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War Within and Without: Irish women in the First World War era (special issue)

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Title: 'War Within and Without: Irish Women in the First World War Era'

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Abstract

The period 1914-1918 was tumultuous in Ireland when conflict wrought by international tensions was exacerbated by a fractious domestic political scene that ultimately resulted in partition of the island into two jurisdictions: Northern Ireland, comprised of six of the nine Ulster counties, and the Free State, encompassing the remaining twenty-six counties. Both were dominions within the British Commonwealth with domestic parliaments controlling internal affairs. Neither were the desired political outcome of the various factions who had protested, taken up arms, and eventually negotiated. Women were pivotal on both sides of the political divide. For those who wished to stay in the union with Great Britain, the First World War was a chance to demonstrate loyalty and to showcase the particular contributions of women, from hosting Belgian refugees to the encouragement of enlistment of husbands, sons and friends. For those who wished to see the enactment of independence for Ireland, as promised in the 1912 Home Rule Bill and the suspended Act of 1914, the First World War provided an opportunity to enact long held ambitions for a violent revolution, with women participating in active combat and non-combatant roles. Thus while the First World War was a pivotal moment for women globally, in Ireland it had an additional layer of complexity given the national political context. This article seeks to explore these

intersections and tensions, providing an introduction to this special issue in which many facets of the war period in Ireland are explored.

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Text

In the years leading up to the First World War, campaigners for women's suffrage, Home Rule, Unionism, trade unionism and social rights competed for attention in the Irish political landscape. The outbreak of war in Britain led to an outpouring of support but the war as a whole was somewhat more complicated in Ireland due to the political environment of the time. Ireland had been inching towards political independence over the previous five decades. While some sections of the population were fully committed to the war effort, others actively opposed any attempt to force Ireland to fight what was perceived to be a British war. Home Rule, or domestic political independence in Ireland, was due to be enacted in September 1914 and was suspended upon the outbreak of war.

A call to arms by the nationalist leader John Redmond in support of Ireland's independence through a show of loyalty, saw most of the Irish Volunteers, the militarised faction dedicated to gaining Home Rule for Ireland, voluntarily join the British army. The female arm of this group, Cumann na mBan were, naturally, ineligible for military service but maintained their support on the home front. Most Volunteers who were in support of an independent Ireland believed their fighting would help to achieve this goal and wished to demonstrate Ireland's loyalty to fulfil their political aspirations. In Laffan's analysis, a 'European war provided the opportunity for Irish nationalists to prove their claim that Home Rule would not threaten British strategic interests'.¹ The complexity of the situation is exemplified by the aims of another group on the island of Ireland, also eager to demonstrate loyalty but for diametrically opposed reasons. Unionists, largely based in Ulster, also rallied in response to the call to arms, but in order to show their fealty to maintaining the Act of Union of 1801. Between those who wholeheartedly supported

Britain's war effort and those who viewed it as further evidence of the need for independence and as Ireland's opportunity to stage a violent rebellion, lay a middle ground: those who supported the war solely for economic reasons or the pacifist men and women who opposed any form of militant action. This special issue casts a critical eye on the spectrum of experiences that existed in Ireland in the years 1914 to 1918, specifically focusing, for the first time, on the lives of women in Ireland during the First World War era.

Fearghal McGarry has outlined that the declaration of war in 1914 'transformed the political atmosphere in Ireland, at a stroke postponing the implementation of Home Rule, defusing the impending crisis in Ulster, and forcing nationalists to take a stance on the war.'² Initially, he argues, an 'unfamiliar and, for some, disconcerting sentiment percolated Irish public opinion: goodwill towards Britain.'³ Two years later, however, the Easter Rising in Dublin and the heavy-handed British response would shift nationalist focus away from Home Rule and towards complete independence. Moderate nationalism had been replaced by a more extreme brand of republicanism that found expression in the 1916 uprising and the subsequent War of Independence. For unionists, the unexpected rebellion in Dublin served to reignite fears about the nationalist agenda. Attitudes towards the war in Ireland, and Britain generally, therefore, were not only influenced by its duration and its devastating effects but also by political events at home. Physical trenches may not have been dug in Ireland but, as John Horne argued in 2008, 'Few countries were more decisively affected by the Great War than Ireland.'⁴

Regardless of the levels of support, the war had a direct and immediate impact on Irish citizens, transcending political, social, geographic, generational and economic boundaries as it did elsewhere. War challenged and simultaneously reinforced such

boundaries. Although conscription was never implemented, around 210,000 Irish men, most of whom were Catholic, voluntarily enlisted.⁵ These absences, and the resulting fatalities and injuries, strained relationships and family economies. The introduction of rationing and subsequent food shortages caused further hardship for many families. Leisure activities and recreational travel were also impacted.⁶ Societies and committees, such as those related to the suffrage and labour movements, often reduced the number of meetings or suspended them entirely, thus slowing down social advances and political developments. For though Pašeta argues in this special issue, that 'Feminist activism and ideas touched all aspects of Irish political life in the period, from the national question, to socialism, to pacifism and to social reform activism',⁷ progress in these areas was affected by the outbreak of the war and the ensuing domestic conflicts. The first decades of the twentieth century could thus be seen as ones of restriction and stagnation as much as of new war-related opportunities. Indeed, as Pašeta also highlights, Ireland became an important arena for militant suffrage activity in the immediate pre-war period, with the Women's Social and Political Union targeting their efforts at both nationalist and unionist politicians due to the large number of Irish MPs at Westminster who had it in their power to tip the vote for any proposed suffrage bill. Unfortunately for suffragists throughout the United Kingdom, they continuously declined to do so.

