within domestic settings. It discusses the routines of daily life and women's leisure time to explore how an imperial Britishness became a lived experience. While focused mainly on the United Kingdom it does consider some aspects of women's patriotism in the dominions.

The world wars are seen as dramatic events, for women as well as men. Men of military age were expected to join the armed forces, fulfilling the supreme duty to the nation, of being prepared to kill and die for their country. In their absence, young, active women were encouraged to contribute to the war effort by entering the workplace. Historians have focused on the roles of these active women – those who entered the munitions factories, the transport services and the auxiliary paramilitary forces. In the Great War in the United Kingdom, upwards of five million women workers contributed to the war effort in such ways. These women are seen as being let out of the cage, as being able to break the constraints of separate spheres, to emerge into public spaces, even if only for the duration after which they were forced back to home and duty.¹ Such public activism, undertaken for a variety of motives, has been seen as having a profound effect on women's consciousness.² The impact of war therefore is seen as dramatic, changing women's lives, taking them out of the ordinary into the extraordinary. Susan Kingsley Kent has argued that “the language of traditional femininity, of separate spheres for women and men, could not adequately articulate the experience and requirements of a war that failed to respect the boundaries between home and front, between civilian and soldier.”³ However, the majority of British women in the Great War did not go into munitions factories or the auxiliary forces, or any other form of paid war work. Many were too young or too old, or continued to be housewives and mothers.

This essay tends to focus on middle and upper class women, since many of these did not face the economic imperative to work, and it is therefore more possible to examine their ideological motives in participating voluntarily in the war effort. Aristocratic women, in particular, had a tradition of organising voluntary effort and continued to play a role of social leadership in wartime. In Ireland, Lady Aberdeen, wife of the viceroy was central to the voluntary patriotic war effort. In Australia Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the governor-general, organised the Red Cross, and in Canada the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire was led by women of privileged social position.⁴ But voluntary effort spread far down the social scale because most women in the Empire did not undertake paid work during the war. As Martin Pugh has pointed out, “Even in 1918 when some 6 million women were officially in paid employment, the substantial majority of women still remained at home.”⁵ This was recognized across the Empire during the war. Mrs George McLaren Brown in her wartime account of the Canadian War Contingent Association is worth quoting at length:

When, nearly two years ago, the call to arms first sounded, the men in Canada, like men of British birth all the world over, at once gave up their usual occupations and hastened to offer themselves in defence of the Empire they loved so well. But the breach they left behind in the body politic was enormous and immediately there arose and went humming round the globe the question: “Who will fill this breach – who will carry on the work and duties our men perforce have had to lay aside?” And in Canada, as in all parts of the Empire, with one voice the women cried, “We can and we will.” Right loyally they have proved that this claim was no idle boast. Everywhere, in factories, warehouses and shops, in hospitals, schools and offices, in the City and on the land, the women have

stepped in and shouldered the burden. But behind those splendid women were thousands and thousands of others – no less eager, no less willing, but who for many reasons were unable to leave their homes and go outside to take up the men’s work. “We cannot make munitions nor till the land,” they said, “nor go into the offices or the schools, but right here in our homes there are many other things we can do to help our men.”⁶

This essay therefore turns its attention to the women who did not leave the home, and examines their social, cultural, individual and emotional responses to the war. It examines the women for whom war did not challenge their traditional gender roles. It looks at the everyday and private lives of women to discuss the impact of war on their sense of themselves as British. As Michael Billig has commented, “national identity in established nations is remembered because it is embedded in routines of life, which constantly remind, or “flag”, nationhood.”⁷ In wartime, women were integrated into the nation by the routine events of their lives, not just the dramatic and extraordinary. Women in the home confronted the realities of war at their breakfast, lunch and dinner tables and in their leisure time. The banal, passive acts of eating margarine and knitting became part of “being British”, which implied a demand for recognition of their citizenship. This was frequently seen as an imperial Britishness, since the war enhanced the sense of the Empire’s common purpose. This imperial, British and domestic role did not necessarily entail the demand for the vote in Britain since war enabled many women to gain citizenship within the domestic sphere.⁸ It is also my intention to make some comparative comments on “British” women in the dominions, to tentatively suggest that the domestic setting of participating in the war effort contributed to a sense of “Britishness” across the white dominions, even where the distinctive national identities

of the dominions were developing. Women in Britain and the Greater Britain saw the bonds of empire and Britishness augmented not only because they went into the factories but because they stayed in the home making patriotic meals.

