THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

WHAT THE OTHER DIDN'T SEE: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE WRITINGS OF TWO CIVILIANS IN WORLD WAR I GERMAN-OCCUPIED BELGIUM

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FALL 2017

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for baccalaureate degrees
in History and English
with honors in History

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how German occupation influenced Belgian society during WWI. By using the diaries of Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock, two civilians living in Belgium at the time of the war, this thesis examines not only how occupation society functioned as a whole, but also how different groups within occupied Belgian society experienced the occupation. After an introduction and an overview of the occupation's origins and circumstances, the thesis itself is split into sections along the intersectional lines of class, nation, and gender, each representing an aspect of a person's identity that would change their occupation experience. Examining Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock's experiences regarding each of these three things, including how they themselves made note of class, nation, and gender's impacts on people's lives under occupation, makes it possible to study both how the German occupation had altered Belgian society, as well as the ways in which Belgian society did not change.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Unknown Lives

The importance of the historical study of non-powerful people is perhaps best summed up not by a historical source, but by the last line of George Eliot's Middlemarch, published in 1874, only three decades before the beginning of the First World War: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."[1] It is easy to think of history as a long march of Charlemagnes, Bismarcks, and Lenins, but in fact, most of history has been the business of those who were not in positions of great power.

The value of studying those without significant power in history has often been overlooked because of their lack of active participation in world-changing events. It is true that a WWI-era French peasant soldier likely would not understand the battle plan in the trenches exactly. If you wanted to understand the movement of troops and strategy, his letters home to his wife about the necessity of buying a cow would be fairly irrelevant. But who can say that Martha Hanna's book Your Death Would Be Mine, analyzing the correspondence between WWI French peasant soldier Paul and his wife Marie Pireaud does not reveal important information about the lives of soldiers and the changes in peasant experiences during the period of the First World War?[2]

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[1] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*. (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), P. 838.

[2] Martha Hanna, *Your Death would be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Hanna's book focuses on personal correspondence, and from that the author is able to build a narrative of the war from the perspective of those whose voices are less frequently heard. The use of ego documents such as these in the study of history, specifically in the study of aspects of historical society, has been growing as a practice for good reason. The study of non-powerful people and their lives is often best accomplished by the use of ego documents (personal diaries, letters, and so on) because of the value of understanding the subjectivities of history: what people thought was happening, how they understood it, and how they made sense of it in the context of their own lives. In this context, the value of studying those who did not hold power during their time period cannot be overlooked. After all, throughout much of typically-studied history, women have arguably been one of the most obvious groups lacking power. But would anyone attempt to claim that the study of women and their roles in various times and places throughout history is not valuable? There is a great deal to be learned from the study of those who were unable to greatly influence the events taking place around them, but were free to interpret historical events within the context of their own lives and personal realities, and write them down as they saw them. Historian Mary Fulbrook explains the value of ego documents such as these in her chapter of the 2010 book German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century:

> Historians also use ego documents for a wide variety of purposes. These range from writing biographies or seeking information about aspects of individual lives that have evaded official records, through using eye-witness testimonies as a means of exploring the truth of claims and counter-claims, to constructing the subjective meanings given to broader historical developments, or analyzing changing historical subjectivities and emotions.[3]

[3] Mary Fulbrook, Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate, and Roger Woods, *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. N - Newition (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2010), P. 27.

Using ego documents allows historians to not only study the history of those without power, but to gain an appreciation for how non-powerful people made sense of the world around them, how they understood their place in that world, and how they interpreted historical events when they were occurring.

In addition to the study of people without power, it is important to contemplate why certain people lacked power: why, who, and in what situations. Who was powerful? Who was not? Would a particular person have been powerful in any country in their time period, or only in the country in which they lived? If they were powerful, was it because they were upper class or rich? Was it because they were male? Was it because they were a certain nationality? Would an upper-class British man have had the same social advantages if he lived in enemy Germany during the First World War as he would have had living in England in the same time period?

The answer to that last question, obviously, is no. He would not have lost those advantages in Germany because he was upper-class, nor because he was male, but because he was English. However if he had instead been a she—an upper-class English woman living in England, for example, she would be less powerful than her male counterpart. Not because she was English or upper-class, but because she was a woman. And obviously, were our person once more a man, but this time lower-class, his experience would have been largely different, and he would have had an entirely new set of disadvantages. Despite his class, however, in some ways he would still have advantages over the upper-class English woman, particularly in the time period of the First World War: women in England did not gain the right to vote until 1918. The upper-class woman might have wealth and access to society, but she was locked out of democratic processes, unlike the lower-class man. Keep her a woman, keep her lower-class and this time make her nationality German instead of British, but place her once again in Britain in 1914, and you start

to get an idea how different factors of a person's identity can radically change the amount of power they hold and how they might experience world events. Our poor German woman trying to make a living in London would not experience or interpret the First World War in the same way as our rich British man living in the same city at the same time.

These examples are extreme, but by no means unrealistic, and they illustrate a point: at any given moment in history, certain people hold more power than others, based on nothing more than who they are, and what aspects of identity are valued by the society in which they live. The study of how different parts of peoples' identities interact in order to bestow or remove layers of privilege is known as intersectionality. This anthropological theory encompasses how people of different backgrounds experience and interpret events differently from each other, and how power can be given or taken away based on societal norms, structure, and circumstance.[4] Intersectionality, then, is a useful practice in examining a society, as well as in interpreting history.[5] In fact, this practice is growing in use. The historian Tammy Proctor made use of the theory of intersectionality in her book Civilians in a World at War, in order to examine how the experiences of those with civilian status differed from those of military status, and further how civilian experiences differed based on nationality, geographical location, gender, time period, race, and so on.[6] Other historians as well, as studying non-powerful people has become a more prominent historical field, have been examining the circumstances (societal or otherwise) which

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[4] Floya Anthias, "Hierarchies of Social Location, Class and Intersectionality: Towards a Translocational Frame," *International Sociology* 28.1 (2013;2012;): 121-38.

[5] D. Hodgetts. and C. Griffin, "The Place of Class: Considerations for Psychology." *Theory & Psychology* 25.2 (2015): 147.

[6] Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918*. (New York University Press: New York, 2010).

have given certain groups power, or taken power away from others as a method of gaining a deeper understanding of the functions and imbalances of historical societies. For example, historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver recently wrote a book on Belgian spy Gabrielle Petit. Petit was a young woman who was able to move through occupied Belgium with a degree of freedom which would not have been possible for a man her age. The Germans were not concerned that a young woman would escape the country to join the Belgian army, but it was a very present concern regarding young men of the same age. As a result, Petit could travel (and subsequently spy) more easily than a man her age would have been, in almost a reversal of historically typical gender privileges.[7]

In this thesis, I discuss the German occupation of Belgium during the First World War, and examine ego documents from two people living in Brussels during this time, making use of the theory of intersectionality in order to better analyze the relevance of the experiences recorded in these ego documents. Brand Whitlock (1869-1934), head of the American Legation in Brussels during the war (until America joined the Allies in April of 1917), kept a diary of his daily experiences, upon which he would later base a memoir, published shortly after the war. Mary Thorp (1864-1945), an Englishwoman acting as a governess to a wealthy family of Brussels, also kept a diary, which is scheduled to be published in annotated form in 2016, although heretofore it had not been an object of study.[8] By understanding the experiences of these two people, and examining what each observed (or did not observe), a great deal of information about the society in which they lived can be uncovered. In addition, their individual ways of making sense of

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[7] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *Gabrielle Petit: The Death and Life of a Female Spy in the First World War*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 55-56.

