

## The Role of Women in a Man's War

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The 1916 Easter Rising disseminated a nonexclusive tragedy which impacted the whole world. Propaganda circulated within political and social spheres, serving as a driving force for both Ireland and Britain. Propaganda marinated in a widely accepted notion that conventional military tactics would not win the war, allowing characterization of the rising to each country's respective affinity. The Irish perspective centered on survival and raw blunt force, whereas the British focused on the virtue of conflict and empire. Nonetheless, women were largely represented poorly in proliferating propaganda pieces. Although the Irish and the British maintained opposing views of the 1916 conflict, both sides exploited women imagery to support their masculine vision.

Propaganda stimulates others to accept assertions without challenge. A working definition of "propaganda" is "the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person" (Manzaria and Bruck). In essence, propaganda exists to draw the public eye and excite supporters. Wartime propaganda popularized the narrative that cast women into traditional roles of "guardians of the home" and further, as trophies requiring protection. Undertones of WWI themes, such as honor, way of life, and protection of women, readily appear in propaganda produced during the 1916 conflict. Propaganda of all forms segregated women from directly engaging in the conflict. Instead, they indirectly supported the conflict with "their gentle nature and vulnerability making them both objects of men's affections and victims of the enemy's barbarous acts" (Fox, 2014, p. 14). The psychology that drives modern ideals of women is rooted in common past perceptions. While Britain and Ireland both manipulated women illustrations, propaganda was tailored respectively to each country's objective.

The advertising of the Easter Uprising was a "discreet footman trying to catch attention with a quiet cough" (Brown, 2016). Propaganda played a critical role in motivating and mobilizing supporters in Ireland. For the Irish, it served as a beckoning call to protect the country's freedom from oppressive British rule. However, the effort was largely prompted by the sheer masculinity which fueled the uprising. The Irish perspective was exclusively survival, more than just liberation of men and women. They intended rather a "principled, heroic gesture to reawaken the spirit of militant nationalism among the apparently apathetic masses, an aspiration that explains their preoccupation with symbolic and dramatic gestures" (McGarry, 2014). Therefore, propaganda produced by Irish rebels rarely featured women. Instead posters fixate on men devoted to the fight. Themes of strength and heroism dominated the rebellion narrative. One image, published by the *Irish Life* magazine, depicts an Irish soldier raising the Irish flag in one hand and a rifle in the other while standing on a defeated British flag framed with the words, "Ireland first, and Ireland last, and Ireland overall." This particular ad is a great example of "the type of propaganda used to promote the war effort in Ireland" (Mawe, 2015). It illustrates rebellion as a masculine effort reinforcing women in a supporter role from the home. Another image flaunts the fragility of women. Men in uniforms arranged in trenches encircle a floating woman waving the Irish flag. Her white, cascading gown symbolizes purity of the Irish intentions; to rule their own land. The men surrounding her highlight the Irish consensus that men are the protectors. The propaganda that advocated the conflict only featured men in uniforms holding guns suppresses proper recognition of the axillary service women provided.

The Easter Rising is remembered as the pivotal event in the struggle for Irish independence. However, for the British, the Rising was a calamity. The Easter Rising "precipitated the independence of one corner of the UK, led on to the partition of Ireland and the Troubles and emboldened British colonies elsewhere to seek their freedom," in turn hastening the end of the British empire (Irish Central, 2016). The conflict was necessary for the sake of virtue. That is, the virtue of empire and the virtue of civilizing the Irish. Women served as the embodiment of the nation's virtue and innocence; "the justice of its cause, and its determination to overcome the [rebels]" (Fox, 2014). Contrary to Irish rebellion the British used propaganda to protect the vitality of Ireland as part of their empire. One prominent postcard portrays a woman raising a gun and the Union Jack's asking the following question: "How is freedom measured?" The answer is stirring: "By the effort which it costs to retain freedom!" The answer positioned near the flag signifies Britain's justification of the conflict. This poster also exemplifies the proactive role of advertising women for an endearing pathos appeal to continue the fight. War is a necessity for the British to maintain control over Ireland. Even though British ad emphasis of women surpasses Ireland capitalizing on elegant and appealing illustrations ultimately emits a masculine sentiment embedded in war. Therefore, the British perpetuate the traditional role of women which influenced future propaganda.

Propaganda produced during the Easter Rising contributed to the narrative that percolated the perception of women throughout history. There are clear traces of women exploitation in women's suffrage movements from around the globe. Famous images affirming and negating women's suffrage all derived from the fragile and virtuous icon. Though Suffragettes argued that the mobilization of women proved active female participants in the war effort "were more worthy of citizenship than male pacifists or conscientious objectors" (Fox), the image of such women was obscured. Female nurses, who risked their lives to care for the troops at the front, were still described in gendered terms such as "carers, sisters or angels." Inversely, munitions workers were simultaneously depicted as capable of demanding physical labor and as compromising their maternal instincts. Jo Fox proposes the question, "How to reconcile the paradox that the same women who made the bullets and shells, responsible for the deaths of so many, would also be the mothers of the next generation?" The same narrative that influenced past propaganda imposed and crippled future movements that sought to deminish such notions.

The exploitation of women differed in each side of the fight. The British manipulated feminine imagery for the public to aspire to. However, the Irish rebels used images of men fighting for women to inspire the citizens. Although both countries utilized women imagery in contrasting ways, the exploitation of women furthered the narrative that kept women on the sidelines. This narrative embedded societal beliefs within historical suffrage movements and led to the present-day calls for equality.

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