This special issue focuses on how women in Ireland experienced the First World War era. It follows other gendered analyses of war and violence in modern Ireland, for as McIntosh and Urquhart have observed: 'Conflict is a central motif in twentieth-century Ireland. Adopting a gender analysis adds a crucial dimension to the debate'.⁸ This gendered perspective is particularly important given the legislative and social changes relating to

women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tammy Proctor has insisted that 'as war workers or propaganda poster girls, women functioned as necessities for the successful militarization of society and the state rhetoric of warfare. Far from being tangential to war, women are central.'⁹ Despite these astute observations, recent commemorative research and activities have not always shone a light on the particular experiences and contributions of women in Ireland. As Keith Jeffery identified in 2011, women's activities during the Great War have remained in 'a kind of historically hidden Ireland'.¹⁰ This collection brings together insights about women of opposing political and religious affiliations, various ages, and different classes and geographic regions of Ireland, imbricated as they were with the social and political tensions of the era. It focuses predominantly on women in Ireland but also considers Irish women overseas. Together the essays illuminate the roles and activities of, and attitudes towards, particular groups and individuals and draw together perspectives from north and south of the island. These have often been traced separately, reflecting the political divide created in 1920 through the Government of Ireland Act, with women's contributions either to the unionist stance against political independence or the nationalist effort to gain self-rule side-lined or ignored in historiography.¹¹ Gregory and Pařeta have highlighted that not all war experiences 'fit neatly into the mainly political studies of unionist and nationalist responses to the Great War' and this special issue confirms their assertion.¹² While drawing out some unique experiences for women in the period, this volume also demonstrates both the increased politicisation and militarisation of life in Ireland. It further highlights the ways in which feminist activism interacted (and sometimes clashed with) the dominant political organisations. Essays in the collection also move beyond the political, shedding light on Ireland's social, cultural and economic landscape at the time. Analyses are enriched by

women's first-hand accounts, such as the letters written to and from Ireland during this period, or the literary works penned by Susanne Rouviere Day from the camps for displaced individuals in France, as well as by newspaper articles, pamphlets, minute books, family case files, and photographs that recorded women's activities during the war years in written or visual form.

Each of the contributions interrogates contemporary understandings of femininity and various facets of womanhood during this period. As with other collections and publications on women and the war, it is impossible to generalise about women's experiences of or attitudes towards war, and as Fell and Sharp argue, 'there was no clear consensus about what constituted the proper "womanly" response to the war' even when they belonged to small, niche groups such as suffragist or feminist organisations.¹³ In Ireland, the range of women's experiences was even more acute given the polarised attitudes towards Britain and the war effort generally, and thus this collection does not profess to be comprehensive. The experience of the war in Ireland therefore has an added dimension for women not apparent in Britain: their attitudes towards Ireland's political future were often interwoven in their activities. Knitting 'comforts' or gathering sphagnum moss could be an overt expression of unionism; gathering signatures against conscription or learning semaphore could be an explicit statement of advanced nationalism; learning First Aid techniques could be either.

As the essays in this collection make clear, social status could, and did, shape responses. In her article on alcoholism, Holly Dunbar notes the 1901 view of Fr James Cullen, a Jesuit who established the Total Abstinence Society of the Sacred Heart, that 'women have ever been by word and example the world's great social reformers'.¹⁴

Philanthropy and charity work was seen as an appropriate role for middle- and upper-class women before the war and indeed during it.¹⁵ War offered women opportunities to further participate in charitable endeavours or to increase their involvement in certain roles. Maeve O’Riordan argues in her article on landed women in the province of Munster that women of this class assumed leadership roles in their localities in the pre-war period to foster a community spirit and to promote involvement but also as a means to exert control.¹⁶ At the onset of the conflict in 1914, women applied their skills and experiences to the war effort. Indeed, Lady Aberdeen, wife of the lord lieutenant, on behalf of Queen Alexandra and the British Red Cross, gathered volunteer women for such philanthropic work in Ireland within days of the conflict, meeting in Leinster House, Dublin, on 10 August 1914.¹⁷ Clothing was sourced and sent to civilians abroad, socks were knitted, money was raised, and the collection of supplies was coordinated and sent to the troops at the front. Later in the war, rationing exacerbated poverty at home and women took the lead in distributing clothing and supplies to the needy. When the injured began to return home, women organised convalescent visits.