[8] Mary Thorp's diary was bequeathed to an archive in Flanders by her nephew, a former prisoner of war, and went unnoticed until only a few years ago.

what was happening, and how their social position informed that subjective sense, may be explored.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the German invasion of Belgium in 1914, and the events leading up to the occupation of Belgium by the German army during the war, by way of setting up an understanding of the common experiences of those living in Belgium at the beginning of the war, as both Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp were. I also discuss the lives of both Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock, setting them up as the main voices to be used and analyzed within the thesis. What were their lives like, and what past experiences colored their interpretation of the German occupation? Where would they fit into an intersectional analysis, and what was each one's intersectional profile? These are some questions I attempt to answer in the Chapter 2. I also discuss the significance of keeping a diary in a time of war, particularly under conditions of occupation, in order to better understand the two ego document sources which are analyzed throughout the thesis.

In Chapter 3, I begin the intersectional analysis of how Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock viewed and wrote about the occupied society in which they lived. The focus of Chapter 3 is class—how Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock saw class, how they were able to interact with the members of different classes, how the nature of their interactions with various classes influenced their views, and what the experiences of different classes (as observed by Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock) actually were.

The focus of Chapter 4 will be nationality—a particularly complicated intersection because Brand Whitlock was American and Mary Thorp was English. They were both living in Belgium, the population of which was composed of both Flemish and Walloons, and over it all loomed an occupation by the Germans. Naturally, there are a significant number of national groups for

consideration, and Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock's views would also have been in certain ways biased by their own nationalities, coloring their impressions of each of the national groups they observed. All of this is discussed in this chapter, and themes from chapter 3 will also be brought back for consideration.

Chapter 5 continues the intersectional analysis of the diaries, but built upon the themes established in chapters 3 and 4 moving on to focus primarily on gender. What differences were there between the experiences of males and females under German occupation? How did gender play a role in day-to-day life, and (drawing on information from chapters 3 and 4,), how did class, nation, and gender intersect to create unique experiences during the course of the occupation? How did Mary Thorp's gender influence her perspective? Was there anything that she noticed which Brand Whitlock did not, on account of gender? How did Brand Whitlock's gender play a role in influencing his perspective, and what can be learned about the society in which Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock lived, based on these differences?

The conclusion of the thesis ties together the other chapters in a few examples to show how various parts of a person's identity all influenced their experiences during occupation. I also address in general what was learned about Belgian occupied society through this analysis, and I address once more (in the context of the analysis from the rest of the paper) the various intersections of identity which influenced Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock's experiences.

What I address over the course of this thesis is the value of an in-depth analysis of such a complex society as that of Belgium under German occupation in World War I. By analyzing the diaries of two people living in Brussels at the time of the occupation, and then using that analysis to better understand the society in which they lived, I hope to convey a complex analysis of the forces and pressures at work under German occupation. By extension, I hope to contribute to the

understanding of how societies under an occupying force function, and what challenges may be faced by any occupied society under the control of a military power as Belgium was controlled by Germany between 1914 and 1918.

Chapter 2

Under the Circumstances

Before the diaries of focus can be properly analyzed, the time period and circumstances under which the diaries were written must be understood. Belgium's entry into the First World War was abrupt and largely unanticipated by the Belgians themselves, but the Germans, too, were surprised by the sequence of events which created the atmosphere of occupation under which Belgium would exist for the next four years. The German Schlieffen Plan, in which the German army swept through Belgium in order to more quickly take France, was based on the assumption that an invasion of Belgium would be an unexpected move, which it was, and that Belgium would simply roll over in the face of the greatly superior strength of the German army—which it did not.[9]

The Schlieffen Plan failed, and Germany found itself bogged down in trench warfare well before it could get to Paris. One of a number of reasons for the failure of the Plan was that Belgium resisted the movement of the German army through their territory, buying the French army time to rearrange and prepare to receive the German army from this unexpected direction. Given the option of surrendering or fighting (and inevitably losing to) a military force much greater than their own, Belgium opted to fight. It was this decision more than any other made by

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[9] Isabel V Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), P. 52.

Belgium which shaped the experiences of those living in Belgium for the rest of the war under German occupation.

On the face of it, Belgium's decision to fight rather than surrender appeared to be poorly thought out. The German army, after all, was significantly stronger than Belgium's own, so surrender would seem like the reasonable move. Fighting could not end in a Belgian victory or a repulse of the Germans from Belgian land—it could only result in bloodshed. After all, what the Germans were requesting was simply unhindered passage through Belgian territory— seemingly not worth dying over except as a point of patriotic pride.[10] Historical context, however, can shed light on the Belgian decision to fight: the Belgians could not grant free passage to the Germans without violating their own neutrality, the basis by which their nation retained its sovereignty.

When Belgium's borders and conditions of independence were finalized after a power struggle between France and the Netherlands in 1839, the treaty held that Belgium would be "an Independent and perpetually Neutral State… bound to observe such Neutrality towards all other States."[11] The neutrality of Belgium was quite literally one of the primary bases for its independent statehood, and was theoretically ensured by the five great European powers (France, Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria) in 1839 when Belgium's treaty of independence was signed. Belgium was not entirely free to do as it pleased in terms of foreign policy, but by maintaining neutrality in foreign affairs, it was theoretically protected from foreign invasion and conquest by the auspices of the great powers backing its treaty of independence.

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[10] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper,* P. 52.

[11] *Ibid*., P. 17.

Without a treaty such as this, such a small nation in such a contentious placement otherwise would have had no chance at remaining independent. Belgium's lack of military strength and its small size was made up for by its neutrality, which the treaty guaranteed would be protected by the major powers (Including Germany, which understood itself to be the legal successor of Prussia and thereby also bound by the treaty).[12] Belgium was responsible, however, for maintaining its own neutrality, and so was required to mount a defense in the event of foreign invasion. The Belgian government was therefore faced with a significant conundrum when given the option of capitulating (thereby sabotaging the basis for their own statehood by violating the conventions of neutrality) or putting up what would surely be a bloody and ultimately unsuccessful resistance against a vastly larger and more powerful force. If the Belgians did not resist the invading Germans, they would lose any say in what would happen to their country after the war. If they did resist, Germany would officially classify them as an enemy, and when overpowered by the German army, Belgium would largely be at the mercy of Germany for the course of the war, no matter the war's winner.[13] Germany was breaking international law by invading neutral Belgium. By resisting the invasion, Belgium was attempting to uphold international law, but the cost was painfully high.

The German understanding of neutrality, as explained by Isabel V. Hull in her book Scrap of Paper, was in some ways quite different from the ideas of neutrality held by much of the rest of Europe. German's view of international law held that international laws could nearly always be waived in cases of "military necessity," and that state neutrality was only valid if the neutral

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[12] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper,* pp. 17, 22.

[13] Brand Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol. 1, (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1919), pp. 56-63.

country could defend itself from invasion.[14] A text by Friedrich von Bernhardi, a German military thinker, in 1912 ,titled Germany and the Next War, summed up this view very bluntly, and was widely-read by (at the least) nationalist circles in Germany, going through six printings by 1914. As Larry Zuckerman sums up in his book The Rape of Belgium, Bernhardi "argued that weak nations did not have the same license to live as powerful ones, each nation had its own concept of right, and none would submit to international law, a subservience he equated with dishonor."[15] This view had no shortage of detractors, even in Germany, but aspects of it were bolstered by the military strategy in vogue at the time, which held that a hard, fast, unexpected offensive to gain a quick victory was the best method of fighting a war. Modern war, after all, took up so many resources, without a swift victory war would be impossibly costly (as Germany later found to be painfully true). Therefore in order to win, (at least in Germany's view) it was necessary to be the one to make the first move, and end the war before the enemy could mount a full resistance. If it was necessary for the defense of the nation (as popular view among military leaders in Germany held that the war on France was), it was considered by many to be entirely reasonable to take advantage of a small, neutral country.[16]

Given all of this, from the German point of view it made very little sense for Belgium to resist German invasion. Their specific view of international law may well have caused Germany to present Belgium with the choice that it did at the beginning of the First World War; in fact as Larry Zuckerman points out in his analysis of the invasion, "Among the many,

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[14] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper,* pp. 22-33.