Themes such as margarine and knitting sound remarkably flippant when discussing a war in which one million men of the British Empire were killed, as well as around one thousand women. There was a “pervasiveness of death”⁹ that invaded everyday life. From New Zealand, 17,000 men died, from Canada 60,000, from Australia about 60,000 and from South Africa around 7,000. Three million people in Britain suffered the loss of a close family member, and such losses reinforced familial identities, as mothers, wives, sisters, aunts and cousins (as fathers, brothers, uncles too). Because the war effort was imperial, and because the British-born in the dominions were more likely to enlist than the non-British born, it meant that war casualties often brought home the imperial context of the war. For example, Florence Lockwood, a British Liberal and suffragist, listed her male relatives who were serving in the forces. As well as nephews and cousins in the local Yorkshire territorial force she had relatives in the Royal Irish Rifles, Gordon Highlanders, and an admiral in the Australian fleet.¹⁰ Grief often invaded every waking moment of the bereaved.¹¹ This was not, however, the only experience of the war that imperial Britons had. Miss E. Airey of Norfolk, whose three brothers joined the armed forces in 1914, wrote in her memoir of the war that, “In the Spring of 1918 came the news that my brother had been killed in France. This was a great tragedy for us *and the first real sorrow that I had known.*”¹² In order to appreciate the full and varied impact of the Great War on identity we need to examine the experiences of people before, as well as after, grief and sorrow entered their lives.

Nina MacDonald expressed well the concurrence between the public and domestic aspects of patriotism:

Sing a song of War-time,
Soldiers marching by,
Crowds of people standing,
Waving them “Good-bye.”
When the crowds are over,
Home we go to tea,
Bread and margarine to eat,
War economy!¹³

Such verses draw attention to the construction of the notion of the “home front” in the Great War. This was a war to be fought not only on the battlefields but in the houses (homes) of the citizens (subjects) of the United Kingdom and the Empire. Home and nation became synonymous terms. The *Win the War Cookery Book* exhorted: “The British fighting line shifts and extends and now *you* are in it. The struggle is not only on land and sea; it is in *your* larder, *your* kitchen and *your* dining room. Every meal *you* serve is now literally a battle.”¹⁴ This meant that the routine activities of people uninvolved in the war in any other way took on national significance. Viola Bawtree, living at home in Sussex with her parents and two sisters, too young to play an active role, nonetheless “did her bit” for the nation, as she explained in her “war diary”:

We three girls eat margarine now instead of butter. Sylvia says we do it because we can't afford butter, but I like to imagine we're doing it because every patriotic person does so, and because we're loyal Britons – it goes down easier that way.¹⁵

While this quotation suggests a consolatory purpose, that patriotism made margarine less distasteful, it does suggest ways in which in wartime the most commonplace activities brought people face to face with their membership of the nation. Sometimes, children were not entirely free agents in having their membership of the nation and Empire brought to their attention. The Boys' and Girls' League of South Africa encouraged 'a sacrifice of a child's personal property' through regular collections 'for the relief of distress occasioned by the war.' This was imposed patriotism.¹⁶ Viola Bawtree's actions, however, indicate the willingness of many of those who could not participate in the war except from within the home. Viola Bawtree felt that she could make some contribution to the financing of the war through her pocket money by initiating her War Savings Card: "it's a great treat to feel you're doing something for your country. To get my first [6d] stamp I've gone without a pot of Glycola and shan't mind chapped and rough hands a bit for the cause."¹⁷ Here Viola reinforced precisely the nature of the nation as "imagined community." She felt her membership of that community not only in the abstract but in the day-to-day of pocket money and chapped hands. We can see this again in the war memoir of Annie Purbrook, 49 years old in 1914 and married to the owner of a small printing works. She recorded that:

My maid has like hundreds of others, gone to munition work. Of course, they earn more.... So, to-day, many ladies who had hitherto only planned and supervised the work of the home are perhaps doing a great part or even the whole [of the

housework], and sometimes the washing also. They carry on cheerfully on the whole and feel that they too are taking their share in this huge enterprise.¹⁸

The experience of war was being brought down to the level of the prosaic and mundane. This often occurred within an imperial context. Empire Day of 1917 was used to read King George V's proclamation on food economy from the town halls of the United Kingdom.¹⁹ Throughout the Empire a similar turn to economy in food was being emphasized.