Yet the war also changed such philanthropy. O’Riordan points out a notable difference in the charitable work undertaken by middle-class women during the war than in the years previous. The wartime recipient was not now a local resident but rather a ‘faceless “wounded soldier”, “Belgian Refugee” or “war widow”’: none of whom were to found within shooting distance of the country house.’¹⁸ As was the case elsewhere, the arrival of refugees to Ireland meant that the recipient of charity was not merely imagined but a physical reality, bringing reminders of the horror and hardships of the war to the doorsteps of the privileged classes in Ireland. What was not known then was that this class would be obliterated by the

political turmoil of the revolutionary years as the Protestant and elite Anglo-Irish classes retreated from Ireland. Indeed, between 1911 and 1926 the Protestant population of the twenty-six counties that were to become independent of British rule declined from 10 per cent to 7 per cent with an overall loss of 106,000 people, the biggest population movement in twentieth-century Irish history.¹⁹ Thus the efforts by upper-class women to prove their loyalty to the Crown via wartime philanthropy became grossly out of step with the sentiments of the vast majority of people who wished for greater political distance from the British establishment. This experience, however, was replicated globally by women of means: Olga Shnyrova, for example, has argued that the sending of letters and small presents to soldiers, the establishment of hospitals and the collection and production of clothes, bandages and medicines were 'the social and charitable obligations of upper- and middle-class women' in pre-revolutionary Russia and manifest themselves even more prominently in wartime.²⁰

The essays in this special issue cast light on the distinctly Irish experiences that were dictated by the complexities of Ireland's early twentieth century. Diane Urquhart's article describes the role of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC) in militarised pre-war Ulster, a group of women who have been described as 'more extensively organised than their nationalist counterparts'.²¹ While unionist women in the early twentieth century raised funds, electioneered, and participated to some extent in intelligence gathering, they also organised first aid, established medical training schemes, and secured medical equipment in anticipation of civil war in Ireland due to the passing of the 1912 Home Rule Bill which was due to come into force, after a delay by the House of Lords, in 1914. Medical skills that were developed in the Ulster Volunteer Force's (UVF) Nursing Corp lest civil war

should break out, were put to use in the UVF hospital in Ville de Pau, Cabinet du Maire, in France. Women stepped into such non-combatant roles in order to free men for active military service, thus extending and reinforcing the idea of gendered spheres within a war arena. Urquhart's research also emphasises regional differences. The Women's Legion, for instance, visually distinct in their uniforms, were not necessarily appreciated, particularly outside Ulster where they were regarded as British. This particular political aspect adds a further layer to the criticism of women in uniform seen outside Ireland.²² The cross-class, non-political and non-denominational character of the Legion may also not have been appreciated in historiography thus far, yet the union of women of different political and religious persuasions into war work was itself an achievement in an Ireland riven by such divisions. In County Clare, as O'Riordan notes, Lady Inchiquin's support of charitable war work was at odds with the views of the Catholic Church and neighbours in her locality. The work of these women also reveals some of the contemporary gender biases of wartime Britain and Ireland. O'Riordan demonstrates that women were not usually regarded as efficient financial managers or administrators of charitable funds, and that men typically undertook such responsibilities despite the prominent roles that women had played in raising the monies.²³ Neither were these women typically seeking to go beyond what was socially permitted for women of their era; this was simply a different application of a long-standing commitment by middle-and upper-class women to feminine philanthropic work that would allow them to express loyalty and pro-British and pro-war sentiments whilst firmly ensconced in culturally appropriate activities.

As Maria Luddy has argued elsewhere, nineteenth-century women became social activists because their philanthropic work led them to identify gender inequalities in Irish

society.²⁴ It was Irish women's suffrage activism that also brought some women to the battle field, and suffrage was one of the last uniting bonds between women otherwise deeply divided on the national question. The desire to demonstrate loyalty to Britain was not the only incentive for Irish women to move towards the warfront. Women such as Susanne Rouviere Day, discussed in this special issue by Sandra McAvoy, were motivated by their civic principles and a desire to contribute, to work more directly on or near the front lines. In the case of Day, this took the form of providing relief for displaced persons in France, after which, she concluded that it was women, not men 'who suffered the worst of all humiliations and agonies' in wartime.²⁵ Such an analysis complements recent scholarship by Caitriona Clear and Eileen Reilly on the roles of professional and voluntary nurses in tending to soldiers at the battlefields and convalescents at home.²⁶ The life and wartime work undertaken by Day also demonstrates some women's lust for a direct, physical experience of war as a form of titillation or excitement, for while her efforts in France can be traced both to pacifist and feminist beliefs, she also admitted to a desire to 'see the action' and to obtain war 'mementos' or trophies, such as shrapnel or a helmet. For Day as well as for other women, the glories of combat offered a potent attraction. Indeed this contribution further affirms Lee's argument that the war provided such volunteer women with 'an altered femininity that positioned them in the most masculine of spaces: the battlefield. Participation in war allowed some women to enter the citadel of masculine experience and enjoy opportunities and adventures otherwise off limits to them'.²⁷