[15] Larry Zuckerman. *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I*. (New York: New York University Press, 2004), pp. 42-43

[16] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper,* P. 29.

complex motives must be contempt." He goes on to explain: "The Germans could have sent the note—particularly that note—only to people they disdained, and they could have expected compliance only from a society they pictured as different from their own. The Germans themselves would never have tolerated the ultimatum, yet they supposed the Belgians would."[17] Germany's presenting Belgium with the ultimatum of 1914, and its decision to go forward with the Schlieffen Plan in disregard of Belgian neutrality on its way to war with France, seemed clearly to the Belgians to express contempt for their country and people, and so the Belgians themselves reacted accordingly in their resistance to the invasion. Whatever the reason justifying the initial ultimatum, however, what is clear is that Germany was not expecting Belgium to mount a resistance.

Herr von Strum, a member of the German legation in Brussels at the time war broke out, may have inadvertently summed up the German feeling, when he spoke to the American ambassador[18], Brand Whitlock, in a moment of despair at the war's onset after learning that Belgium planned to resist the German army and not allow it to pass through unhindered: "Oh, these poor stupid Belgians! Why don't they get out of the way! Why don't they get out of the way! I know what it will be. I know the German army. It will be like laying a baby on the track before a locomotive!"[19] It was nonsensical to him that Belgium would resist such a superior military force, international law or no. The German army and command did not understand

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[17] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium,* pp. 42-43.

[18] Technically Brand Whitlock's position in Belgium was that of "minister" as he was head of the American Legation in Brussels at the time. America would not have an Embassy in Belgium until after the war. For simplicity's sake, however, as Brand Whitlock's duties were ambassadorial in nature, he will be referred to as an ambassador in this paper.

[19] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1, P. 63.

entirely why Belgium would mount a resistance, but unlike Herr Von Strum, the German army seemed to lack the pity and sympathy which came with that lack of understanding of the Belgian perspective in Herr Von Strum's case. This unsympathetic view was in fact widespread among the German army itself, among both soldiers and officers, perhaps contributing to the series of events that would come to be known as the "German Atrocities" at the outset of the German invasion of Belgium in August 1914.[20]

A great deal has been written on the German invasion of Belgium, and the "German Atrocities" that followed. Brand Whitlock himself wrote as much as he could of what the people streaming into Brussels had to tell; in the face of the German invasion, many Belgians were displaced, and Whitlock collected the stories of as many as he could of the ones who came to Brussels. Many civilians from Visé, Aerschot, Louvain, Dinant, Namur, Andenne, Tamines, and all the cities in which the Germans thought they saw *francs-tireurs* became refugees within their own country. Unexpected resistance by the Belgian army created resentment among the German army, and almost every time the German soldiers suffered a setback in their advance, and were sent back to a city they had previously passed through, the city to which the Germans had been forced to return suffered atrocities as a result of the setback. [12] Brand Whitlock noted the pattern and wearily reported it as he saw:

> There was a certain gruesome monotony in the stories, after all; they were alike, the same thing over and over again, everywhere in the land—the same details, the same characteristics, the same typical deeds […]
>
> The Germans enter a town, take hostages—the burgomaster, some councilmen, one or two notables; they demand money, food, wine, and forage. All goes well enough for a few days. The army moves on. There is a reverse, and

[20] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, P. 52.

> soldiers swarm back into the town crying "*Man hat geschossen!"*[21] Then murder, pillage, fire, rape, massacre.[22]

A secretary from the American Legation in Brussels where Brand Whitlock worked, Hugh Gibson, also made note of the anger of the German troops in the face of resistance by the Belgian army. Gibson found himself in Louvain as it was being destroyed, and was told by a German officer in the city: "We shall make this place a desert. We shall wipe it out so that it will be hard to find where Louven used to stand. For generations people will come here to see what we have done, and it will teach them to respect Germany and think twice about resisting her."[23] It could easily be said that the German army's actions in August 1914 were simply a result of facing unexpected resistance, perhaps in conjunction with the contempt historians such as Zuckerman maintain Germany held for Belgium at the time. There is however another side to the story: the idea of *francs-tireurs* loomed in a very real way over the episodes of German retaliatory violence and served as a German justification for much (if not all) of the excesses directed against Belgian civilians in August 1914.

***Francs-Tireurs*: A Dangerous Myth**

The legend of the *francs-tireurs* was based in memories of the war of 1870, in which the civilian population of France rose to fight a German invasion. These civilian fighters were known as *francs-tireurs*, and a great deal of German military policy was based around the idea

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[21] "*Someone has shot!"*

[22] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1, P. 215.

[23] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, P. 53.

that *francs-tireurs* would play as much of a role in Germany's next war as they had in 1870. The uprising of a civilian population, unidentifiable in civilian clothes, was an ingrained part of the German military consciousness, and subsequent German military policy since 1870 had been crafted with an expectation of facing *francs-tireurs* if Germany invaded another country. As *francs-tireurs* were by their nature an unofficial force, the only approved method of stopping them was by terror tactics, discouraging the masses by the use of fear. Although it has not been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that there were no *francs-tireurs* at all in Belgium when the Germans invaded, any civilians who took up arms against the Germans somehow managed to leave no trace after the war.[24]

German reports included accounts of German guards found with mutilated tongues and eyes, and on a number of occasions, Germans occupying towns and cities reported being fired upon by *francs-tireurs* in closed buildings and from attics. But *francs-tireurs* were never definitively proven to have actually existed, and historians continue to debate their existence 100 years later.[25] What can be proven, however, is the mayhem caused by Germans who were convinced that they were under attack by *francs-tireurs.* The use of human shields and hostages has been thoroughly recorded, as have been the numerous bloody excesses that occurred as the Germans moved through Belgian territory. In the wake of the German invasion, cities burned, most famously Louvain, where the medieval library of irreplaceable manuscripts burned to the ground, to say nothing of the people who died along the way. Because German policy for dealing with *francs-tireurs* consisted largely of terror tactics, the reprisals for sightings of civilian resistance (real or imagined) resulted in precisely that: as refugees streamed into Brussels, each had a story

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[24] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium,* pp. 47-49.

[25] *Ibid.,* pp. 51, 57.

of horror to tell—and as previously noted, almost all came from cities to which the German army had been repulsed after an unsuccessful attack.[26]

A report (known as the Bryce Report) detailing the German atrocities was quickly made up by British authorities in response to the burning of towns and general terror of the German invasion, and was brought to America in an attempt to present Belgium's case to the world, but far from being too little too late, it was too much, too soon. The Report had been written so quickly that much of what it contained was hearsay: grisly details which might capture the public eye but would be difficult to prove definitively, and which were in some cases of dubious factuality.[27]

The time of invasion certainly had its fair share of excesses, some of which were even contained within the Bryce Report itself, but the world became swept up with the brutal images of the Report. This focus on specific drama overlooked the mass terror, mayhem, and destruction Germany's advance was creating. The United States was at the time still heavily committed to not getting involved in what it saw as a European conflict, and when the Belgian reports of some of the dramatic reports (supported only by hearsay) did not hold up under scrutiny, it only hurt Belgium's case. Later still, Britain would come to resent Belgium's drawing them into the war as a case of false pretenses when many of the details of the Report could not be confirmed. As Larry Zuckerman noted in his analysis of the Bryce Report's effects,

> The attempt to exploit [the Bryce Report] for British purposes did not change a central fact: The invaders had employed illegal, systematic terror. By emphasizing rape and mutilation—and on flimsy evidence—the report obscured the murder, arson, pillage, and deportations for which Belgians, if not Britons,

[26] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper,* pp. 51-54.

[27] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium,* pp. 131-139.

