

Moral Norms and Values

By [Gearóid Barry](#)

Summary

Change and continuity marked belligerent societies' norms and values during the First World War. Normative institutions such as marriage and the family proved basically resilient but "fatherlessness" propelled anxieties about unruly youth who asserted greater autonomy in terms of leisure and courtship. Non-marital relationships received pragmatic state recognition withheld before the war. Rhetoric of sacrifice and restraint, backed up by law, ordained norms for personal consumption, as seen in the regulation of alcohol and of sexuality, just as a coarse egalitarianism drove attacks on profiteering. The civilian-soldier distinction weakened with state-sanctioned repression of dissenters and anti-imperial revolts. Mass violence permeated societies and expanded the categories of expendable lives even if humanitarian mobilization salved some wounds.

Table of contents

- [1 Introduction](#)
- [2 War, Family, Authority, and Normative Assumptions](#)
- [3 Personal Conduct, Sexuality and the Regulation of Morality](#)
- [4 Abstinence, Alcohol, Values, and Consumption](#)
- [5 'Fairness', Social Morality, and the Distribution of Resources](#)
- [6 Mass Violence, Mass Death, and Social Norms](#)
- [7 Conclusion](#)
- [Notes](#)
- [Selected Bibliography](#)
- [Citation](#)

Introduction

The effects of the First World War on the [norms and values of civilians](#), [combatants](#), and social groups that made up belligerent nations in wartime were multiple and ambiguous. As this survey of the major European combatant powers shows, the war affected perceptions of the "transgressive," from the fighting front to the home front. Structural factors such as class, gender, political ideology, and [religion](#) helped and hindered values change. The concept of habitus elaborated by sociologist [Pierre Bourdieu \(1930-2002\)](#) can help to understand such an ebb and flow of norms and values in First World War Europe. Habitus, thought of as the web of explicit and implicit assumptions inhabited by individuals and social

groups, provides a framework within which this essay considers five major themes, ranging from [sexual ethics](#) to acceptable forms of violence in society. We begin by considering the disruption of family life and its ripple effects on parental authority, on the social codes of behaviour for [children](#) and how the absence of many fathers affected this.

The second section is also concerned with the growing autonomy of youth in wartime and how this impacted the sexual mores of youth and other social groups. Separate but related moral panics occurred with regard to armies, [prostitution](#), and [venereal disease](#). In a similar vein, the valorisation of self-restraint – in what one consumed, drank, or even [smoked](#) – is at the heart of the third section which shows how this resonated well with the volunteer ethic of wartime, especially in [Britain](#) and [Ireland](#). Relations between consumers, the private market, and the state also had their own norms of fairness which we consider in a fourth section. As well as being an economic reality, “[profiteers](#)” were also a symptom of a sense of unfairness. In a fifth and final section we consider the subtle ways in which the transgressive violence of the First World War, as [Heather Jones](#) terms it, in turn altered norms concerning the punishment of military indiscipline, anti-imperial agitation, and [revolution](#). Wartime [humanitarianism](#) provided a counterpoint to these trends. Nonetheless, with its brute egalitarianism, the war coarsened norms and implicitly marked out categories of expendable lives.

War, Family, Authority, and Normative Assumptions

Any consideration of the question of the war’s impact on authority relationships within Europe’s families should begin by recognizing the basic resilience of the family as a social unit and a focus of attachment in the face of the upheaval of war and during its uncertain aftermath. With some degree of adaptation, the bonds of marriage and kinship, even if they had been alternately burdensome or solacing in the pre-war world, generally endured and provided a framework for reintegration into normality afterwards. As [Martha Hanna](#) notes, the number of married couples who divorced at the end of the war – in those jurisdictions where civil divorce was permitted – did indeed increase but overwhelmingly married men returned home to their womenfolk and children. Of course, even where divorce was allowed by law it was often out of reach of many couples for financial reasons or for reasons of stigma. A fear of British soldiers returning to terrorize their women and children was recurrent in 1919-20 and some indeed acted like this, as [Maureen Healy](#) shows in the case of Vienna.¹ Nonetheless, even taking into account other forms of informal or de facto separation, couples (and their families) generally lived with varying degrees of contentment in reunited households, their circumstances varying with economic resources and the degree of physical or [psychological injury](#) inflicted upon the returning soldier. Authority relationships within families were, however, often tested by the First World War. The relationship revolved not

just around the question of the authority of the father but also that of the mother in relation to children and dependents; the enforced absence of fathers for long periods was acutely felt at the time and had an impact on the norms and values relating to youth. The injunction to obey and respect elders was tested even to breaking point by the circumstances of the war, most especially in the cases of the Central Powers from 1916 on as economic crisis gripped the home front.

First, to the question of marriage and the war. Cathérine Rollet considers that in the case of London, Paris, and Berlin, “family and household structure was profoundly disturbed by war.”² A high proportion of conscript soldiers were themselves married, reckoned at more than half in the French case, at least a third, if not more, in German and Italian armies and over 40 percent in the case of the Habsburg Empire.³ Even before [conscription](#) in 1916, some British fathers had volunteered. More poignantly still, the war as a whole left an estimated six million orphans across the world, one million each in the cases of [France](#) and [Germany](#) alone.⁴ In some parts of Europe, especially in the poorer [rural peripheries](#), women might well have been already used to a pattern of seasonal migration by menfolk. [Urban](#) or rural, not all husbands were loving and responsible or were equally missed. For the war’s duration at least, fathers were generally absent for long periods, amidst the continuing fear that they might not come back at all or come back incapacitated in some way. The absence of male authority figures, when combined with other factors, challenged traditional norms about youth behaviour, especially that of boys and male youths, even though the phenomenon was neither a uniquely urban nor male one.