Irish women's war work was not confined to charitable and caring roles in the immediate aftermath of battles. Deborah Thom's article on women's manual labour in the munitions factories in Ireland touches upon the opposite end of the class spectrum: the

economic opportunities provided by the war for Irish women to earn a living. However, Thom also points to the limits of such work, when most employment opportunities in Ireland were created for men, not women, during the war, and furthermore, that the war was only an intermittent break for women from the 'five Cs' (catering, cleaning, caring, clerking and cashiering) that characterised daily life for the majority. Thom thus confirms Clear's finding that the absence of conscription and widespread unemployment in Ireland meant that posts vacated by enlisting servicemen were filled by other men rather than by women.²⁸ The women who did assume such positions, she argues, were more resented in Ireland than in Britain. Therefore women's war work in Ireland, 'might have given individual women self-confidence and valuable experience, but its peculiar nature meant that the women who undertook it embarked upon the post-war years with the sense that paid work was either a privilege or an obligation but never a right.'²⁹ Nevertheless, as Thom argues, the war itself (and not the revolutionary period that followed) instituted changes in women's employment prospects that were sustained and expanded upon in the years to come, a factor often forgotten in the commemoration of the losses of troops or the celebration of nascent independence in Ireland.³⁰

As Thom also makes clear, the engagement of Irish women in supporting the British war effort through their labour was also impacted by the contemporaneous claims for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. While Fell and Sharp have considered the fracture of the international suffrage movement along patriotic lines as inevitable, the situation becomes even more complex in the case of Ireland.³¹ From the late nineteenth century, movements for women's rights emerged in Ireland as in Britain, but some organisations had the twin ambitions of liberating both 'their sex and their country' as

Senia Pařeta has argued.³² This proved an additional challenge to suffrage activism, along with the regional, class, and methodological tensions that threatened suffrage movements internationally.³³ Suffragists like Cork's Susanne Rouviere Day and Belfast's Mary Baker, were vocal in their insistence that the suffrage movement should be non-political, at least until the vote was won. The latter claimed that 'As suffragists we are to have a single aim until we have the vote – party politics and party concerns are not for us.'³⁴ Women in the suffrage movement in Ireland, however, were faced with a different dilemma than their English counterparts upon the outbreak of war. For some, as Pařeta argues in her article in this issue, the official line of the Irish Women's Franchise League was to resist the war on pacifist grounds, but the desire to 'do their bit' was difficult for some to resist. Thus debates on the politics and morality of war existed concomitantly with the arguments on entering a 'British', rather than Irish, conflict, and while these perspectives were very different, they resulted in a similar rejection of involvement in the First World War. In the midst of this, the issue of suffrage lingered, straining tensions across the political divide as independence for Ireland (and the threat of a subsequent civil war) inched ever closer as the war went on. If the war strained such attempted unity, the 1916 rebellion shattered it almost completely.

During the 1916 Rising the loyalties of individual women were tempted, tested and torn by the various suffrage, socialist and nationalist groups and agendas active in the early decades of the twentieth century. Urquhart demonstrates the significance of family connections in cementing women's involvement in political affairs but the presence of the same women in numerous organisations sheds additional light on female alliances and networks. That particular women feature repeatedly in nationalist, socialist and suffrage pressure groups also demonstrates the extent of their activism and the extent to which

allegiance lines were sometimes unclear. As Pařeta argues in this special issue, Cumman na mBan, for example, did not begin as a republican organisation and at the outset of the war it had 'an increasingly bewildering array of women's groups and initiatives in association with or in support of the Volunteers'.³⁵ Furthermore, this activism was not necessarily divided along class lines; a striking cross-class solidarity can be seen during the 1913 Dublin Lockout, for example, that would find echoes in the Rising three years later. Women's activism was, however, sometimes separate from that of their male counterparts. It seems that nationalist men had more difficulty in understanding how to utilise women than their Unionist 'foes'. Despite political differences, therefore, the distinctly female nationalist groups established during this period are in many ways comparable to the female unionist groups that emerged in Ulster.

Women featured in war posters of the period that played on perceptions of femininity and masculinity as explored by Thom, but individual women directly involved themselves in recruiting. The Unionist women, who feature in Urquhart's essay, actively solicited men to join the Ulster division, while titled women similarly vocalised support for enlistment. It appears that women as both motivators for war participation and emblems of the home front were tropes that operated as strongly in Ireland as elsewhere during this period. The difference, however, is the particular political context which in some quarters cast the war as having little to do with Ireland, and reconceived the 'enemy' to be the imperialist British state rather than the Kaiser's Germany due to the longstanding fight for political independence in Ireland. As well as participating in the armed insurrection, women formed the backbone of the movement for independence whilst their male counterparts were imprisoned over the next few years. Nationalist women thus sustained the rebellion in

Ireland after the failure of the 1916 uprising by collecting funds for the dependents of those killed or imprisoned, organising against conscription to the British army in Ireland and promoting the resurgent Sinn Féin political party. The latter would sweep the polls in the 1918 election and set Ireland on a new path towards independence.