In Canada, women were urged to "Eat fish as a patriotic duty," and the food controller explained the reasons why:

All persons in ordering their food ought to consider the needs of Great Britain and her Allies ... for wheat, beef, bacon, and fats, and the Canada Food Board desires the public to do everything possible to make these commodities available for export by eating as little as possible of them.²⁰

The activities of daily life were being accommodated to the desire to serve the nation and empire in wartime. Such necessities could be taken a step further by portraying the sacrifices being made as heroic. In February 1916, *The Times* published a letter from a middle-class household in which the male writer explained that he and his wife had agreed to aid the nation in its time of need. The first pledge was unlikely to cause undue hardship to the family, since it stated that, "The servants must take 25 per cent less wages." The other nine pledges imposed a range of minor restrictions on the family, such as "no casual entertaining," "if any golf, no caddies", and "Rigid economy in food: no soups, entrees, sweets ... or fruit except from our own garden; only joints, plain

puddings, and simplest food.” The letter further explained what this had meant in practice: “At breakfast we have come to a sort of Continental breakfast with porridge and marmalade added. Only on Sundays do we now make the acquaintance with the friendly kipper or eggs and bacon.”²¹ Again here the breakfast table had come to symbolize patriotic commitment. And that the breakfast table was existent in every household had the effect of making easier the imagining of the nation. Of course, such themes were the subject of wide scale propaganda. Even before the war the British Women’s Patriotic League had answered the question “How can I show my patriotism?” with the command: “By *always* buying British or Empire made goods” and “By bringing up children to do the same.”²² In wartime when frugality was called for from all ranks in society the most famous breakfast table in the nation became the source of example as the Royal Family called on the nation to eat less bread.²³

As war continued food shortages caused considerable annoyance, but it did enable many women to feel that they were contributing to the war effort even without leaving their routine domestic spaces. Helen Harpin, living at home with her parents, wrote to her fiancé on the Western Front that, “No, the rationing is *not* very nice tho’ we are bearing up remarkably well.” To stress her continuing commitment to the war effort she congratulated him on his military achievements: “Your enterprise on the 28th must have been very successful. I’m particularly glad about the prisoners & I hope you have killed lots more (Yes war isn’t good for natures).”²⁴ In this case, the domestic hardship of war (this was limited, Helen had also written of the degrading nature of looking for servants) was not translated into opposition to the war effort but was borne, stoically, alongside a continuing patriotic commitment. This too could be displayed with food and drink. The Reverend Andrew Clark, in rural Essex, noted the patriotic activities of the Trittons, the most prominent of local families. One of the daughters, Lucy, recruited in

the local villages, another, Marjorie, collected novels to send to the front, and a third, Annette (Nettie) compiled a roll of honour to place in the Church porch. Their mother meanwhile entertained soldiers to tea in her home. On one occasion Clark counted sixty-one men.²⁵ The soldiers were fighting for home, and most women by remaining in their domestic setting made more real the images of home, and therefore the nation.²⁶ . It was considered by the *Spectator* in 1915 that housewives were succeeding in their domestic patriotism, for it argued that “It is a splendid reflection on the influence of family life that it is the married men who measure and accept their responsibilities with conspicuous readiness. They have learned that a home is a thing worth fighting for.”²⁷ These women were doing more than committing themselves to the war effort; they were reinforcing the commitment of the soldiers. The passive patriotism of the table had developed into active patriotism, by which women could show their commitment to the war effort in the routines activities of their lives. Entertaining soldiers in the home, whether in Britain, Australia or Canada, gave such women a role in defining the British world, and though it may have been limited by ideas associated with what was acceptable for a woman to do, it still bestowed citizenship by enabling membership of the imperial nation.

So far the domestic necessities of life have been discussed, but women’s patriotism in the home extended further, into their leisure time, into areas where they were able to make choices about their participation in the war effort. Much of this was done without breaking out of accepted gender roles.

Mrs McLaren Brown, quoted above, in emphasizing the role played in the war effort by non-employed Canadian women, described how their domestic patriotic activities brought them out of the home but kept them within separate spheres:

We can knit socks and mufflers and mittens, we can sew shirts and pyjamas and underwear, we can make cakes, sweets and jam, we can give tobacco, gum, candles and soap, and a hundred other things; and we can organise committees and centres to collect them, pack them up, and send them overseas as comforts for our fighting men, who have little time and opportunity to find comforts for themselves.²⁸