> could hate without any manipulation necessary. The tragedy is that the report made the terror seem trivial, at least in retrospect.[28]

The Bryce Report is but one example of how depictions of the German invasion of Belgium were blurred, both at the time and in the historical record. The narrative of the German invasion was *never* straightforward, not even when it was ongoing. And as Larry Zuckerman also notes, the world's obsession with the "German atrocities" and subsequent disillusionment when the brutalities did not occur in such a theatrical fashion as the Bryce Report suggested, masked a much longer-lasting tragedy Belgium endured: that of occupation. With the impression that the Bryce Report was an exaggeration came the idea that in general Belgium really did not have it so bad. And with the impression that the invasion itself had been overblown in the retelling came the idea that occupation likewise was not so bad, especially compared to the massive death tolls in, say, France. Obsession with the invasion and the dubious stories in the Bryce Report led many who had sympathized with Belgium at the beginning of the war to take little notice of the hardships Belgians suffered during the years of occupation.[29] Whatever the blurred records and conflicting reports, however, what is definitively known is that the German invasion *was* brutal, and the Germans *did* employ brutality and illegal terror in an attempt to keep (almost certainly imagined) *francs-tireurs* in line.

Of course, Belgium itself was barely prepared for war, much less for atrocities such as the burning of Louvain followed by an extended occupation by a hostile force; the German army ultimately ended up with control of Belgium, which they would continue to occupy until the end of the war. The area around Brussels, however, did not mount a resistance due to the intense

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[28] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium,* p. 136.

[29] *Ibid.,* pp. 1-3.

destruction of other cities in which the army had resisted the German advance. In order to save the city and its people, the Belgian army allowed Germany to march into Brussels without a fight. This left Brussels relatively unscathed (physically, anyway) by the initial German invasion, but the people living there angry and frustrated by the foreign troops that had simply marched into their city ostensibly unchallenged.[30] In addition, as the Germans remained as an occupying force in the city throughout the course of the war, once they arrived, their presence never left.

As Belgium had not simply allowed them to pass through the country unhindered, Germany felt that it needed to keep the area under control by maintaining a military presence and management in Belgium. With this military presence and often micromanagement, the citizens of Belgium, particularly in the cities, were subjected to a great number of rules put in place by the Germans to keep their population under control; institutions as harmless as the boy-scouts were dismantled in an effort to prevent dissent.[31] Even unorganized dissent such as the writing of a private diary containing negative opinions of the German occupiers was easily a punishable offense.

When Mary Thorp started keeping her diary, she did it in full awareness of the danger involved. As she noted on the first page, "Several times, in the beginning of the war, I wanted to start a diary, but was dissuaded from doing so, because it was considered dangerous; a Jesuit father was shot during the (…) Louvain days of August 1914, for having written a few

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[30] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1. pp. 115-140, 235.

[31] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *La Belgique Et La Première Guerre Mondiale*, Vol 4, (Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 130-133.

impressions."[32] Brand Whitlock comments on the same thing in his memoir, discussing the danger of expressing dissent, even in a diary: "People 'inside' do not lightly give testimony, or write their experiences and impressions, even in private diaries. Father Dupierreux learned that…" He even mentions the same Jesuit priest as Mary Thorp did.[33] The priest to whom both Whitlock and Thorp refer was a young man in Louvain at the time of the terror there, who had compared the destruction of the university library, where many irreplaceable medieval manuscripts had been kept, to the burning of the Library of Alexandria, and the behavior of the Germans to that of the Saracens under Genseric.[34] These impressions were written on papers found on Father Dupierreux's person, and he was summarily executed for having written such things.[35] There was no underestimating the potential consequences of crossing the Germans, even by something so simple as a negative written impression. Considering the danger involved, then, why did Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp both choose to keep diaries under German occupation? Understanding their decisions might be easier with a better understanding of who they were.

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[32] Mary Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows" of the War, during the German Occupation of Belgium, from September 15th, 1916.* 15 Sept. 1916.

[33] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1, P. 161.

[34] Genseric was a King of Vandals, and sacked Rome in the year 455

[35] Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *The German Terror in Belgium: An Historical Record*, (New York: George H. Doran company, 1917), pp. 141-142.

Biographical

Brand Whitlock was a native Ohioan who gained a diplomatic post in Belgium after years of writing, practicing law and politicking in various parts of Ohio and Illinois. He was a writer by nature, and an idealist, which accounted for some of the initial failures of his law career. He was by no means incompetent however, and in fact turned down a fifth consecutive term as mayor of Toledo, Ohio, in order to take the appointment at the American Legation in Belgium that President Wilson had offered him. The position in Belgium was supposed to be a chance to relax: Belgium, after all, being a generally quiet place, diplomatic posts there were at the time generally considered fairly cushy, and Whitlock's posting there was meant to give him a chance to rest. Unfortunately for Whitlock, President Wilson posted him there in 1913. Whatever chance there might have been to relax and rest in his new post was shattered by the onset of the First World War, and Whitlock ended up taking responsibility for representation of seven other countries' diplomatic interests in Belgium (after the ambassadors of those countries left due to their own countries being at war). He also helped to organize the food relief program which ensured the people of Belgium did not starve, despite Germany's inability to maintain food availability in the country themselves.[36] The intersectional profile of Brand Whitlock, therefore, was not that of a person totally without power to influence the events around him: as a diplomat for a neutral country, Whitlock had a certain degree of power, although the ways in which he could behave (as he represented a government) were somewhat limited. He was 45, upper-middle-class, American, and directly involved in the workings of the government, allowing him to see the bigger picture and also to interact individually with those people who came to the

[36] Robert M Crunden. *A Hero in Spite of Himself: Brand Whitlock in Art, Politics, & War*. (A. Knopf: New York: 1969).

American Legation looking for assistance. He could also speak French fluently, allowing him to participate fairly fully in Brussels society.

Mary Thorp's life was rather more small-scale, despite her more generally forceful personality. Where Brand Whitlock tended to prefer the periphery of activity, and to observe events and people as he saw them (even while doing his best to improve the conditions of those around him,) Mary Thorp was a formidable woman. She had little power to influence world events, but even in photographs, she cuts a commanding figure; it is not difficult to imagine her acting as governess for rich teenage boys. She was born in London (Kensington) on the first of January, 1864, so she was fifty years of age in 1914, the year the war broke out. Her family had moved from London to Bruges, Belgium, in 1875, when Thorp was eleven, and she subsequently began working as a governess at age seventeen, ending up taking several governess positions before the First World War. She worked for a wealthy industrialist in West Flanders, lived for a time with her uncle in London, and travelled to the United States around 1883 in the employment of the American merchant George Bainbridge. Shortly before 1910 she began working in Brussels, but soon she returned to Bruges, likely to care for her ailing mother. When she returned to Brussels, she entered the employment of the Wittoucks (a wealthy family with Russian aristocratic ties), for whom she would work during the entirety of the war[37].

As a governess, Mary Thorp had a somewhat complicated intersectional profile. She occupied a place between classes, working for a rich family while simultaneously being able to interact relatively freely with members of all classes both above and below her. As an English woman, her position under German occupation was somewhat tenuous, considering Britain and

[37] Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Tammy Proctor, *An English Governess in the Great War: The Diary of Mary Thorp,* (Oxford University Press: forthcoming 2016).

Germany were at war, but having lived in Belgium for much of her life, she was fairly at home living in Brussels during the war.

Diaries

Keeping a diary in a time of war is no simple task, and doubly so when a person is living under foreign occupation. As Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp both noted in their memoirs and diaries, a potential outcome for writing down unfavorable impressions of the occupying Germans was execution. Both Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp were painfully aware of this, as they could both name a concrete example of someone being executed for keeping a diary. So why did either of them do it? Brand Whitlock, as a diplomat for a neutral power (Germany had no desire to make an enemy of the United States), was afforded a certain degree of protection. He also had to remain carefully neutral, however, until the United States ultimately joined the Allies in the fight against Germany, at which point of course he had to leave the country, as America's representative. His nature as a writer, however, did not go away when he took a diplomatic position, and he wrote his impressions likely with the express purpose of writing a memoir after the war (which he did: Belgium: A Personal Narrative was published in 1919).