At first, the separation of children from their fathers might have seemed to reinforce the idea of his authority and centrality in the life of the family. Fathers, who were normally expected to be firm but loving, were often moved at the moment of separation to more open displays of emotion which deeply affected the boys and girls who witnessed them. “The irruption of tears into the social space,” as [Manon Pignot](#) writes of these retrospective accounts, “constituted a first crack in the traditional social and emotional code of restraint.”⁵ As was the case for couples themselves, vast quantities of [letters](#) communicated fatherly concern and filial loyalty, in many ways acting to preserve and confirm the husband and father’s family role of paterfamilias, reinforcing discipline over children by backing the authority of the mother.⁶ Testamentary letters, written by soldiers for fear of death in military service and often deposited at home in case the worst happened, gave encouragement, advice, and instructions from beyond the grave. Mostly, it was economic considerations and competing influences on youths, in the form of peer pressure or new opportunities for earning money, that would thwart parental control. For a time at least, some youths gained practical freedom

from their parents thanks to the war.

In working-class families, the absence of fathers coincided with opportunities for teenage youths to earn more money by working in [war industries](#). Such opportunities varied with location and gender. As [Matteo Ermacora](#) shows for Friuli, the northeastern Alpine border region of [Italy](#) which was at first a [rear area](#) for the Italian army, there were deep local anxieties about war work's impact on peasant girls. Younger women, local priests wrote, though long used to hard physical work on the land, were now adopting "male" patterns of behaviour. Loosened parental control permitted girls to indulge in "bad language, provocative fashion styles, and, above all, sexual relationships with soldiers", according to this particular source.⁷ In the case of Germany, as [food](#) shortages hit hard from the time of the Turnip Winter of 1916-17 on, young women and girls were more likely to be kept at home by their mothers to help out on the [domestic front](#). Mothers had to spend more and more of their time queuing for [food](#) or eking out sources of fuel. In spite of wages actually declining in value, male youths with independent income became, in relative terms, better off than the mothers who increasingly depended on them. Whilst firstly concerned with the material needs of their own mothers and siblings, these young men also progressively claimed a right to consume and participate in commercial [leisure](#) and to do so in a less restrained manner than before the war. The bonds of authority that bound young children in Germany were also loosening. From 1915 on, the [education system](#) began to creak under the demands of wartime. War pedagogy (incorporating current great events) and charitable and patriotic mobilization ate up school time. When daily survival became a struggle from 1916-17 on, schools could indeed act as a refuge for worn-out children but there were also extended holidays to save on light and heat; classes were often taught by old or less qualified teachers who were themselves struggling to survive. Truancy soared. As [Andrew Donson](#) points out, the streets of German cities and towns were where urban children and youths now spent a large amount of the increasing free time they had, with a marked decrease in the amount of adult supervision in comparison with the years before 1914 not least because police forces were themselves thinly spread due to the conscription into the army of their members.⁸

Unsurprisingly, in these desperate circumstances, there was a considerable growth in juvenile delinquency. The juvenile courts that had been created before the First World War in Germany as a measure of social reform had at first recorded a fall in prosecutions at the beginning of the war owing to the alleged Spirit of 1914 and increase in social cohesion. From 1915 on, this unravelled. At first stealing props for war games, children increasingly stole to make up for shortages of essentials. Prosecutions of youths quadrupled and convictions of children doubled from 1914 to 1918 even if the overburdened police only pressed prosecutions for more serious cases.⁹ As the struggle for survival intensified, criminal gangs

or so-called “wild cliques” emerged which stole food and coal. Gangs of thirty to fifty boys, sometimes as young as twelve, were reported in Hamburg in March 1917.¹⁰ The sense of a wartime crisis of social norms was soon exacerbated by the violent street games and fantasies of middle-class male youths in Germany. When five schoolboys in Danzig stole extensively from their school to supplement their bomb-making activity, the prosecutor agreed that the abnormal times and “present war psychoses” meant their actions “could not be recognized as normal crimes.”¹¹ Shockingly for public opinion, a gang of fifty to sixty boys left a trail of criminal damage to businesses in the West Prussian resort and gambling town of Zoppot during its off-season in the spring of 1915. East Prussian refugees’ tales, the boys claimed, had incited them to play this “Russian” game. Problems with delinquency and restless youth were not confined to Germany but were also reported in the Austrian capital Vienna.¹² Runaways increased in number across Europe. Simultaneously, within the [Russian Empire](#), there was a dramatic rise in the number of crimes committed by minors, rising by 284 percent between 1910 and 1916.¹³

Personal Conduct, Sexuality and the Regulation of Morality

Norms and values surrounding personal conduct and the regulation of sexuality were also influenced by wartime. A wartime alteration in the norms surrounding courtship and youths’ sexuality was one such change. Andrew Donson argues that in the course of the war young men and women gradually “wrested control over a key rite of passage from adults and wrote the rules of courtship themselves.”¹⁴ Supervised courtship had been an important part of respectability before the war, particularly for the middle classes who operated a chaperoned calling system to protect the honour of all involved. Premarital sex was somewhat more tolerated in the working classes. The war undermined such conventions largely due to the increased burdens on at-home parents (i.e. mothers) and a decline in the policing of public spaces, where youths of both sexes could congregate. School authorities and conservative commentators in Berlin were shocked at the lewd undertones of such gatherings but neither they, nor the official *Sittenpolizei* or moral police who patrolled public spaces, were effective at preventing them. The lowering of the conscription age from twenty to eighteen conferred new status on teenage boys as did allowing sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds to volunteer for the army. In the case of uniformed male youths, visible affection with girls, even with girls younger than themselves, such as kissing in public, was generally tolerated but not encouraged in a departure from pre-war norms.¹⁵ The equivalent scare in Britain occurred in the early part of the war and was tagged as “khaki fever” when fear took hold that young women were engaged in licentious behaviour on the home front with trainee soldiers. In

response to this, women police patrols were introduced.¹⁶

The linked issue of so-called “war babies” brought the question of non-marital children into sharp focus. As [Susan R. Grayzel](#) points out, pro-natalist anxieties, which predated the war in many societies, when combined with wartime jingoism, could trump traditional morality. The press and public opinion implied that the recourse to consensual sex to reward men was inherently patriotic and good, though it should be practised preferably within the confines of marriage. Where pregnancies resulted in the birth of non-marital children (deemed “illegitimate” in the eyes of the law and of contemporary moral codes), a wartime debate arose in Britain over whether to condemn or to condone the phenomenon. The mere fact of the debate was itself a wartime deviation from peacetime codes of respectability even if, in practice, working-class families, for instance, had often demonstrated a degree of pragmatism on such matters. The [French government](#) also faced such challenges: it was flexible enough to allow marriage by proxy and even posthumous marriage for soldiers and women when the prior died leaving non-marital children, the new law regularizing the women and children’s status and consequently easing their access to state entitlements after the war.¹⁷