Perhaps the most widely undertaken patriotic act by women in wartime was knitting. The *Saturday Review* described Britain in September 1914 as “a vast knitting machine.”²⁹ This activity was widely mocked, at the time and subsequently. It did not receive the hostility provoked by the practice of giving out white feathers but it certainly attracted ridicule.³⁰ Two *Punch* cartoons serve to show this apparently affectionate ridicule. The first, from 1914, shows a young woman struggling to learn how to knit to produce a pair of mittens, which leave the British soldier in the trenches baffled as to their use, but by applying his ingenuity he discovers a way to keep his face, feet and hands warm while he smokes his pipe.³¹ The second has an officer holding up a sock while his auntie sits in her armchair knitting another. “Do you know, Auntie, I can get both my feet into one of these socks you’ve made for me?” he says. “But surely, my dear” she replies, “it’s not so easy to walk that way?”³² Arthur Marwick suggests that, “It was said that many men in the trenches used these unwanted, and often unsuitable, items for cleaning their rifles and wiping their cups and plates.”³³ Other representations of knitting were far less unkind. Jessie Pope, the most renowned wartime British female patriotic verse writer, established the important emotional connection over geographical distance between the knitter and the soldier:

Shining pins that dart and click
In the fireside's sheltered space
Check the thoughts that cluster thick –
20 plain and then decrease ...

Never used to living rough,
Lots of things he'd got to learn;
Wonder if he's warms enough –
Knit 2, catch 2, knit 1, turn ...

Wonder if he's fighting now,
What he's done an' where he's been;
He'll come out on top some how –
*Slip 1, knit 2, purl 14.*³⁴

The Ladies' Working Part of the Good Hope Red Cross Society recorded how none of the clothing, pillowslips or comforts they had sent to South African soldiers had been ready-made but that "every article supplied ... has been a labour of love."³⁵ Bruce Scates has shown how in the Australian case that "enormous emotional labour was invested in even the most prosaic commodities."³⁶ Susan Kingsley Kent has noted that the outbreak of war reconfirmed traditional gender roles, which had been under threat from the feminist activity of the suffragettes and suffragists in Edwardian Britain. The war brought the expectation that men would join the army, and this in turn had consequences for women's roles. The outbreak of war brought unemployment for many women, and there were few acceptable forms of active patriotism for women. So, as

Caroline Playne remarked in her 1931 history of the war, “The great era of knitting set in; men should fight but women should knit.”³⁷ Across the Empire, knitting provided an acceptable patriotism for women. Mrs C.S. Peel in her late 1920s history recalled how:

We knitted socks (some of them of unusual shape), waistcoats, helmets, comforters, mitts, body belts. We knitted at theatres, in trains and trams, in parks and parlours, in the intervals of eating in restaurants, of serving in canteens. Men knitted, children knitted, a little girl promoted to four needles anxiously asked her mother, “Mummie, do you think I shall *live* to finish this sock?”³⁸

The reference here to men knitting is worth a brief comment. The 1870 Elementary Education Act had made it compulsory for girls to learn to knit, but it had also encouraged boys to learn.³⁹ The other comment worth making on Peel’s extract is in relation to the impact of the visibility of women in public during wartime, as they donned uniforms as “the outward and visible sign of their patriotism” and visually announced their entry into the public sphere, whatever the limits.⁴⁰ Here though Peel suggests the way in which women’s entry into public spaces could continue to invoke domesticity through the act of knitting. Women tram and bus conductresses in Britain often encountered hostility, yet trams and buses were parts of the public sphere where women could be seen conducting acts of domesticity for patriotic purposes. Florence Lockwood saw it as worth recording in her diary: “Ladies knitting in the tram car, on our way to Slaithwaite ... Territorials want warm clothes – sleeping helmets & gloves.”⁴¹

Knitting acted as an acceptable method by which women could show their patriotism. Barbara McLaren in a propagandist book published in 1917 suggested that,

“If the complete history ever comes to be written of the work of women with their needles during the war, it will reveal an outstanding record of patient, loyal, skilful achievement, and an output of which the figures can only be described as phenomenal.”⁴² The Queen Mary’s Needlework Guild, for example, produced 15,577,911 articles during the war. It had branches throughout the empire.⁴³ Other patriotic women specialized. Lady Smith-Dorrien organized the sewing of brightly coloured small bags for wounded soldiers to safeguard their valuables. By May 1917 1,833,194 bags had been sent.⁴⁴ Katherine, Duchess of Atholl, a Scottish aristocrat, organized the knitting of a garment that could be worn under the kilts of the Highland regiments. Within three weeks of making her appeal 15,000 had been sent.⁴⁵ South Africa had a veils’ fund “for the purpose of supplying veils for the men going to German SW [Africa] where the torment of flies & desert made life without them intolerable.... A C’tee of ladies bought the stuff & volunteers made up the veils.”⁴⁶ The recording of the numerical achievements of this voluntary knitting and sewing effort suggests that it was felt necessary to validate the worth of such organisations. But these organisations were made up of individuals, all of whom had their own motives for participating. Mrs Peel remarked that knitting “was comforting to our nerves ... and comforting to think that the results of our labours might save some man something of hardship and misery, for always the knowledge of what our men suffered haunted us.”⁴⁷ The act of knitting could close the distance between women at home and men at the front, in addition to being patriotic. Helen Harpin sent her fiancé socks as a mark of her affection for him, though her previously cited letter shows that did not preclude patriotic motivations.⁴⁸ Others joined knitting circles for social purposes.⁴⁹ Ada McGuire, though, revealed the meaning of knitting to her. “I am busy knitting woollen helmets for the soldiers”, she wrote to friend in the United States in the midst of a letter that