Mary Thorp, on the other hand, almost certainly never anticipated her diary being published—certainly she never attempted after the war to turn it into a memoir or publish it herself. Rather, she began keeping a diary because she considered the period she was living through to be significant. As she wrote on the first page, after mentioning how she had considered starting a diary earlier in the war: "now events are centering on a very interesting

period, I decide to follow my fancy at (let us hope), 'the eleventh hour.'"[38] For her, the significance of the period was enough to want to write down her impressions, despite the danger. Based on what she wrote about within the diary itself, it also served as a way for her to vent the frustration she dared not voice in public. Imposing she might have been, but Mary Thorp was smart enough to not risk jail or worse to voice her opinion publicly. She had to settle for writing the frustrations and anxieties of life under occupation in a diary, despite the risk even that small act of rebellion posed.

Diaries under an occupying power also serve another purpose for the diarists—they allow their writers to make sense of time that is otherwise featureless. Under German occupation, normal day-to-day activities in Belgium were suspended, and diaries allowed writers like Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock to chronicle their days so the time did not blend together, as it was in danger of doing. If there were things happening about which they could write, and impressions were being noted down, it meant that the time that was passing (however frustrating and featureless it might seem,) was not passing meaninglessly. Discussions of diary writing under occupation have noted this previously:

> Diarists writing under military occupation were particularly and painfully aware of time passing uselessly. For, under occupation, the domain of normal activities shrank; unlike what happened in unoccupied home fronts, no economic or other mobilisation on behalf of the war effort was possible. What economic activity was available, might serve the needs of the occupying regime and so was shunned and/or suspect. So, for many, time passed, possibly in vain. Keeping a diary constituted a form of discipline, at least; a regular endeavor that paralleled

[38] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* 15 Sept. 1916.

> the general injunction to sternly "see it through" and keep one's dignified bearing.[39]

This particular motivation for keeping a diary might have particularly appealed to Mary Thorp, and accounted for her waiting so long before starting a diary, but keeping it so faithfully after she had begun. Brand Whitlock began keeping his diary before the war even broke out, in the sunny summer days of 1914 when it was so easy to believe that the trouble in the Balkans would blow over without impacting the rest of Europe. Mary Thorp, however, began her diary two solid years into the war, in September of 1916. A great deal had happened since the "Louvain days of August 1914,"[40] and the occupation had progressed from an invasion to a force showing no signs of leaving. Brussels itself had changed to reflect the occupation in a number of ways, and the war itself continued to drag on. Keeping a diary was dangerous, but it was one of the few ways Belgian citizens might be able to make sense of their experience under such a long occupation.

Part of the difficulty faced by the people of Brussels in the fall of 1916 was that it had been so long since the occupation had begun, the simple emotional strain of living under observation and foreign rule had begun to wear people thin. If the war had obviously been about to end this might have been easier to bear, but for the people of Belgium, news was scarce, and what news there was was not good. Mary Thorp expressed hope, on the opening of her diary, that the war might be nearly over,[41] but there was little to support that idea in Brussels at the time except for

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[39] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "Measuring Lost Time: Civilian Diaries Under Military Occupation," in Richard Bessel and Dorothee Wierling eds., *Inside World War One? Ego-documents and the Experience of War*, (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2016), P. 7.

[40] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* 15 Sept. 1916.

[41] *Ibid.,* 15 Sept. 1916.

the heavy feeling that surely the war could not continue much longer. Brand Whitlock knew that the war was not about to end, but commented on the feeling in his diary as well: “The people are really in fear---half fear, half hope---thinking, for some odd reason, that the Germans are about to retreat. One hears it everywhere. It is interesting as a bit of crowd psychology.”[42] There was not much the people of Belgium could do but hope that the war would end soon, and in reality the war would drag on until 1919.

The CRB (Commission for the Relief of Belgium) and CN (Comité National), importing and distributing food and needed supplies, ensured that the people of Belgium would not starve, but there was little for civilians to actually do in terms of work unless they themselves were involved in the relief effort, and obviously not everyone could be employed there. The economy and industry in the country had essentially ground to a halt with the German invasion, and so most scheduled activities (such as work) had been more or less suspended. What few activities there were available had gained sinister significance under the German occupation. For example, when a local lake froze over, local Belgian authorities arranged to have the ice around the edges broken up and thrown in the middle to discourage skating, sure that the Germans would arrange for photographs of any joyful activity to use as propaganda to show how well-off Belgium was under German rule.[43] Little wonder that the people living under the German occupation felt the need to express their frustration; the challenges of life in occupied Brussels were not of the sort that could be expressed in public, not when any possible insult to the Germans was enough to end up in jail. Without any release valve on the tensions of society, it was no wonder that some

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[42] Brand Whitlock, and Allan Nevins, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* (New York; London: D. Appleton-Century company, incorporated, 1936), Sept. 12, 1916.

[43] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* 1 Feb. 1917.

of the people living under German occupation turned to a diary in which they could confide, despite the risk of the book being found.

Daily Challenges

What exactly were the pressures of society that the people under occupation faced? Naturally, they were different for everyone, but some of the day-to-day stresses by 1916 included requisitions, as the Germans had begun to take as much metal, industrial machines, and just about anything they could use for the war. Other stresses included unemployment and food shortages. By taking the machines used for industry, the Germans had removed most of the employment opportunities in Brussels, and put a lot of Belgians out of work. And even with the best of intentions, the CN and the CRB could only keep people from starving, they could not prevent people from losing weight as winter prepared to bear down on them. Fabric shortages made it difficult to make coats or new clothes. Leather shortages made it difficult to reheel boots. Sugar shortages meant that only the very rich had tasted anything sweet aside from jam for months. And of course, insulting the Germans, or "military treason" (anything that might hinder the German war effort) carried a jail sentence or worse, depending on the severity of the offence.[44] There was also a great deal of internal stress. German propaganda blamed in war profiteers for Belgium's woes, and it was a difficult idea to shake; as Belgians became increasingly suspicious of war profiteering, they also became more suspicious of each other,

[44] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1, pp. 607-609.

increasing day-to-day strain in society.[45] By mid-1917, Governer-General von Falkenhausen[46] found himself writing a report that the Belgians still hated the Germans, but now had grown to hate each other, as well.[47]

To make matters worse, the city was crawling with spies, many of whom conducted a manner of sting operation where they would attempt to gain the sympathy of a person in the city who could get them in contact with someone willing to help them escape the country to go help the war effort in England or France on the side of the Allies. Naturally, if the person agreed to help the spy, he or she would be arrested. Spies also kept track of comings and goings, and plainclothes spies would sit on trams around the city and eavesdrop.[48] There were also multiple levels of German police presence in Belgium—the Military Police, who acted as a normal occupying police force, and the Political Police, who specialized in counter-espionage and who (as a side-effect of their duties) inspired fear and almost paranoia in the civilian population.[49] As Larry Zuckerman explains:

> No one outside of Belgium could appreciate what was happening, and to do so would have required a frame of reference that they lacked. A later generation that had witnessed full-blown totalitarian regimes would have

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[45] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "An outsider inside: the occupation diary of Georges Eekhoud", in Serge Jaumain, Michaël Amara, Benoit Majerus and Antoon Vrints, eds., *Une guerre totale ? La Belgique dans la Première Guerre mondiale. Nouvelles tendances de la recherche historique. Actes du colloque international organisé à l'ULB du 15 au 17 janvier 2003*, Studies on World War One, 11 (Brussels : AGR, 2005), P. 13

[46] Ludwig von Falkenhausen became Governor General of Belgium under the German occupation after Moritz von Bissing died in 1917.

[47] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "Belgium," in: John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I*, Blackwell Companions to World History series, (London: Wiley- Blackwell, 2010), P. 394.

[48] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1,pp. 437-439.

[49] Schaepdrijver, *Gabrielle Petit*, pp. 72-74, 79-84.

> understood, but in 1914 and 1915, the occupation was hard to comprehend or credit, never mind explain.[50]

Belgians suffered from a lack of resources, but more importantly even than that, they suffered from an atmosphere of fear, steadily imposed over the course of the years of occupation.