The competing forces of traditional morality and wartime expediency were clearly at work in the case of Berlin schoolmistress Margarethe Lichey. When she became an unmarried mother in 1915, because of an affair with a married fellow teacher, Lichey lost her livelihood, before being reemployed as a teacher later in the war owing to the shortage of qualified professionals. Such practical tolerance would have been doubtful in peacetime.¹⁸ Though the number of all births declined in wartime Berlin, the proportion of births outside of wedlock remained constant at 22-23 percent. In London the proportion of non-marital births rose slightly from a low base of 4 percent before the war to 5.4 percent by 1917. Parisian rates of illegitimacy went from about a quarter at the start of the war to almost a third by 1917. The disruption the war wrought in the birth rate was itself a major concern for governments: a German [government](#) commission recommended to [Wilhelm II, German Emperor \(1859-1941\)](#) in 1917 that more crèches be provided and that errant fathers be pursued more aggressively for maintenance. Such policies indicate a passive toleration of non-marital births – for the greater demographic good.¹⁹

If, as Susan Grayzel argues, the taboo surrounding birth out of wedlock weakened in wartime, such a modification of mores was highly conditional, not universal and was liable to reversal. There were on-again off-again wartime moral panics about sexuality, but they were articulated largely around issues such as state allowances to non-marital spouses and concerns over moral and public hygiene associated with prostitution, the threat of venereal

disease, and the spectre of the (usually male) homosexual “other.” The payment of separation allowances, meanwhile, to the women and children of all men who enlisted, irrespective of the legal status of the couple’s union, was a pragmatic recognition of lived reality by [governments](#). As Martha Hanna points out, conscription regimes in France, Germany, and Italy obliged the state to assist the families of those it compelled to enlist. By extension, in Britain and her Dominions which were at first wholly reliant on volunteers, a failure to introduce such measures would have proven a major disincentive to the voluntary enlistment of fathers and men in stable relationships, legal or not. Such passive toleration of cohabitation was controversial however and occasioned protests in [Canada](#) and Italy, amongst other nations. For British aristocrat Lord Middleton ([Godfrey Willoughby, 10th Baron Middleton \(1847-1924\)](#)), giving welfare to common law wives “[struck] at the heart of morality.”²⁰ Thus the British system of separation was underpinned by a degree of moral policing of wives’ fidelity to men at war (and of alleged frivolity). Susan Pedersen’s research into state investigations of separation shows that the authorities opened 41,836 cases for alleged misconduct in the period 1916-20 culminating in the stopping of allowances for some 13,418 women who, in turn, represented about 1 percent of all women receiving such allowances.²¹ The work of [women in factories](#) was also subjected to moralistic inspection by women of a higher class status, be they women welfare supervisors introduced in Britain in 1915-16 or the French equivalent *surintendantes*. “Lady supervisors”, as they were known in the British case, could be a benign presence in some cases, helping women to balance competing demands and standing up for them to bullying male overseers. As Laura Lee Downs observes, a concern with moral hygiene marked supervisors’ work: the protection of women’s health occurred with one eye on the future bearing of children so that women’s work did not undermine the dominant maternalist norms and expectations in society.²²

The war’s effects on the norms concerning homosexuality appear ambivalent but their essentially punitive nature endured. Male comradeship in arms made the policing of acceptable boundaries of homosocial attachments all the more pressing. The [Noel Pemberton Billing \(1881-1948\)](#) libel trial in London in May-June 1918 fed a moral panic about untrustworthy “sexual perverts” who were easily bent to the enemy’s will. On the other hand, [Jason Crouthamel](#) has shown how, in the case of the German army, there was some practical tolerance of male intimacy as an antidote to the strain of wartime, provided certain norms were not openly flouted. In addition, as Lisa Z. Sigel shows, male fantasies of mimicking female attributes or the performance of cross-dressing entertainments, amongst prisoners of war, for example, are too easily dismissed as humour but in fact provided respite from the norms of hegemonic [masculinity](#).²³

A final area in which norms and values about sex were tested by the war related to the issue

of prostitution, the use of prostitutes by soldiers and the associated issue of venereal disease. The wartime recourse to prostitutes by soldiers was assuredly not new in the First World War. In a war where so many married men were mobilized and where cultural mobilization of society often stressed the purity of the national cause, however, the widespread toleration of prostitution in the vicinity of the fighting front, but also in zones behind the front lines and near home-front depots, was bound to heighten fears of national debasement. Some military establishments were less torn on this issue and more permissive than others, even if all in the end were obliged to show some pragmatism. The French *maisons tolérées* or regulated brothels stood at one end of the policy spectrum whereas the more prim American military hierarchy pursued an official policy in July 1918 of preventing men frequenting prostitutes altogether. Women who were not prostitutes per se but who were desperate for cash, food, or companionship might also have sex with soldiers in regions where they were stationed. Zones of [occupation](#), such as Brussels, were home to large-scale prostitution, yielding heartrending instances of young women and girls being exploited.²⁴ In spite of its high-minded objective, the American army, like other armies, felt obliged to combat sexually-transmitted disease in a tacit admission that total suppression of prostitution was impractical. The challenges of prostitution and of venereal disease (VD) entwined home front and war fronts across the porous borders between them; soldiers on leave might make for cities like Paris, or, in the case of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean theatres, Cairo or Alexandria, in a manner that aided the transfer of norms (as well as the spread of disease). The so-called Wassa riot in the red-light district of Cairo on Good Friday 1915 occurred when [ANZAC](#) soldiers on leave ransacked the area in anger at bad liquor and diseased prostitutes. Embarrassing for military authorities and shocking for respectable opinion at home, the incident resulted, tellingly, in few punishments for men but rather in stricter controls on brothels. Overall, men risked punishment not so much for using prostitutes but for doing so irresponsibly. Failure to undergo the recommended treatment at official prophylactic stations after the fact left a soldier open to court-martial. Women in Britain who had VD were liable to prosecution under the Defence of the Realm Act and other regulations for having sex with a soldier. The families of British soldiers who contracted VD were made to suffer by means of the cutting of family allowances for the duration of his hospitalization. This immiseration of the innocent increased the penalty for unregulated sexual activity by soldiers to include public shame of the family.²⁵ Overall, it would appear as if wartime norms and values incorporated something of a traditional double standard in relation to men and women's sexual transgressions. Men were punished usually only when sating their sexual desire threatened military cohesion by means of disease. The supreme value in the realm of soldiers' sexuality therefore was the preservation of group health so that the maximum number of healthy men were available to fight and, if necessary, to die in pursuit of military objectives.