Discussion thus far has focused on divisions and tensions, but there were also some commonly held assumptions as war broke out, particularly in relation to women's morality. Pařeta outlines three 'almost universally accepted ideas within the broader women's and social reform movements'³⁶ that had much ramifications in society, particularly in the ways in which they were incorporated into welfare provision for soldier's wives. These assumptions were: 'that public vice would increase during wartime'; that women, and especially younger, working-class women would be vulnerable to corruption and 'would pay a higher price than men for such moral laxity'; and that the streets, particularly of major cities, 'were unsafe for women of all classes'.³⁷ This indicates a perception that women had a particular social standing in Irish society but also had designated places and spaces. In considering women's presence in public houses and shebeens, the private, unlicensed venues that sold alcohol, Holly Dunbar draws attention to resolutions that attempted to reinforce what were or were not 'appropriate' public spaces for women. The extension of the separation allowance, the allowance given to women dependent on enlisted men, increased concerns about alcoholism among women. Pre-war gendered expectations that meant women of the landed class were to collect but not necessarily to administer charity funds found echoes in the wartime mistrust of women's management of their separation allowances. These concerns were exacerbated by contemporary class prejudices. Separation allowances were paid at a higher rate than widows' allowances, the argument being that

the former had to 'keep the home going for their husband's return, while widows were told they could move to somewhere cheaper'.³⁸ This was a literal interpretation by the government of the wartime sentiment of 'keeping the home fires burning' for troops doing their bit at the Front, and thus it might be supposed that the behaviour of such recipients was expected to be in line with, or morally worthy of, the remuneration received. As Lomas has highlighted, moralistic attitudes found their way into official government reports on wives and widows of soldiers: "'Delicate Duties' was the term used by the Ministry of Pensions to describe police reports on wives or widows suspected of being 'unworthy' to receive either a war widow's pension or a separation allowance'.³⁹ This issue came to prominence early in the war, with *The Times* reporting that a meeting chaired by Lady Jellicoe was to be held in the Guildhall in London in November 1914 on the subject of the drinking habits of soldier's wives.⁴⁰ The provision of remuneration during the war thus facilitated the policing and punishment of women's alleged sexual misbehaviour and alcohol consumption.⁴¹ Dunbar's contribution to this special issue demonstrates how concerns about women's sexual behaviour and alcohol consumption gathered momentum during the war era when fears that immoral behaviour was being funded by separation allowances were heightened by anxieties about Irish women consorting with soldiers.⁴² The war thus provided another context for class sensibilities about appropriate female behaviour.

Age has yet to emerge as a prominent category of analysis in Irish women's history. A woman's age and life-cycle at the time of war, as well as her class and marital status, impacted on her experiences. Leanne McCormick's article considers predominantly young, working-class women. Like Dunbar, she argues that the war increased fears about women's behaviour and led to efforts to control their activities in public spaces. Men's absence at the

war front, it was feared, provided women with a greater level of freedom to indulge in alcohol in Belfast, in common with fears about women across the major cities of the United Kingdom. Femininity was connected to sexual identity and behaviour, and fears about the consumption of alcohol were interwoven with worries about women's sexual conduct outside marriage. Concerns about the perceived sexual freedoms of youth would find further expression in later years.⁴³ Like the working-class, unmarried female subjects of McCormick's chapter, the leisure activities of the married working-class women whose husbands were away at war were often a cause for concern. McCormick uncovers contemporary desires to control such activity and to 'protect' unmarried working-class girls and women and 'save' them from ruin. She focuses in particular on the role of women's patrols in Belfast city. While these patrols had no authority to apprehend those whom they perceived to be misbehaving, they could lecture and caution, and, it seems, the women's patrols played on the notion that the words and actions of 'exemplary' woman would influence others to good. The transmission of social and moral mores from the upper echelons of society to the lower classes appears to have taken on a more urgent tone in the wartime period, when old certainties, and to some minds, traditional values, were crumbling.⁴⁴ A war on morals and behaviour raged on the streets of Belfast with women on both sides.

These scenes were re-enacted with nascent forms of women police in both Dublin and London during the war period. In London, for example, women trained by the Women Police Service (WPS) 'were employed by a combination of police forces, local authorities and voluntary groups during the war, although the vast majority supervised female workers in munitions factories'. Most were 'classified as ladies of private means or no profession', a

factor that reveals middle-class women's desire to be active, but also reinforces the class dimensions to such supervisory work.⁴⁵ The moralistic roots of the WPS can be seen in the fact that it was founded in 1914 by Margaret Damer Dawson, who had been previously involved in rescue work with the National Vigilance Association, a key player in welfare work at ports and stations and in providing assistance to unmarried mothers across Britain.⁴⁶ Women's policing in Belfast, like other cities, including Dublin, had its roots in social and moral purity reforms that emerged in the nineteenth century. More than 5,000 women became engaged in police work during the First World War.⁴⁷ Woodeson has questioned the role of such women in the regulation of others but she also highlights the fact that 'in common with other women workers who had encroached on traditionally male preserves, the women police found themselves forced out by dominant interests when peace-time conditions resumed'.⁴⁸