explained her attitude to the war. She expressed her patriotism: “It is hard to realise what a love one has for one’s country till that country is threatened and threatened by such a foe! We cannot underestimate Germany’s power – we will need to strain all our resources to crush their hateful arrogance.” She wished that she were a man so that she could enlist, though she noted, “but of course it is easy to say so when it is impossible.” She was restricted to knitting but that was an expression of her integration into the nation and the Empire: “We are all tremendously eager to show how loyal we are. We all think *imperially* now.”⁵⁰

Knitting was banal. But it tied women into the war effort; it “flagged” the nation to them. Given its banality, other banalities intervened. Ada McGuire expressed her boredom with the task in hand: “I have been making socks & helmets but I cannot get a great amount done as I have not much time & it takes a long time knitting a pair of socks. If only *one* sock would do.”⁵¹ In those days of the dismembering of the male, others had solutions to the “technical” problems of knitting socks.⁵² Miss G.M. West, working in a Red Cross hospital, recorded in her diary in 1915 that “Aunt Maggie has sent me a sock. Enclosed was a note saying that she had meant to make a pair but all the wool got used up on one, but perhaps there was some poor fellow who had lost one leg & would find it useful.”⁵³

Examination of almost any aspect of daily life would show how the war intervened to bring the nation and Empire into women’s lives.⁵⁴ There were tensions between the language of traditional femininity and a war that encouraged women into the public sphere. Women were strained by the contradictory pressures encouraging them out of the home to participate in the war effort and the messages that the soldiers were fighting for homes with women within them. Many women resolved such pressures by remaining within the home *and* participating in the war effort. The Great

War did disrupt the private sphere, but it did not destroy it. It transformed even the home into part of what Denise Riley has called the “social” sphere.⁵⁵ It became an arena where women could engage in the war effort. The home front meant not only Britain and the dominions but literally incorporated the home. Women were able to express their citizenship within the domestic sphere. Nicoletta Gullace has recently argued that during the war citizenship became defined by service to the nation and not by the male body.⁵⁶ Many women did give service to the nation outside of the home, in paid employment and in auxiliary military services, but when women’s suffrage came to be discussed in Britain it was women over thirty, those least likely to have entered the munitions factories and auxiliary military forces, who were granted the vote. As Lord Selborne argued, such women would be a “steadying influence” amidst an enlarged electorate.⁵⁷ In Canada too some women were granted the vote as recognition of their patriotism. The Military Voters Act granted the vote to women in the armed forces, but Wartime Elections Act gave the vote to the female relatives of servicemen – the women most likely to have knitted and put together parcels of comforts.⁵⁸

This essay has examined women who conformed to the patriotic values of the British world in which they lived. There were of course many differences between Britain and the dominions, including a variety of ethnic divisions. Within the United Kingdom Irish nationalists were divided by the war effort with parts of Irish-Ireland (as opposed to British-Ireland) mounting a rebellion at Easter 1916 that provoked one woman diarist and sock knitter to remark that “Some of the Irish are traitors.”⁵⁹ In Ireland, the voluntary war effort tended to be conducted by Protestants rather than Catholics.⁶⁰ Many Afrikaans-speaking South Africans did not see the war as theirs. In Canada, French-speakers frequently saw themselves as Canadian rather than imperial citizens, and only 30,000 of the 400,000 Canadians serving overseas were French-

speaking even though they constituted one-third of the population.⁶¹ In none of these cases am I suggesting that there was an ethnic determinism to support or oppose the war effort, but it is clear that the British-born were more likely to participate because of their “Britishness.”⁶² Other participants saw their efforts for the war as likely to benefit them in the wake of the war. Hence Goolam Vahed has suggested that Durban’s “Indian elites hoped that after the war British imperial goodwill would result in redress for Indian grievances,” and Eileen Reilly has argued that “a robust and ambitious [Irish] Catholic middle class, conscious of the tantalising immediacy of Home Rule and anticipating imperial accomplishment, responded positively to the summons to arms.”⁶³ This did not necessarily lessen the sincerity of British imperial patriotism but these examples point to the complexity of motives behind loyalty.