Another overarching aspect of occupation was the inability to express patriotic pride, or work for patriotic causes. There was almost nothing Belgians could do in Belgium for the sake of their own country, except to get out of it; somewhere around 30,000 Belgian men escaped the country through neutral Holland to go and join the war effort in Britain and France over the course of the German occupation. Four out of five Belgian men of military age, however, were not in the army, in part because of only very recent Belgian military reforms, and in part because the invasion by Germany had been so swift.[51] What this meant was that there were a significant number of military-aged men in Belgium living with frustration at their inability to help their country, generally unemployed, and also living under an extra helping of suspicion from the German occupiers, who were naturally wary of groups of military-age men in the occupied zone, especially 'idle' ones.

Once the occupation took hold, Belgians were largely unable to do anything about it: crossing the border to Holland was dangerous, and would become increasingly more dangerous over the course of the war as the Germans mounted an electrified, guarded fence to block the route.[38] The ultimate result of all of this, however, was that resistance went underground, and did not fight back with weapons, but with more subtle means. There was an extensive

[50] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium,* pp. 136-7

[51] Sophie De Schaepdrijver. "No Country for Young Men: Patriotism and its Paradoxes in German-Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," in Laura Engelstein and Boris Kolonitski, eds., *Patriotic Cultures during the First World War*, (Oxford University Press: forthcoming 2016), pp. 3-4.

underground press (the most extensive in Europe)[52] but no organized armed resistance during Belgium's occupation; violent action taken against the German occupiers was rare, and in fact sharply condemned by the underground press, partly for fear that the occupiers would act out reprisals against the rest of the population.[53] Reprisals in fact were quite common. For example when an aviator dropped pamphlets in support of the Belgian people on Brussels on September 7th, 1916, by September 12th a new curfew was in place for the citizens of Brussels (on account of "signals" having supposedly been given to the aviator as he flew over) forcing them all to remain inside after 8 at night.[54] A curfew was hardly the worst fate possible for a population, but more important than the curfew itself was the demonstration of Germany's power over the people of Belgium, and its willingness to punish the population at large for the actions of a few, or even hearsay.

It was in some ways the arbitrariness of many aspects of the occupation (such as the curfews, for example) which presented a challenge to the citizens of Belgium, but more than that it was the atmosphere of fear, want, and powerlessness perpetuated by the German occupiers that wore most intensely on the Belgian population during the years of occupation. Requisitions, arbitrary laws or rules used to emphasize the powerlessness of the Belgian people against the German occupiers, and the blaming of the Belgian people for the deaths of Belgian citizens which occurred during the invasion (both by resisting and by means of the *francs-tireurs* myth) all

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[52] Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Emmanuel Debruyne. "*Sursum Corda*: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," First World War Studies 4:1 (March 2013), p. 1.

[53] Schaepdrijver, *No country for young men*, pp. 4-14.

[54] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* Sept 7-12, 1916.

added up to create a very particular social environment in which Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp kept diaries.

Chapter 3

Class: Status, War, and Bread

Class distinctions in Europe at the outset of the First World War were both more static and more clearly distinguished than they would be throughout the rest of the twentieth century, but occupation society was in some ways able to turn these distinctions on their head. Across Europe at the time, the status of the middle-class was shifting, and middle-class positions such as doctors, teachers, and lawyers were growing both in number and in status. They held a tenuous position in terms of maintaining what status they did have, and they tended to make the upper-middle class quite nervous by emphasizing a certain degree of fluidity between classes.[55] At the same time, the working classes were becoming more powerful as unions became more prevalent and popular among members of the working class. The working class was gaining a self-identity at the same time that the middle classes were becoming somewhat fragmented, and so class friction was increasing.[56] Belgium faced these problems as much as the rest of Europe, but with the German occupation, all classes in Belgium became fraught with unexpected benefits and drawbacks, distinct from the benefits and drawbacks of class in the rest of Europe.

The working class in Belgium was immediately faced with challenges as industry in Belgium ground to a halt, and the middle classes found themselves with new material want and no way to

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[55] E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), P. 165-191.

[56] Stearns, Peter N. *Encyclopedia of European Social History from 1350 to 2000*, Vol. 3, (New York: Scribner, 2001), P. 127-128

manage it without losing status. Members of the upper class were under close scrutiny, and all classes suffered under German law in the cold of winter. Class distinctions certainly impacted all Belgian citizens during the war, but not every impact was predictable. This chapter will examine how class influenced individuals' experiences living under occupation, but also how occupation influenced the institution of class.

Rose-Colored Classes

Both Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp lived within the class-specific society of Belgium in 1914, and it necessarily changed how they viewed the events taking place around them. Brand Whitlock, as an American diplomat, held a reasonably high degree of status within occupied Belgian society, but for all that, he was solidly upper-middle class, not upper class. Growing up in a small town in Ohio, Whitlock held a certain sort of privilege, but it was not the sort of privilege that one would expect from an upper-class European family. In fact, Whitlock's occupation as a journalist would hardly have been an appropriate job for upper-middle class European men, and it was only his eventual decision to become a lawyer and then politician which made him upper-middle class at all, despite his family's relatively privileged status. As such, Whitlock's position in Belgium was not simply unusual for him because of the Belgian culture (different from contemporary culture in America), but also because of the class distinctions which were more stratified than they typically had been in his native Ohio, where classes had been slightly more fluid. Regarding Whitlock's two grandfathers, one (Elias Whitlock) had been a pioneer who prospered in Ohio, and the other (Joseph Carter Brand) was an ex-soldier, and mayor of the town where little Brand Whitlock had grown up. Just a

generation after these two men, Brand Whitlock's uncle (Elias's son) became president of Wesleyan University—no small feat for the son of a pioneer, however prosperous.[57] This history of Whitlock's family reveals differences in how classes functioned in America. Classes in Europe at this time were more stratified, and so by living in Europe as an American, Whitlock's views on class were slightly different from what they would have been had he been born and raised in Europe.

Mary Thorp, unlike Brand Whitlock, was European, and so her class is in some ways more easily defined: as an English woman, she grew up in a very class-based society, and in Belgium held a position as governess to a wealthy family. She was obviously not upper-class, but she had access to the world of the upper-class, and even helped to shape the world of the upper-class family she lived with by acting as an educator. She held a position in an upper-class family which elevated her far above the servants, and in some ways gave her power over members of even the upper-class itself (her power to educate her young students). However, despite all of this, she still was not a member of the class. She was employed by the family, earned money from her position in it, and had no servants of her own. Her trips into town on errands for the family (and errands of her own) brought her in contact with shop owners and tailors and so on, and it was this class that Mary Thorp empathized most with.[58]

The nature of Mary Thorp's work also brought her in contact with the very rich and powerful. On several occasions in her diary she mentions lunching with diplomats with the rest of the Wittouck family, however she herself was not rich, nor was she powerful. Her life also brought her in contact with the lower and lower-middle classes, and despite her remarkably high

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[57] Crunden, *A Hero in Spite of Himself*, P. 3-4, 7-9.

[58] Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Tammy Proctor, *An English Governess in the Great War: The Diary of Mary Thorp*, (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2016).

level of education, she seemed entirely at home with, and empathetic to, the struggles of these classes.[59] As such, Mary Thorp held a sort of position between classes. She had access to the members of many classes, and could interact freely (relatively speaking) with all of them, however as a governess for such a wealthy family, her own class is less easily defined. The existence of this space between classes in fact also serves to show that despite the relatively static and differentiated nature of classes in Europe at the time, positions between classes existed (even between the lower-middle and upper-middle classes), and the separation between classes was not always clear-cut.