The maternal aspects of women's policing roles are evident in the work of Pařeta, and McCormick in this collection, as women provided help, guidance and a firm moral hand to those they deemed needed it; motherhood was a commonly used trope of war, as has been established by scholars worldwide. Proud mothers waved off husbands and sons in recruitment posters. Irish and British mothers, French 'godmothers of war' and Italian 'soldiers' godmothers' provided men at the front with emotional support and morale-boosting packages.⁴⁹ Policies were developed by the wartime British government to enable mothers to maintain their families in the absence of male breadwinners. However, Sarah-Anne Buckley's chapter on working-class mothers and children's welfare complicates this image of the war mother, as she points to the additional policing and punishment of mothers during the war. While motherhood had been monitored and policed since before

the establishment of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the late nineteenth century,⁵⁰ the outbreak of war and the provision of a separation allowance rendered child neglect a national concern. As Buckley argues, by 'looking inside the homes of the poor and working class, we address not only the disappointment, fear and self-denial that poverty and near-poverty had on women and the family, but the way in which this affected relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, families and the State'.⁵¹ The early twentieth century witnessed increased focus on poverty and measures such as the Children Act, 1908, and the Punishment of Incest Act, 1908, regulated children's welfare and created a greater legislative, and punitive, structure around child protection.⁵² But as Caitriona Clear has argued elsewhere, war was not necessarily beneficial to the wellbeing of working-class British or Irish women in industrialised areas because of the increase in working hours and the increase in food prices. Infant and maternal mortality increased during the war years and poor diet and poverty rendered women susceptible to disease.⁵³

In Culleton's analysis, the historical tendency to divide experiences of war 'into those who fought and those who waited' is less applicable than the separation between 'those who fought and those who worked, especially since the waiting was inevitably done by soldiers and noncombatants alike'.⁵⁴ The articles in this special issue each examine what diverse women were doing in Ireland during the war period, whether it was paid or unpaid work or leisure, or waiting, on news, money, charity, or opportunities.

Conclusion

The war years were tumultuous in Ireland. Indeed as Pašeta argues in this special issue, Ireland 'was the most politicized part of the United Kingdom over the war years'.⁵⁵ By the

end of 1918, the Ulster Unionist Council had accepted proposals for a six-county partition, the Easter Rising had changed the expectations of the majority of nationalists in Ireland who now embarked on a guerrilla war to obtain independence, and some women had been given the right to vote. This was an Ireland that was 'changed utterly' in Yeats' poignant words⁵⁶ and the war had 'cemented the notion of "two Irelands"', north and south.⁵⁷ For women, both the international conflict and the revolution within Ireland offered opportunities to contribute but the contrasts could not be more stark. While some women threw their energies behind the defence of Britain, others passionately worked for the independence of Ireland. In both cases, however, the activities took certain parallel functions: fund raising, propaganda, first aid and administrative support characterised the work of women areas across this divide. A more active military engagement by participating in drilling, or in a few cases, taking up arms is also characteristic of women on different sides of the political conflict. The Irish women examined in this collection came close to battle zones in Dublin and in France, experiences that would transform their lives in the post-war period. Rather than drawing simplistic or reductionist lines between 'Home Rulers' and 'Unionists', these essays taken together point to commonalities in women's experiences despite vast differences in political outlook. Women's activities in Ireland in the period of the First World War further reveal the complexities of the period for women and for Ireland.

At this concluding juncture it seems imperative to pose what Laura Doan has argued is the inevitable question for historians: what had the war changed for women in Ireland?⁵⁸ The war years witnessed change, but as Monger and others, have detailed, the extent to which this was influenced by the war remains debated.⁵⁹ The Representation of the People Act, albeit limited to women over the age of thirty who had particular educational or

property qualifications, brought a hard-fought alteration in politics. Women now wielded political power as voters and thus could no longer be ignored by politicians. The UWUC, Urquhart shows in this edition, for example were now invited to political meetings from which they had previously been excluded. Clearly, women's patriotic service in the British and Irish Isles during the war period advanced the cause of suffragists to extend civic rights to women in the public realm. Some of the women involved in the suffrage campaign turned their attention and energies towards other social reform endeavours in the aftermath of war. Such changes to the electoral register also had impacts elsewhere in public life. Temperance societies, Dunbar argues, continued to appeal to women to combat the perceived rise of alcohol abuse. Financial support was given to women standing in county council and poor law elections after March 1919.