Abstinence, Alcohol, Values, and Consumption

Aside from sexual morality, wider issues arose in wartime societies about self-control and the moral value of temperance and the consumption of alcohol, food and leisure. At first, in August 1914, societies seemed to have purged themselves of what seemed like frivolous or sordid pleasures. Most people refrained from acts of conspicuous consumption and in Berlin a ban on dancing and variety shows operated. However, in the German case, from 1915 on, youths with wages that were high relative to others were in a position to consume leisure again and craved the chance to do so. As Andrew Donson argues, “pleasure” was a means of asserting adult status prematurely. Stories of conspicuous consumption circulated often relating to young men’s consumption of tobacco and alcohol. The “swagger” of working-class youths now with the money to be consumers themselves offended middle-class sensibilities based on discretion and thrift. One rural Bavarian adult remarked that the younger generation was getting “cheekier and more immoral.”²⁶ Similar reactions greeted the increased spending power of female munitions workers in Britain and France. In reaction the military commanders in specific areas of Germany took measures to curb commercial leisure for such youths, measures which enjoyed broad support from the adult population, except from those commercial interests directly affected. Beginning in Kassel in October 1915, local military commanders invoked the Prussian State of Siege to ban youths from pubs and [cinemas](#). Munich and Hamburg followed suit with bans on youths smoking. Predictably, these efforts had mixed results and some bans were reversed. Encouraged by public complaints at their having too much money and too little sense, the authorities decided in 1916 to strike directly at young workers’ income by introducing a compulsory savings scheme for wage-earners who earned in excess of 24 marks a month. The state was admitting that parents’ wise counsel or commands were no longer heeded. The reaction to these *Sparzwänge* or savings plans was furious and, remarkably, young workers in Braunschweig and Hanover managed to reverse the authorities’ plans by means of a sympathetic strike (which included clashes with the police) in May 1916.²⁷

The question of alcohol was a highly controversial one in various societies before the First World War and had been the reason behind a range of social reform movements under the banners of temperance or teetotalism. In wartime, the abuse of alcohol was deemed not only selfish but unpatriotic. Drink was not alone a waste of money, reformers declared, but it also had a negative effect on workplace productivity and led to accidents. Drink could also un-sex women, men of influence feared: “although it sounds horrid”, wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury, [Randall Davidson \(1848-1930\)](#), to Minister of War Lord [Herbert Horatio Kitchener \(1850-1916\)](#) in October 1914, working-class women were reportedly getting drunk on part of their separation allowances.²⁸ On the alcohol question there was an on-going tug-of-war

between the forces of volunteerism and compulsion, between those who wished to exhort self-restraint and those who saw fit to impose it by law. The forces of teetotalism were generally strongest in Anglophone combatant nations, Britain, her Dominions and the [United States](#), likely due to a combination of ideas of liberal reform and broadly Protestant cultures. In Anglophone Canada too, soldiers in training were being observed and judged by the wider public for their drink culture.²⁹ In the countries of wine-production, however, in France in particular, the culture of alcohol production was different and, in many cases, the local grape and vintage were cherished parts of local identity. With state help, the wine-producers around Béziers (in the Hérault department on France's Mediterranean coast) proudly shared part of their hard-won yield with the troops as a patriotic duty.³⁰ Completely counter-culturally, Tsar [Nicholas II \(1868-1918\)](#) closed down distilleries and banned vodka in the Russian Empire at the war's outset.³¹ The policy backfired due to widespread evasion, illegal distilling, and a collapse in tax revenue. Britain and the United States had the most effective anti-alcohol movements and saw the most intrusive state [regulation](#) of alcohol in wartime, culminating in the United States' experiment with a total ban known as Prohibition. Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution shortly after American entry into the war in 1917, swayed in part by arguments that while Americans sacrificed their bodies overseas all Americans should sacrifice drink. Ratified by the requisite thirty-six states by January 1919, it came into effect a year later.³²

Influenced in part by his Welsh Nonconformist Protestant background, [David Lloyd George \(1863-1945\)](#) – who served successively as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of Munitions, and from December 1916 as Prime Minister in wartime cabinets – was the political leader most prominently associated with the public policy drive for temperance in wartime. In April 1915, while still Chancellor, Lloyd George memorably declared at Westminster that “We [Great Britain] are fighting Germany, Austria and Drink, and the greatest of these three deadly foes is Drink.”³³ A spirit of voluntarism marked the British anti-alcohol campaign even if it was backed up by legal restrictions making alcohol harder to access. The announcement that King [George V \(1865-1936\)](#) would not drink (nor serve drink at his palaces) for the rest of the war helped make abstinence normative, not least when Anglican, Nonconformist, and Catholic religious leaders followed suit and encouraged the populace to do likewise. Women ran voluntary canteens offering men on leave wholesome fare and an alternative to the pub.³⁴ In policy terms, the [British government](#) set up a Central Control Board for the regulation of the liquor trade. Pub hours were reduced and “treating” – the buying of rounds of drink – was banned, resulting in an overall shift in the drinking behaviours of the British public.³⁵