Furthermore most historians recognise that the Great War played a profound part in the development of distinctive dominion nationalisms. The place of Gallipoli in the formation of Australian and New Zealand identities is rightly emphasized. Marilyn Lake has convincingly argued that at Gallipoli men gave birth to the Australian nation, rendering women invisible.⁶⁴ However, one Australian school teacher did show the way in which some women did share in the strengthening of Australian national identity produced at Gallipoli:

DEAR AUSTRALIAN BOYS, Every Australian woman’s heart this week is thrilling with pride, with exultation, and while here eyes fill with tears she springs up as I did when I read the story in Saturday’s *Argus* and says, “Thank God, I am an Australian.”⁶⁵

Differences could also be identified at the day to day level. Sister MacAdams, a dietician at the Ontario Military Hospital in Orpington, Kent, who was standing for the Alberta legislature from afar, became more aware of her difference from the English during her service in England. This difference was expressed through a woman's proper realm when she was interviewed by the *Weekly Dispatch*. "'We Canadians,' she said with a smile lighting up her face, 'will be glad to get a good meal when the war is over!' She says English people have different ideas about the kind of food that is required," the paper reported.⁶⁶ Edith Woods described South African women's patriotic activities in relation to those of women in Britain. She noted how [South African] "women held street collections, concerts, entertainments and sales ... this was much the same as in England, except that at our sales there are fewer pictures & objets de vertu & more pumpkins & produce."⁶⁷

Stuart Ward has pointed out that "successive generations of historians have set out to identify the earliest sprouting of youthful, assertive nationalist behaviour and, having done so, to explain why these signs of early promise failed to achieve the full bloom of national independence."⁶⁸ The expression of Australian, South African, Canadian, and New Zealand national identity was not incompatible with the expression of a "British race patriotism" or "Britishness." As Scotland within the British Isles used the war to emphasize its distinctive role in the war effort through the building of a separate Scottish war memorial in Edinburgh castle, so too did the dominions through their commemoration of the war dead.⁶⁹ Philip Buckner and Carl Bridge have pointed out that national identities in the dominions were frequently associated with building "better Britains" rather than with repudiating "Britishness."⁷⁰

It has sometimes been said that parts of the British population remained indifferent to the British Empire because their material needs remained paramount.⁷¹ A

similar argument might be used to explain how women, confined to the home, could also remain indifferent to the nation and empire.⁷² Yet in wartime, the distance between the material and the ideological was narrowed considerably. Hence in the Great War, everyday actions, for example, of eating margarine and knitting, brought the British world into the home. British women came face to face with their Britishness at the breakfast table and at their knitting needles, wherever they were in the Empire.

Women's role was conducted in their knowledge of the imperial context of their actions. At the beginning of the war, Mrs Arthur Morrison, organiser of the first Union Jack Flag Day, held in Glasgow to raise money for the war effort, explained how she hit upon the idea:

It occurred to me that if a street collection was held it would raise a large sum of money in the least possible time with a minimum of expense and from the magnificent manner in which the whole Empire had responded to the call of the Motherland I decided that no more suitable emblem could be sold than the Union Jack.⁷³

At the end of the war, Queen Mary, patron of imperial knitters across the world thanked "the women of the Empire" who had formed a "sisterhood of suffering and service." Women, she said, had "proved their courage, steadfastness, and ability." The reward for this service was that "plans are afoot for bringing to an end the existence of such bad and crowded housing as makes home life almost impossible."⁷⁴ The impact of the war, therefore, confirmed the traditional and "British" role of women in a context of domesticity.

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¹ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora, 1987); Deidre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty Women between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Pandora, 1989).

² Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5: "Not all women experienced greater gender consciousness during the war, but the evidence suggests that, at least for some women, wartime worker created gender-related growth in esteem and self-assertiveness."

³ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 36. Antonia Lant makes a similar point that there were 'clashes between domestic ideals and women's wartime lives' during the Second World War arguing that 'Wartime ideology, the discourse that explains mobilization, recruitment, fighting and killing, runs up against the peacetime ideology of separate spheres for men and women and the clear differentiation of men's and women's cultural, economic, and political contributions': *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 17.

⁴ Eileen Reilly, "Women and Voluntary War Work," in *Ireland and the Great War: "A War to Unite Us All?"* eds Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 49-72; Melanie Oppenheimer, "'The Best P.M. for the Empire in War?': Lady Helen Munro Ferguson and the Australian Red Cross Society, 1914-1920," *Australian Historical Studies*, 33 (2002): 108-24; Katie

Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire*

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), chapter 2.