However, these transformations should not be overstated. Women were not necessarily welcome in the political arena and often concessions were given reluctantly or partially. For instance, the UWUC was not consulted on partition in 1921 and, despite their active role as political organisers and as revolutionaries, many of the nationalist women were to be sorely disappointed by the independent Ireland for which they had fought. This was not a unique experience; women across Europe had to contend with 'post-war societies [which] were indeed overwhelmingly characterised by a desire for stability and the need for regeneration which tended to position women once more in a domestic, maternal role'.⁶⁰ Despite this, in some areas such as employment, the opportunities created by the war period were not entirely closed off afterwards, and some would be reopened in the Second World War on a greater scale.⁶¹ The war was thus neither 'good' nor 'bad' for women, but it inevitably resulted in change in Ireland that affected women of various ages, classes, marital

and familial statuses, religions and political affiliations. As Monger has suggested in a British context, ‘historians need not be torn between interpretations of a watershed, a rededication or a renegotiation—women’s experiences could incorporate all of these things.’⁶² There was no hegemony of experience; each woman had her ‘own’ war.

¹ Michael Laffan, John Edward Redmond, in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* database, available at dib.cambridge.org.

² Fearghal McGarry (2010) *The Rising: Ireland, Easter 1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 79.

³ *Ibid*, p. 81.

⁴ John Horne, Our war, our history, in John Horne (Ed.) (2008) *Our War: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy), p. 3.

⁵ Keith Jeffery (2011), *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 6.

⁶ David Fitzpatrick, Home front and everyday life, in Horne (Ed.), *Our War*, p. 138.

⁷ [Reference to Pašeta article in this issue.](#)

⁸ Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart, Introduction, in Gillian McIntosh & Diane Urquhart (Eds.) (2010) *Irish Women At War: the twentieth century* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press), p. xix.

⁹ Tammy Proctor (2005) ‘Patriotism is Not Enough’: women, citizenship, and the First World War, *Journal of Women’s History*, 17(2), pp 169-76, p. 170.

¹⁰ Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*, p. 29.

¹¹ This Act legislatively separated Ireland into two jurisdictions: six of the nine Ulster counties became Northern Ireland, with the remaining twenty-six counties forming the Free State, which would eventually become the Republic of Ireland.

¹² Adrian Gregory & Senia Pašeta, Introduction, in Adrian Gregory & Senia Pašeta (Eds.) (2002) *Ireland and the Great War: ‘a war to unite us all’?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 1.

¹³ Alison S. Fell & Ingrid Sharp (2007), Introduction: The Women’s Movement and the First World War, in Alison S. Fell & Ingrid Sharp (Eds.), *The Women’s Movement in Wartime: international perspectives, 1914-19* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 13-14.

¹⁴ [Reference to Dunbar article in this issue.](#)

¹⁵ Maria Luddy (1995) *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

¹⁶ [Reference to O’Riordan article in this issue.](#)

¹⁷ Eileen Reilly, Women and Voluntary War Work, in Gregory and Pašeta (Eds.) *Ireland and the Great War*, p. 49.

¹⁸ [Reference to O’Riordan article in this issue.](#)

¹⁹ Johanne Devlin Trew (2013) *Leaving the North: migration and memory, Northern Ireland 1921–2011* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 40.

²⁰ Olga Shnyrova, Feminism and Suffrage in Russia: Women, War and Revolution 1914-1917, in Fell & Sharp (Eds.) *The Women’s Movement in Wartime*, p. 127.

²¹ Senia Pašeta (2013) *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 19.

²² Susan R. Grayzel (2014) The Role of Women in the War, in Hew Strachan (Ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition), pp. 156-7.

²³ [Reference to O’Riordan article in this issue.](#)

²⁴ Maria Luddy (2007), Introduction, in Louise Ryan & Margaret Ward (Eds.), *Irish Women and the Vote: Becoming Citizens* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press), p. xv.

²⁵ [Reference to McAvoy article in this issue.](#)

²⁶ Caitriona Clear, Fewer Ladies, More Women, in Horne (Ed.) *Our War*, pp. 161-4; Reilly, Women and Voluntary War Work.

²⁷ Janet Lee (2006) A Nurse and a Soldier: gender, class and national identity in the First World War adventures of Grace McDougall and Flora Sandes, *Women’s History Review*, 15(1), p. 84.

²⁸ Clear, Fewer Ladies, More Women, p. 165.