In Ireland, still part of the United Kingdom in 1914, pre-existing confessional temperance movements amongst both Ulster Protestants and Irish Catholics encouraged abstinence as both a moral and patriotic duty. For Irish nationalists, resisting stereotypes in the English-speaking world about the “drunken Irish” was part of a strategy of proving Ireland worthy of self-government. The Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart, founded in Dublin in 1898, by Jesuit priest Fr [James Cullen \(1841-1921\)](#) enrolled Catholics who pledged not to drink and to make reparation for the sins occasioned by excessive drinking. Pledge-takers became known as “Pioneers” and wore a distinctive badge. One such Pioneer, Irish Jesuit priest [Willie Doyle \(1873-1917\)](#) sought out a role as chaplain to an Irish division of the British Army on the Western Front in 1915. Famously physically brave and devoted to men in distress on the battlefield, Doyle died at the Fourth [Battle of Ypres](#) on 16 August 1917, his body never being recovered: for his posthumous admirers, his belief in temperance was at one with his self-sacrifice on the battlefield.³⁶ The [Easter Rising](#) of 1916 transformed Irish nationalist politics marking a shift of nationalist opinion towards demands for independence from Britain rather than just self-government within the United Kingdom. Irish republicans could equally invoke abstinence as part of a nationalist identity. [Thomas Kent \(1865-1916\)](#), executed in Cork on 9 May 1916 for his part in the rebellion, took care to commit his temperance badge to the safekeeping of the army barracks chaplain as he faced the firing squad. Refusing the offer of a stimulant Kent reportedly declared: “I have been a total abstainer all my life and a total abstainer I’ll die. I have done my duty as a soldier of Ireland and in a few moments I hope to see the face of my God.”³⁷ Abstinence was consonant therefore with broader wartime tropes of [male patriotic sacrifice](#). Irishwomen too could be called to moral action. The prospect of female [suffrage](#), finally realised in restricted form in the Britain and Ireland in 1918, sharpened this appeal. The Protestant Belfast-based Ulster Temperance Council took out a large advertisement in the (Catholic nationalist) *Irish Independent* newspaper in advance of the December 1918 election urging women to use their vote to “win the war on drink,” and suggesting that drink was a worse danger to men than militarism as one destroyed bodies whereas drink “destroys men’s and women’s souls.”³⁸

Overall, the war increased the regulation of alcohol across the world, normally for reasons of military efficiency. Wartime alcohol control mostly occurred at the national level: an exception to this was a paternalistic regional system operated by European powers to restrict access to alcohol in the African colonies.³⁹ Mark Schrad has referred to a “global prohibition wave” catalysed by the war and cresting with the enactment of Prohibition in the United States in 1920 (where it lasted officially until 1933).⁴⁰ Tobacco, in contrast, attracted none of the same opprobrium. During the First World War, cigarettes went from being popular items

to patriotic ones, becoming the ubiquitous “gifts to the men.” Though acknowledged to be a luxury item, governments still went to considerable lengths to ensure supplies of tobacco products to soldiers and to war industry towns as cigarettes were viewed as an important accessory of distraction and thus of morale. Men found reason to fault the relatively novel sight of women smoking in public, a taboo that took time to disappear.⁴¹ In Germany, urban male youths’ smoking even attracted the authorities’ attention as part of a clampdown on conspicuous consumption by young workers, prompting complaints from tobacconists in Munich and Hamburg who had to enforce the age restriction.⁴² In the case of narcotics, such as the non-medicinal use of morphine and cocaine, the First World War induced a “drug scare” in Britain with concerns over the sale of [drugs](#) to Canadian troops at Folkestone and to soldiers in London’s West End. Worries about soldiers’ drug use brought drug control out of the colonial sphere and made it an urgent issue of national security in Britain, Germany, Canada, and other countries. Transnational supervision of international narcotics agreements under the new [League of Nations](#) resulted (as specifically provided for in Article 295 of the [Treaty of Versailles](#)).⁴³ The war had encouraged the intervention of the state and of international bodies to enforce norms of personal behaviour.

‘Fairness’, Social Morality, and the Distribution of Resources

The demands of modern industrial warfare involved a novel degree of cultural mobilization for war amongst combatant nations. The language of [sacrifice](#) itself was mobilized as part of what [John Horne](#) terms “a specifically wartime ‘social morality’ – or set of reciprocal moral judgements on the contribution of different groups to the national effort,” and one in which the state frequently ended up acting as arbiter between competing claims.⁴⁴ Accusations that some sectors of society were shielded from the risks of war, and that sacrifices for the common weal were not being properly shared, had the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the war effort and of the state itself. Peasants and middle-class observers often expressed resentment at skilled workers brought home from the front (or exempted from going there), in order to carry out work in vital war industries, under military discipline, at home. The norms and values of wartime societies both reflected, and helped shape, the hostility displayed towards those who profited excessively from war and those individuals and groups who seemed to shirk their responsibilities more generally. Behaving “as if there was not a war on” was morally reprehensible. Pre-war social norms had also deprecated indolence and irresponsibility, of course, but the ways in which the media and the general public reacted to instances of shirking and self-indulgence in wartime reflected a coarse egalitarianism whereby “fairness” could be mobilized both fairly and unfairly, in the latter case to target unpopular groups and to demonize others as “enemies within.” War also lifted certain taboos

in the name of “fairness”: the social language of morality, and tensions over scarce resources like food, fed a dynamic which legitimized the practice of denunciation (of alleged profiteers or allegedly disloyal soldiers’ wives, for instance) to an extent not normal in peacetime.