⁵ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 12.

⁶ Imperial War Museum, London (IWM), Colonies Files, Women at Work Collection, Mrs George McLaren Brown, 'Canadian War Contingent Association', in *Women of the Empire in War Time*, (microfilm).

⁷ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

⁸ Anne Summers explores the way in which women asserted their citizenship as military nurses: *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses, 1854-1914*, second edition, (Newbury: Threshold, 2000).

⁹ *Authority, Identity and the Great War*, eds, Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (Oxford: Berghahn 1995), xix.

¹⁰ Kirklees Archives, Huddersfield, KC329, Florence Lockwood, unpublished diary, volume 1, September 1914. Lockwood marked their names in red as they became casualties.

¹¹ See for example Bob Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance' in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 1992); J.M. Winter, 'Communities in Mourning', in Coetzee and Shevin-Coetzee, *Authority, Identity*, p 325-355; *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* eds, T.G. Ashplant et al (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹² IWM Department of Documents (DD), London, 81/9/1, Miss E. Airey, typescript memoir. Emphasis added.

¹³ *The Virago Book of Women's War Poetry and Verse* ed. Catherine Reilly (London: Virago, 1997), 69. The tune is the children's nursery song, 'Sing a song of sixpence'.

¹⁴ Quoted in Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*, 13.

¹⁵ IWM, DD, 91/5/1 'Episodes in the Great War 1916 from the Diaries of Viola Bawtree,' 23 February 1916. Rationing of foodstuffs was not introduced until January 1918. Margarine and butter were rationed in February in London and the Home Counties. Many women 'monumentalized' the war through writing war in diaries, see Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War," *Twentieth Century British History* 12 (2001): 27.

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- ¹⁶ IWM Colonies Files, Unattributed press cutting. (microfilm). See Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 234-41 for children and patriotism in Canada.
- ¹⁷ IWM, DD, 91/5/1 “Episodes in the Great War 1916,” 5 March 1916.
- ¹⁸ IWM, DD 97/3/1, Annie Purbrook, memoir, 8.
- ¹⁹ Kirklees Archives, Lockwood diary, 24 May 1917.
- ²⁰ Quoted in Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921 A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1974), 238.
- ²¹ *The Times*, 2 February 1916, quoted in E, *Human Documents of the Lloyd George Era*, ed. Royston Pike (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 229.
- ²² IWM DD, BO5/3/14, British Women’s Patriotic League.
- ²³ Royston Pike, *Human Documents*, 211-212.
- ²⁴ IWM DD, CON SHELF, H.M. Harpin, letters, 8 March 1918, 3 May 1918.
- ²⁵ *Echoes of the Great War: The Diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919*, ed. James Munson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 43, 78, 79, 66, 98, 145.
- ²⁶ One of the roles of those women who left Britain’s shores to serve in France in the WAAC was to create ‘home from home’ for the men. Mrs Grace Curnock explained in 1917 how ‘British women have a wonderful power – a power which is the keynote of the nation’s worldwide greatness, they carry Home wherever they go. At Christmas the men will be made happier from the knowledge that in WAAC camps and YMCA huts, British women are keeping the great festival with all the traditions of home’: Elizabeth Crossthwait, “‘The Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun’: The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, 1914-18,” in *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women’s History and Women’s Work*, ed. Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986) 167.
- ²⁷ Quoted in Nicoletta F. Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 114.
- ²⁸ IWM, Colonies Files, Mrs McLaren Brown, “Canadian War Contingent Association,” (microfilm).
- ²⁹ ‘Women in War Time,’ *Saturday Review*, 27 March 1915.
- ³⁰ Nicoletta Gullace, “White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War,” *Journal of British Studies*. 36 (1997): 178-206.