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- ²⁹ Ibid, p. 170.
- ³⁰ Reference to Thom's article in this issue.
- ³¹ Fell & Sharp, Introduction, p. 1.
- ³² Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, p. 16.
- ³³ For a discussion of racial issues in the US suffrage campaign, see Nell Irvin Painter (2002) *Voices of Suffrage: Sojourner Truth, Frances Watkins Harper, and the struggle for woman suffrage*, in Jean H. Baker (Ed.), *Votes for Women: the struggle for suffrage revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 42-55; Marjorie Julian Spruill (2002) *Race, Reform, and Reaction at the Turn of the Century: Southern suffragists, the NAWSA, and the "Southern strategy" in context*, in Baker (Ed.) *Votes For Women*, pp. 102-117; Marjorie Spruill Wheeler (1993) *New Women of the New South: the leaders of the woman suffrage movement in the Southern states* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), especially chapter 4.
- ³⁴ *Irish Citizen*, 8 February 1913, cited in Myrtle Hill (2007) *Ulster: Debates, Demands and Divisions: the battle for (and against) the vote*, in Ryan & Ward (Eds.) *Irish Women and the Vote*, p. 220.
- ³⁵ Reference to Pašeta in this special issue
- ³⁶ Senia Pašeta (2014) 'Waging War on the Streets': the Irish Women Patrol, 1914-22, *Irish Historical Studies*, 39(154), p. 253.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Janis Lomas, 'Delicate Duties': issues of class and respectability in government policy towards the wives and widows of British soldiers in the era of the Great War, *Women's History Review*, 9(1), p. 129.
- ³⁹ Ibid, p. 139, footnote 1.
- ⁴⁰ This was described as a 'meeting of women' with speakers including Lady Willoughby de Broke, Dr Mary Scharlieb, Mrs Bramwell Booth, and Mrs Sidney Webb. *The Times*, 19 November 1914.
- ⁴¹ Susan R. Grayzel (2010) *Women and Men*, in John Horne (Ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), p. 268.
- ⁴² Reference to Thom's article in this issue.
- ⁴³ Leanne McCormick (2011) *Regulating Sexuality: women in twentieth-century Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- ⁴⁴ For an analysis of lesbian rhetoric during this period, see Deborah Cohler (2010) *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), chapter 4.
- ⁴⁵ Maureen Scollan (2014) Gladys Lilian King and the Work of the Women Police in London's Strand 1918-19: a memoir, *Women's History Review*, 23(2), p. 257.
- ⁴⁶ Damer Dawson's co-founder was Nina Boyle, a feminist journalist. For more see Scollan, Gladys Lilian King. For more on the National Vigilance Association and their work with Irish women at ports and stations, see Jennifer Redmond (2008) 'Sinful Singleness'? Exploring the discourses on Irish single women's emigration to England, 1922-1948, *Women's History Review*, 17(3), pp. 455-76.
- ⁴⁷ Alison Woodeson (1993) 'The First Women Police: a force for equality or infringement?', *Women's History Review*, 2(2), pp 217-32.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 218.
- ⁴⁹ Grayzel, *The Role of Women in the War*, pp. 159-60.
- ⁵⁰ See Elaine Farrell (2013) *'A Most Diabolical Deed': infanticide and Irish society, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- ⁵¹ Reference to Buckley's article in this issue.
- ⁵² Ciara Breathnach (2005) *The Congested Districts Board of Ireland, 1891-1923: poverty and development in the west* (Dublin: Four Courts Press). For more on legislative change during this period, see Sarah-Anne Buckley (2011) 'Family and Power: incest in Ireland, 1880-1950', in Ciara Breathnach, Liam Chambers, Catherine Lawless & Anthony McElligott (Eds), *Power in History: from Medieval Ireland to the post-modern world* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press), pp 185-206; Sarah-Anne Buckley (2011) 'Found in a "Dying" Condition': nurse children in Ireland, 1872-1952, in Elaine Farrell (Ed.), *'She Said She Was in the Family Way': pregnancy and infancy in modern Ireland* (London: Institute of Historical Research), pp. 145-62.
- ⁵³ Clear, *Fewer Ladies, More Women*, pp 165-7.
- ⁵⁴ Claire Culleton (1997) *Irish working-Class Women and World War 1*, in Susan Shaw Sailer (Ed.), *Representing Ireland: gender, class, nationality* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), p. 156.
- ⁵⁵ Reference to Pašeta in this special issue.

⁵⁶ William Butler Yeats, Easter 1916, 'first published in 1916, in "an edition of 25 copies 'privately printed by Clement Shorter for distribution among his friends', and subsequently in the *New Statesman* (23 October 1920)' according to CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts: a project of University College, Cork College Road, Cork, Ireland—<http://www.ucc.ie/celt>, digital edition available at <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E910001-057.html>

⁵⁷ Gregory and Pašeta, Introduction, p. 4.

⁵⁸ In this journal Doan has argued for greater complexity in our explorations of women's experiences, and that 'the preoccupation with "change" has delimited our understanding of how gendered subjects experienced war by restricting the kinds of questions we have been able to pose'. See Laura Doan (2006) A Challenge to 'Change'? New Perspectives on Women and the Great War, *Women's History Review*, 15(2), pp. 337-43. The articles in this special issue attempt to explore the particular circumstances of the war in Ireland and its repercussions for women, not simply in terms of social change but also in terms of their role in the new political landscape that emerged after the war.

⁵⁹ David Monger (2014) Nothing Special? propaganda and women's roles in late First World War Britain, *Women's History Review*, 23(4), pp. 519-20

⁶⁰ Fell & Sharp, Introduction, p. 16.

⁶¹ For more on this point, see for example Gail Braybon & Penny Summerfield (1987) *Out of the Cage: women's experiences in two world wars* (New York: Routledge and Keegan Paul).

⁶² Monger, Nothing Special? p. 520.