The image of the wartime profiteer in particular never failed to raise the ire of soldiers and civilians alike. [Adrian Gregory](#) argues that in the British case “by 1917 profiteering has become a widespread term of abuse, a central concept in the discourse of the war.”⁴⁵ The question of relative sacrifice was central here. Gregory argues that whilst there were indeed profiteers, wartime inflation accounted for some of the perception of being swindled in the shops. Perceived sharp practice, be it in local shops or on the part of rack-renting landlords, was not just villainous but also unpatriotic, especially when its victims were the families of servicemen. Thus, during the Glasgow rent strike of 1915, women and children carried a banner with the slogan “We are fighting landlord Huns.”⁴⁶ Denunciation was of course often closely related to economic desperation. Looking at the case of the [Austro-Hungarian Empire’s](#) War Surveillance Office ([k.u.k. Kriegsüberwachungsamt](#)), [Tamara Scheer](#) shows that while denunciations by individuals of fellow imperial subjects were often influenced by [food shortages](#), informers generally backed up their denunciation with reference to the nationality of the person being denounced. The insinuation that a person’s ethnic origins made them potentially or actively disloyal played on the insecurities of the Habsburg administration about the stability of their multi-ethnic domain.⁴⁷ In his study of war profiteers in France, François Bouloc assesses the evidence for the phenomenon of excess profits and examines the cultural tropes that surrounded discussion of it. The figure of the profiteer could be either a stereotypical big industrialist – such as an arms manufacturer – or a local businessperson. In the case of the butchers of Périgueux, it was the boasting of their wives about their good fortune that proved the last straw for some disgruntled customers who wrote letters of denunciation to the authorities.⁴⁸ Bouloc distinguishes between “profitants de guerre” [profit-makers], a category he considers to have made a comparatively honest living out of providing goods or services in particular demand in wartime, and less scrupulous “profiteurs de guerre” [war profiteers] who amassed wealth at the expense of consumers and who were the legitimate objects of resentment.⁴⁹ Soldiers themselves complained of being exploited by the civilian populations behind the lines whom some accused of being grasping in their business dealings with them. Denunciation became a more acceptable mode of behaviour. Wartime patriotism also provided an opportunity to indulge resentments and settle scores in a manner that would have been less seemly in peacetime.

In response to such waves of public anger, which threatened to undermine the politically useful wartime values of equity and solidarity, Britain, Germany and France all introduced

special windfall taxes on businesses in 1915-16 which were levied when the tax authorities could substantiate claims of unwarranted profit margins.⁵⁰ Symptomatic also of the times was the lively debate on the role of tourist resorts, especially upmarket resorts and spas, in nations at war. Stigmatization affected such resorts in general as conspicuous consumption was at total variance with wartime norms and values. The spa town of Vichy in central France, for instance, continued to attract a moneyed clientele in wartime, including wealthy foreigners, while also being one of the largest hospital centres in France for recuperating soldiers. A petition to exclude the war wounded from certain smart areas of town, for the sake of wealthy guests, created uproar when publicized in 1916: disgusted soldiers wrote to the town's mayor to denounce it as a den of immorality for the undeserving rich.⁵¹ Within a capitalist framework, the various emergency extensions of the powers of the state over private revenue marked a significant break with pre-war norms and values relating to free enterprise and private property. Some of these changes persisted after the war in realm of personal and corporate taxation. Solidarity was not as unifying of society as it might have appeared, however. Adrian Gregory argues that much of the demand for equality of sacrifice – of dead sons or of material comfort, for instance – did not have the net effect of strengthening social bonds; rather, it was in fact subtly corrosive of them as no two sacrifices, made by different soldiers, civilians, families or social groups, could ever be fully equated. This unbalanced equation was summed up pithily in the title British war artist [Christopher Nevinson \(1889-1946\)](#) gave to his portrait of a "profiteer" entitled *He Gained a Fortune but He Gave a Son* ([see painting](#)).⁵² Soldiers in turn came to resent civilian attempts to create a pecking order of sacrifice in view of the ultimate sacrifice of their lives they were liable to make.⁵³ The war made social groups and individuals more watchful and resentful of one another, nourishing the hunt for scapegoats at those moments of crisis that occurred for all belligerents, such as in 1917, or again in 1918-19, in the case of the defeated or frustrated nations like Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Italy.

Mass Violence, Mass Death, and Social Norms

The fighting of the First World War was marked in various ways by transgressive violence which flouted or changed existing norms relating to warfare, including the place of civilians within it.⁵⁴ Moreover, the boundary between the fighting front and home front was relatively porous owing to the flow of information and contact by means of letters and home leaves. The older received idea that the First World War, unlike the Second World War, had been marked by a clear division between civilian populations and the experience of violence has been largely replaced in historical scholarship by a more accurate depiction of how the First World War further erased the soldier-civilian distinction. Civilians were exposed to violence

and danger. Direct and deliberate attacks on civilians during invasions and in zones of [occupation](#), the [war at sea](#), the naval and land [blockade](#) affecting food supply, [aerial](#) bombardment of enemy cities and civilian targets and, in the case of [Armenia](#), attempted [genocide](#), all show the hazardous relationship civilians had with the war. Finally, war industries effectively militarized a large proportion of the [workforce](#), including women workers, thus increasing the temptation to see such industries and their workers as military targets. As Heather Jones points out, the First World War “blurred the nascent cultural and legal distinction between civilian and combatant.” Whilst such blurring was not new in 1914-18, “it was the scale of the blurring of this distinction that European populations at the time believed was unprecedented.”⁵⁵ More subtly, generalized conscription and the length and nature of the war served to create, Jones argues, “new hierarchies that privileged ideals of male ‘warrior’, rather than civilian, citizenship.” The war heightened an ideological distinction between the soldier and civilians, so that “[the soldier’s] food supplies, equipment, transport and medical care were protected before those of the civilians.”⁵⁶ In addition, the war accustomed populations to mass violence and killing even if the question of how “normal” it became is open to debate. At the most basic level, “mass killing” in wartime concerned the killing of a large proportion of a military formation or of a large number of civilians; people’s response to the scale of death as exceptional, and their categorization of it as abnormal and aberrant, was itself conditioned by their cultural expectations and norms. Nonetheless, as [Alan Kramer](#) argues, either at the time or since “the death of 12 per cent of United Kingdom soldiers, 15 per cent of German, and 16 per cent of French soldiers constituted mass killing by any standard.”⁵⁷ Did this reality, viscerally evident to soldiers and their families, normalize mass death and violence or did norms and values which saw this scale of destruction as aberrant prove resilient?