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- ³¹ 'The History of a Pair of Mittens', *Punch*, 18 November 1914, in Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting* (London: Batsford, 1987), 140.
- ³² *Punch*, 23 January 1918, in Cally Blackman, "Handknitting in Britain from 1908-39: The Work of Marjory Tillotson," *Textile History* 29 (1998): 187.
- ³³ Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914-1918* London: Fontana/Imperial War Museum, 1977), 35.
- ³⁴ Jessie Pope, 'Socks', in Reilly, *Virago Book of Women's War Poetry*, 89.
- ³⁵ IWM Colonies Files, The Good Hope Red Cross Society, report, (microfilm).
- ³⁶ Bruce Scates, "The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War," *Labour History* 81 (2001), 29-49 (31).
- ³⁷ Kent, *Making Peace*, 15.
- ³⁸ Mrs C.S. Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914-1918 A Sketch of Social and Domestic Life during the War* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head, 1929), 60.
- ³⁹ Blackman, 'Handknitting in Britain', 179.
- ⁴⁰ Susan R. Grayzel, "'The Outward and Visible Sign of Her Patriotism': Women, Uniforms and National Service during the First World War," *Twentieth Century British History* 8 (1997): 178-206.
- ⁴¹ Kirklees Archives, Lockwood, diary, 14 October 1914.
- ⁴² Barbara McLaren, *Women of the War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 85.
- ⁴³ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild Its Work in the Great War* (London: n.p., n.d. [1919?]). See also file IWM Department of Printed Books (DPB), B.O. 2/2. An example of a local variant is the Queen's Appeal for Socks Fund founded in Johannesburg in August 1914.
- ⁴⁴ IWM DPB, B.O. 2/19.
- ⁴⁵ Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), 43. There was also a Kingswear Fund for Trawlers' Seaboot Stockings for the Fleet', Marwick, *Women at War*, 143.
- ⁴⁶ IWM Colonies Files, Edith Woods to WE Dowding, 19 June 1916, (microfilm).
- ⁴⁷ Quoted in Blackman, 'Handknitting in Britain', 188.
- ⁴⁸ IWM DD, Harpin, Letters, 22 March 1918.
- ⁴⁹ For example, IWM DD, Purbrook, 'Memoir', 3.
- ⁵⁰ IWM DD, 96/31/1, Ada McGuire, letter 28 August 1914.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.* 22 September 19[16?].

⁵² Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1995).

⁵³ IWM DD, 77/156/1, Miss G.M. West, diary, 10 June 1915.

⁵⁴ Motherhood was a central aspect of women's lives that was made patriotic in wartime, see Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, 53-69 and Joy Damousi, "Private Loss, Public Mourning: Motherhood, Memory and Grief in Australia during the Inter-War Years," *Women's History Review*, 8 (1999): 365-378. See also Scates, "The Unknown Sock Knitter," for women's role in the process of others' mourning.

⁵⁵ Denise Riley, *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

⁵⁶ Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*.

⁵⁷ Quoted in John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 120. See also Kent, *Making Peace*, chapter 4 and Martin Pugh, *Women's Suffrage in Great Britain 1867-1928* London: Historical Association, 1980).

⁵⁸ Brown and Cook, *Canada 1896-1921*, p. 271. For a discussion of women and citizenship in Australia, see Marilyn Lake, "The Inviolable Woman: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship in Australia, 1900-1945," *Gender and History*, 8 (1996): 197-211.

⁵⁹ IWM DD, Ada McGuire, letter, 31 May 1915.

⁶⁰ Reilly, 'Women and Voluntary War Work,' 66.

⁶¹ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 17.

⁶² See for example Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-1918* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987). See also Donal Lowry, "The Crown, Empire Loyalism and the Assimilation of Non-British White Subjects in the British World: An Argument Against 'Ethnic Determinism,'" in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, eds. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 96-120.

⁶³ Goolam Vahed, "'Give Till It Hurts': Durban's Indians and the First World War," *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 19 (2001): 43.

⁶⁴ Marilyn Lake, "Mission Impossible: How Men Gave Birth to the Australian Nation: Nationalism, Gender and Other Seminal Acts," *Gender and History*, 4 (1992): 305-22. See also Jeff Kershen, "The Great War Soldier as Nation Builder in Canada and Australia," in *Canada and the Great War*, ed. Britton C. Busch (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003,

⁶⁵ Quoted in W. F. Mandle, *Going It Alone: Australia's National Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1978).

⁶⁶ *Weekly Dispatch*, 29 July 1917.

⁶⁷ IWM Colonies Files, Edith Woods to WE Dowding, 19 June 1916, (microfilm).

⁶⁸ Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 6.

⁶⁹ National Library of Scotland, Acc. 4714, Scottish National War Memorial folder 1923, *Report of the Committee on the Utilisation of Edinburgh Castle for the Purpose of a Scottish National War Memorial*, Cd 279, HMSO, 1919. The London war museum became the Imperial War Museum.

⁷⁰ P.A. Buckner and Carl Bridge, "Reinventing the British World," *The Round Table*, 368 (2003): 79

⁷¹ For example, Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

⁷² For example, Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1938).

⁷³ IWM, Women at Work Collection, BO 2/52/16, Flag Days, Morrison ts, ,

⁷⁴ *Morning Post*, 5 December 1918.