As previously mentioned, Brand Whitlock's and Mary Thorp's positions in society influenced the way in which they saw the society in which they lived. Between the two of them, Brand Whitlock was the most isolated from the everyday citizens of Brussels. The irony of this situation, of course, being that by virtue of his position in the relief efforts, Brand Whitlock in many ways was actually deeply involved in the daily lives of the people of Brussels; he was simply seeing them from afar. In his diary and memoir, nearly all of his closely described characters (as a novelist, he had a certain interest in capturing the 'character' of the people he met) are diplomats. He obviously had interest in the lives of common citizens, or he would not have worked so hard to improve those lives, nor been so frustrated when his efforts met challenges. He did not however tend to go around describing the clothing or manner of people he met on the street in the same way as he described, for example, Belgium's Queen Elisabeth, or even German sentinels at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. His memoir is full of descriptions of people in positions of power. After meeting with the Queen on the behalf of an American with a message of sympathy for Belgium at the beginning of the war, he describes her as follows:

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[59] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows."*

> She wore a simple blue gown with transparent sleeves, and a white, low, girlish collar; not a jewel, only her wedding-ring on her hand, and her hair dressed in delicate simplicity. She was calm with a certain gravity, and her blue eyes were wistful in the little smile that hovered about her lips. There was no ceremony at all at this rather unusual presentation…[60]

Not all of Whitlock's descriptions are quite so whimsical, but all are written with a novelist's attention to detail and tone. His description of meeting with Richard Harding Davis[61] reads as follows:

> He was extended in one of the Government's big leather chairs, with an air of having collapsed in it. He was sunburned and unshaven, powdered grey from head to foot with dust, and beside him on the floor lay his bundle, a khaki bag, part of his correspondent's kit. Despite his good looks, his indubitable distinction in any emergency, he looked like a weary tramp, and he lifted his tired eyes drolly, humorously, to me.[62]

Not that these descriptions are in any way historically insignificant or superfluous, but they contrasted with Whitlock's notable lack of descriptions of lower-class individuals (who are typically made note of as a group when they are discussed at all), reveal a certain bias in his reporting.

Mary Thorp, in contrast to Whitlock's upper-class focus, quite typically made note of the lives of average citizens, and doubly so if they were women… although admittedly her prose tended to be less flowery than Whitlock's when she did it. She was no novelist, and might not describe the sort of spark a person's personality left impressed on her mind as Brand Whitlock would have, but her descriptions of the people of Belgium are clear enough. After a trip to town only a few days after starting her diary, she comments: "The poor are suffering from semi-

[60] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 104, 308-309.

[61] American war correspondent, journalist, and writer

[62] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, p. 148.

starvation, food so dear and work so rare, in spite of all the possible help that is given. I was very affected by the change in my little dressmaker, wasting away from want of nourishment."[63] This remark is significant for several reasons, not least of which being that of all the people to comment on, Thorp chooses to comment on the state of the skilled working class, and specifically the state of a woman. Much about her perspective is revealed in this statement: she does not share the dressmaker's profession or her monetary status, but she relies on her dressmaker and cares about her enough to be upset when she realizes that the woman is quickly losing weight.

Caring about the state of her dressmaker privately would be one thing, but Mary Thorp writes about the woman's troubles in her diary, which she had only just started. At the outset of the diary, she had classified it as "Local Gossip and "Side-Shows" of the War," signifying she thought that her account was unimportant, however she also noted that she had wanted to keep one because of the historical significance of the era through which she was living.[64] In a document in which she had hoped to chronicle life in Belgium during German occupation for the value of future generations, Mary Thorp chose to include a line describing the striking weight loss of her dressmaker. To Mary Thorp, this woman's weight loss was historically significant, revealing much about her view of what was important in society. Arguably, Mary Thorp writes a great deal more about those without power than she does those with power, although she has plenty of opportunity to interact with upper-class people of influence. Brand Whitlock writes about the upper-class people he meets with, but Mary Thorpe's focus is generally elsewhere. It is worth noting, however, that although in general the upper classes fared better, many upper-

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[63] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Friday Sept 29th St. Michael's day.

[64] *Ibid.,* Sept. 15th, 1916.

class members of society were reduced to positions of relative powerlessness by the German occupation as well. They could be turned out of their houses, forced to play host to German soldiers in their own homes, or even have their children arrested, with nothing they could do about it.

The Middle Classes

Although Mary Thorp's diary reveals a significant degree of attention paid to those without power (with a particular focus on class,) the significance of class had not entirely been lost on Brand Whitlock either. In his memoir, Whitlock recalls that the middle classes of Brussels did not stand in the bread lines as the working classes did. As previously discussed, middle-class positions in Europe were tenuous, and although the middle classes (particularly the lower-middle classes) were badly in need of food relief as well, they risked losing status (a precious, tangible thing, in 1914 Europe) by standing in a bread line. Status was so important in Belgium at the time of the occupation that there were many cases of lower-middle class Belgians ignoring help (and thereby risking their health) rather than risking their status. As Brand Whitlock explains:

> It was not, perhaps, at the first, the very poor who suffered most; they were as well nourished, as they had been in former times, perhaps better, or at least more regularly and scientifically nourished. It was the middle class—or the lower middle class, if one wishes to refine upon the distinctions we make, even when we try not to make them, in our society. It was the clerks and small tradesmen who suffered most, and those of the *pauvres honteux*, [65] who were required, or who thought they were required, to keep up a certain appearance. There were many obscure and touching tragedies from beneath that were growing shabby. It was a greater mystery than ever as to how the other half lived, and as savings and economies were used, the situation of large numbers became

[65] "The poor and proud"

> desperate. A young man working with one of the departments of the Comité National,[66] one day, in the midst of his labours for the very organism that was directing the feeding of the country, fell in a faint from lack of food—a condition he was too proud to confess to those who so gladly would have helped him; he was of that class who were ashamed to go into the soup line. I recall a pathetic picture drawn for me by an employé of a large company. The clerks all brought their lunches to the office to eat at noon, and they had been used to eat there in company; little by little, one after another of the clerks withdrew at noon, and ate his luncheon alone—it was too meager to be displayed to the others. To meet this most delicate situation, two charities were organized, both affiliated with the Comité National, but receiving private donations as well; the one of them was known as *Les Pauvres Honteux,* the other as *L'Assistance Discrète,"*[67] whose motto was *"Donne, et tais toi."*[68] Many persons who had never known want, and many too proud to expose their condition to the world, would have perished if it had not been for that society, so marvelously organized.
>
> What they gave was given discreetly; no one ever knew. [69]

After it became clear that members of the middle classes were going without food rather than publicly accepting food from the relief organizations, an arrangement was made whereby food would be more discreetly distributed to the members of the middle classes. The main purpose of *L'Assistance Discrète*, was to be completely unnoticed, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that when it comes up in Mary Thorp's diary, references to it are very understated, despite the fact that she actually worked for the "A.D.", as she called it. This however reveals another difference in how the two viewed classes in Belgium during the occupation. Mary Thorp could make note of the ways in which the lower and lower-middle classes were impacted by the

[66] The Comité National (CN) was the Belgian-run food relief program which worked closely with the Commission for the Relief of Belgium (CRB), which was run by the Americans, Spanish, and Dutch. The CN did most of the legwork of actually distributing the food imported by the CRB.

[67] "The Discreet Support"

[68] "Give, and stay quiet."

[69] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative,* Vol. 1, P. 519-520.

occupation, in some ways in a more in-depth manner than Brand Whitlock, who spent less time interacting with those classes as their equal than Mary Thorp did. Brand Whitlock saw the big picture, but Mary Thorp too was familiar with the A.D., and in fact worked with individual families, as she makes reference to in the winter of 1917:

> I went to visit a mother & daughter for the A.D., well to do people who had a business & their own house at Wendwyne. Just 3 years ago, they had to leave, with 40 minutes notice, & have lost all they possessed there; the poor girl suffers with heart trouble resulting from all their emotions— & so many thousands have a similar story to tell; alas! [70]

It is important to note that despite the insight this anecdote gives as to the upsets of class in Belgium in 1916, class remained an essentially predictable influence in the lives of many. A lower-middle class identity admittedly faced unexpected challenges under the occupation, but as Mary Thorp had pointed out, the poor were not favored by the arrangement as much as Whitlock's description might imply. In fact, Whitlock himself goes on to clarify:

> The food imported by the C.R.B… was delivered to the C.N. and by the C.N. through its provincial and communal committees, sold to the communes; and if the communes had not the means to buy it, the C.N loaned them the money to do so. The communes sold the food through communal stores, and to the poor who had no money they gave food gratis, either in rations, or at the *soupes communales.*[71] Those who had the money, therefore, had to buy their food as in ordinary times, and they had to pay a profit which paid for the food consumed by the poor. Naturally there were always certain delicacies of indigenous production, which the rich could procure by paying large prices, and there were certain articles that were imported from Holland; and so, after all, it was the poor, who were at a disadvantage, and, as usual, suffered in the end.[72]

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[70] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* December 17th, 1917.