Overall, for many of those in authority, the war elevated military utility as a core value above that of humanitarian concern or respect for norms associated with peacetime civilian life. The ruthless prioritization of the military over civilians in decisions relating to dwindling food supply in the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary is but one particularly glaring example of this. The Tsarist regime in Russia undermined its own legitimacy with demands on the civilian population that prompted women’s subsistence protests, including the strike that sparked [revolution](#) in Petrograd in February 1917. More generally, soldiers and workers in war industries got better rations than civilians, especially vulnerable adults. As a senior commander in the Austro-Hungarian army told the chief of the general staff [Arthur Freiherr Arz von Straussenburg \(1857-1935\)](#) in early 1918: “The army must eat, it has to receive what it needs ...It is a matter of indifference whether a few more old people in the hinterland die or not.”⁵⁸ Malnutrition contributed to staggering death rates in the mental institutions of Saxony

in northern Germany (up to one third of patients in 1917) making these psychiatric patients, as Kramer puts it, the “first intentional victims of hunger.”⁵⁹ Kramer argues that the War itself occasioned some “subterranean shifts in mentality” in a number of areas, one of which was the categorization of expendable human lives.⁶⁰ The background of mass death and shortage of resources occasioned by the war informed the book published in 1920 by lawyer [Karl Binding \(1841-1920\)](#) and psychiatrist [Alfred Hoche \(1865-1943\)](#), entitled *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life*, on the subject of involuntary euthanasia for people with mental disability. Such blunt utilitarianism met with resistance and largely returned to the margins of medical and legal thinking in the Germany of the 1920s, only for the Nazi regime to allow it to become operational in the name of eugenics and biological racism in 1939.⁶¹

There was no German singularity in such a coarsening of norms, however. Governments and armies across the board dealt harshly with deserters, dissenters, and outsiders. Zones of occupation were particularly liable to see more “civilized” norms of war disintegrate, as [Jonathan E. Gumz](#) has shown in the case of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Serbia.⁶² Wartime states of siege and military codes provided for extraordinary state power over citizens, even if, in nominally liberal states as well as in others, these were officially just transient deviations from legal norms, justified by wartime emergency. The application of such measures often pushed such norms to the limit, clearly. Out of the six thousand British “absolutist” [conscientious objectors](#), who refused even to engage with the military tribunals that could grant exemptions from military service, seventy died whilst undergoing a penal regime that included hard labour.⁶³ In the strictly military sphere, the Italian army was noted for its particularly severe use of execution to punish alleged desertion. As well as carrying out 750 executions for collective military indiscipline in 1917, the Italian army, uniquely, implemented a policy known as “decimation” in 1915-18. Mimicking a Roman practice of collective punishment, one man in ten (or some arbitrary proportion of men) from an offending unit was subjected to exemplary punishment, usually the death penalty, a policy under which 250 Italian soldiers were executed.⁶⁴

The wartime use of [photography](#) literally magnified certain abuses committed by states against enemy civilians. Photographs circulated of the Austro-Hungarian hanging Serb civilians accused of resistance at various stages of their [invasion and occupation of Serbia](#). The empire’s execution, as a treasonous civilian, of an Italian-speaking imperial subject [Cesare Battisti \(1875-1916\)](#) on 12 July 1916 at Trento also reflected the logic of exemplary and publicized punishment. A socialist member of the imperial parliament in Vienna for the Tyrol, Battisti avoided serving the empire in wartime by crossing over into neutral Italy. Fighting as an Italian soldier from 1915 against Austria-Hungary, Battisti wished his native

[Trentino](#) region to be incorporated into Italy. Upon his capture in battle, he was treated by the Habsburg authorities as doubly treasonous and after court-martial was hanged as a civilian traitor, denying him enemy combatant status. For Vanda Wilcox, Battisti's fate was "death as spectacle with a vengeance"; his cadaver was photographed next to the grinning hangman so as to add insult to injury and to warn restive nationalists within the empire.⁶⁵ Britain also broke with pre-war norms in its reaction to the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916, not just with its relatively predictable execution of fifteen men in May 1916. Rather, in suppressing the uprising itself, the British used spectacular and incommensurate force, deploying artillery on city streets. The toll of urban warfare in Dublin in April 1916 included about 450 civilian deaths and the wholesale destruction of large tracts of the city centre, producing "Ypres in Dublin." Though, in British eyes, the actions of the rebels justified this response, the government's very actions struck at the heart of conventional views of the state as a source of security. Fearing further damage to the British state's legitimacy in Ireland, British Prime Minister [Herbert H. Asquith \(1852-1928\)](#) and his government belatedly reasserted the primacy of civilian government, stopping the execution of rebels and, very significantly, Asquith declared in May 1916 that the British government would be financially liable for the reconstruction of Dublin and the compensation of its citizens, as duly happened, in an unusual case of a government paying war damages to its own citizens for damage the state itself had largely inflicted.⁶⁶

This grim catalogue of coarsened norms and abuse of power is not the whole story of the values that underpinned human experience during the First World War and its aftermath. Humane values may have been in retreat but were not extinguished by the war. With the foundation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) at The Hague in April-May 1915, internationalist [feminist and pacifist activists](#) tried to bear witness against the martial values then rampant. American activist [Jane Addams \(1860-1935\)](#) toured Europe to promote the Hague women's conference's agenda, gaining an audience with Pope [Benedict XV \(1854-1922\)](#), who similarly tried to inculcate counter-cultural values of [peace and solidarity](#) throughout the conflict.⁶⁷ Transnational humanitarian mobilization accelerated in response to the humanitarian crises of the decade 1914-24, mobilizing not just well-known figures such as Briton [Eglantyne Jebb \(1876-1928\)](#), founder of Save the Children Fund in 1919, and Norwegian explorer and advocate of refugee rights [Fridtjof Nansen \(1861-1930\)](#), but also an army of on-the-ground nurses and volunteers, female and male, for whom, in Bruno Cabanes' words, "the protection of all the war's victims, soldiers and civilians alike, [was] an absolute necessity."⁶⁸ Julia Irwin points out that aid "could -and did- serve other agendas" but at the same time the values of popular compassion it attempted to channel provided a counterpoint to the dynamic of destruction occasioned by the war.⁶⁹ The pacifists

in the 1920s were often themselves drawn from such categories of moral witnesses, such as [nurses](#) and [veterans](#).⁷⁰ Amongst [international lawyers](#), Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin's (1900-1959) use of the term genocide in 1944, arose, as [Annette Becker](#) shows, from a long reflection on the Armenian genocide of 1915-17, though it was only fully articulated in the face of the Second World War.⁷¹

Conclusion

In any period, the history of sensibility is an elusive one and the balance sheet of the First World War's impact on European societies' norms and values yields mixed results. The social language of morality and discourses of fairness and shared sacrifice were, as we have seen, central to cohesive social mobilization for war. Cohesion seemed to require home-front villains, however, and the war created a coarse egalitarianism with a distinctly exclusivist edge. People and social groups turned against perceived enemies in a manner that often negated fairness. The writing of letters of denunciation flourished. Meanwhile, when "profiteers" appeared to prosper or when the state distributed food poorly, state legitimacy suffered in consequence as was the case in Tsarist Russia, in Germany and in Austria-Hungary. Personal consumption, which had long been politicized, was now dramatized as a test of commitment to the war effort. In terms of authority relationships, the patriarchal family proved resilient, remaining the primary focus of attachment for individuals, even as fathers were spirited away to the war. Some women and youths gained a new degree of autonomy, primarily through access to relatively well-paid war-related work. Parental supervision waned owing to the pressures of wartime which gave rise to new social practices in relation to courtship whilst also creating greater scope for juvenile mischief. The mass violence of the war – as seen in the war of attrition – impacted on home front norms due to the porosity of the border between fighting and home fronts. The collective punishments in armies breaches of norms relating to the targeting of civilians in wartime, especially those occurring in zones of occupation, meant that, overall, the First World War coarsened norms and expanded the categories of lives deemed expendable in the name of military necessity. All the same, the First World War itself produced a humanitarian awakening from groups such as volunteer nurses, neutral eyewitnesses to genocide, and veterans, to name but a few, who would work to relieve suffering, to right wrongs and to secure peace in the interwar period and beyond. The impact of the war on European societies' norms and values was therefore ambivalent and did not inevitably point ahead to the hellish catastrophe of the Second World War. Nevertheless, the coarse egalitarianism driven by the experience of the First World War, with its impossible search for equally-shared sacrifice, was, on the whole, a cause of alienation within societies, not least in nations that found themselves defeated or disappointed during the transition to peace after 1918.

Gearóid Barry, National University of Ireland

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[Central Europe](#) > [Austria-Hungary](#) > [Austria](#)

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[Eastern Europe](#) > [Russian Empire](#)

[North America](#) > [Canada](#)

[North America](#) > [USA](#)

[Western Europe](#) > [France](#)

[Western Europe](#) > [Great Britain and Ireland](#)

[Western Europe](#) > [Italy](#)

Thematic Section(s)

[Home Front](#)

Subjects

[Culture](#) > [Mobilization, cultural](#) > [Cult of sacrifice](#)

[Economy](#) > [Labour](#) > [Women's labour](#)
[Economy](#) > [War economy](#) > [Food and nutrition](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Domestic policy](#) > [Domestic mobilisation](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Domestic policy](#) > [Social policy](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Domestic policy](#) > [Suffrage](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Institutions](#) > [Governments](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Political ideologies](#) > [Nationalism, political](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Political ideologies](#) > [Pacifism](#)
[Politics, law](#) > [Resistance and revolutions](#) > [Revolutions](#)
[Society](#) > [Crime and discrimination](#) > [Juvenile delinquency](#)
[Society](#) > [Demography](#) > [War losses, civilian](#)
[Society](#) > [Everyday life, civilian war experience](#) > [Education](#)
[Society](#) > [Everyday life, civilian war experience](#) > [Emotions, society](#)
[Society](#) > [Everyday life, civilian war experience](#) > [Occupation, society](#)
[Society](#) > [Everyday life, civilian war experience](#) > [Rationing and shortages](#)
[Society](#) > [Everyday life, civilian war experience](#) > [Sports and leisure time](#)
[Society](#) > [Family, generation](#) > [Children and youth](#)
[Society](#) > [Post-war society](#) > [Post-war moral values](#)
[Society](#) > [Post-war society](#) > [Post-war social conflicts](#)
[Society](#) > [Religion and ethics](#)
[Society](#) > [Social conflict](#) > [Riots, society](#)
[Society](#) > [Social groups](#)
[Society](#) > [Women and men](#) > [Masculinity](#)
[Society](#) > [Women and men](#) > [Sexuality](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Crimes, atrocities](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Soldiers, experiences and attitudes](#) > [Emotions](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Soldiers, experiences and attitudes](#) > [Everyday life](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Soldiers, experiences and attitudes](#) > [Motivations](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Trauma and medical care](#) > [Hygiene](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Trauma and medical care](#) > [Mental trauma](#)
[Warfare and the military](#) > [Trauma and medical care](#) > [Nurses](#)

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Coarse egalitarianism; parental authority; temperance; personal consumption; transgressive violence; expendable lives

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LC Subject Headings

[World War, 1914-1918--Moral and ethical aspects](#)

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[Guerre mondiale \(1914-1918\) ; Aspect moral](#)

Key Person(s)

[Nansen, Fridtjof](#); [Lemkin, Raphael](#); [Bourdieu, Pierre](#); [Godfrey Willoughby, 10th Baron Middleton](#); [Billing, Noel Pemberton](#); [Davidson, Randall](#); [Cullen, James](#); [Doyle, Willie](#); [Kent, Thomas](#); [Straussenburg, Arthur Freiherr Arz von](#); [Binding, Karl](#); [Hoche, Alfred](#); [Jebb, Eglantyne](#); [Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia](#); [Lloyd George, David](#); [Wilhelm II, German Emperor](#); [George V, King of Great Britain](#); [Kitchener, Horatio Herbert Kitchener, Earl](#); [Pope Benedict XV](#); [Asquith, Herbert Henry](#); [Nevinson, C. R. W. \(Christopher Richard Wynne\)](#); [Addams, Jane](#); [Battisti, Cesare](#); [Nurses](#)

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