[71] Communal kitchens

[72] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol 1, P. 520.

Despite his careful attention to the needs of the middle classes, the struggle of the poor had not been forgotten by Whitlock, nor could it be ignored: after all, as an organizing member of the CRB, Whitlock had to pay careful attention to whose positions were tenuous: typically, the poor.

There were other differences in how Whitlock and Mary Thorp viewed class, as well. For all his contact with Belgian citizens via the food relief program, Brand Whitlock did not experience much scarcity himself. He mentions scarcity on occasion in his diary, but almost never as something he experienced personally. He has plenty of anecdotes, but few are his own.[73] Mary Thorp, on the other hand, quite frequently went into town looking to buy certain items, only to be thwarted (or at least frustrated) by their cost—or by the fact that the items she was looking for were simply no longer available for sale. As she explains in her diary on October 9th, 1916:

> I paid 4 fr. 50 for soleing & heeling my boots, the price, before war, was 3 fr. 50!
>
> Potatoes & butter (or rather, their absence) are the topics of general conversation.
>
> No more flour is allowed to go to confectioners. Sweetmeats only to be had in the shops that don't close, & few of those, sugar not being very available either. None to be had for private people, except for a few grammes from the "Alimantation."[74, 75]

Thorp's comments reveal not only that costs and scarcity had both increased for common people, but also that they were "the topics of general conversation," even despite the food relief. In addition, there were things which the food relief could not or did not assist with: they could import food into the country, but they could not decrease the cost of repairing boots or clothing.

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[73] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock.*

[74] A collective term for the food relief programs, both the CRB and the CN

[75] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Monday Oct 9th, 1916.

This issue would come to a head in the winter, when class—and its role in the difficulty of obtaining materials—would always become vitally important.

Winter

Several things working in concert with each other made the winter of 1916-1917 particularly brutal for the people of Brussels, but one of the primary problems was a lack of availability of coal. Mary Thorp noted that the Wittouck boys' school was closed as a result of the dearth of coal. The administration could not heat the school sufficiently, and so all of the students were sent home, but homes were not necessarily any warmer, as she explains: "11 degrees under zero this morning at 7. The coal crisis extends every day. Even in this house we have to save coal, as none can be had for money or anything else."[76] Part of the challenge was due to the remarkably cold weather throughout Belgium in the winter of 1916-1917, something also repeatedly commented on by Mary Thorp: "It is so cold, & no coals to be had; the poor are being frozen to death in their attics, alas! alas!"[77]

Exacerbating the problem (particularly the next winter) was the difficulty in maintaining or making new clothing. Mary Thorp discusses her problems in getting a new winter coat, writing about her struggle to get a friend to mail her a woolen blanket she had left in Ghent, so she could re-dye it and turn it into a warm coat.[78] At the time, it was essentially impossible to purchase

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[76] Mary, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Saturday, February 3rd, 1917.

[77] *Ibid.,* Saturday, February 4th, 1917.

[78] *Ibid.,* Friday, August 10th, 1917.

woolen stockings or woolen material to sew winter clothes with.[79] Between the lack of coal and the near-impossibility of obtaining non-worn winter clothing, life was very hard for those who did not already own spare woolen blankets with which they could make coats. As it was, Mary Thorp mentions rumors that the Germans were also (in places) starting to prevent people from re-dyeing blankets at all, in hopes of making use of the wool (often for the same purpose) themselves:

> I have had a disappointment. I had hoped to buy 2 middle sized blankets, to have them dyed violet, to make a warm winter coat, but the person who proposed to sell them, now wants to keep them for herself. Everybody is having blankets dyed, as there are no more stuffs for making clothes. At Antwerp the Boches[80] (who are already taking the wool of the mattresses) have forbidden to have blankets dyed; in view of taking them themselves, & it is greatly feared that it will very soon forbidden here. I am sadly in want of something warm for winter; three years ago one didn't dream of providing for 1917, nor of the possibility of the war lasting so long.[81]

The Germans did requisition a great deal of cotton and woolen material from the people of Belgium and Brussels in anticipation of the winter of 1917-1918. Mattresses, curtains, and other similar cloth objects were removed from Belgian homes for the German war effort,[82] all chipping away at the ability of Belgians to remain warm in their homes. Curtains can act as an extra layer of insulation over windows, and mattresses reflect heat back when slept on. But even before the wool had been taken, in the winter of 1916-1917, Mary Thorp has at least one report of a Belgian child freezing to death in her own home. As she explains: "the man who brought

[79] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Monday, March 5th, 1917.

[80] A rude word for German soldiers in Belgium at the time

[81] *Ibid.,* Thursday, August 30th, 1917.

[82] *Ibid.,* Friday, June 8th, 1917.

the ice here this morning, said a child 3 years old, living next door to him, was frozen to death last night in its cradle. The coal crisis is a terrible one. I am praying the wind may change & start the thaw, on the day of the full moon, the 7th."[83] As Mary Thorp had previously mentioned, "it is so cold, & no coals to be had; the poor are being frozen to death in their attics, alas! alas!"[84] The well-off, however, suffered far less: as Mary Thorp's quotes reveal, it was "the poor" who were in real danger of freezing. This mirrors her observation that "the poor are suffering from semi-starvation,"[85] and reveals that the poor were in the most danger, health-wise, during the period of occupation.

When it was available at all, cloth cost much more than it had before the war, making it prohibitively expensive for many members of the lower class. The lack of access to warm clothing, combined with loss of body fat (from low rations) and lack of access to warm places, created a situation where the poor were indeed at risk for freezing. More so (as Mary Thorp notes) than the rest of the population, despite the fact that a far wider portion of the population than just the lower classes felt some degree of negative impact from the cold weather and lack of coal and cloth.

Simply freezing to death (as terrible as that is) was not the only result of Belgians' inability to get warm. Disease rates grew, including the rate for tuberculosis, associated with not only cold, but lack of food. Belgian staple foods such as potatoes were rare, available more or less exclusively through the black market by people who could afford black market prices, which

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[83] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Monday, February 5th, 1917.

[84] *Ibid.,* Tuesday, February 4th, 1917.

[85] *Ibid.,* Friday, September 29th, 1916.

most Belgians could not.[86] Although the food relief programs were dedicated and efficient, their purpose was to prevent Belgians from starving, and they were not sufficient to keep Belgians from slowly losing weight, thus posing yet another problem to Belgians trying to keep warm in the winter. Even those with privilege lost weight. Mary Thorp mentions this several times, saying in August of 1917: "I went to see the Rinquets & found them both so changed since I saw them in May—so much thinner & more "affaissés",[87] like everyone one hasn't seen for a certain time. Even the well to do people suffer from at least semi-starvation." She also mentions that she herself had grown much thinner since the beginning of the war, like the Belgians around her: "It is incredible to see how thin so many people are getting… I have lost 10 kilos ½ in weight[88] since the end of 1915, tant mieux for me,[89] but it is bad for so many who lose flesh from starvation."[90] This is a particularly notable statement when one takes into account the fact that Mary Thorp's diet reflected that of the rich Wittouck family much more than it did the diets of the average Belgian citizen. In truth, the well-to-do could supplement their diets slightly with food in shops; this food was far more expensive than it had been before the war, but small amounts were still available in some cases to those with money. The poor, however, were unable to supplement their diets, as they did not have the money to afford food's new high prices. This was true for many products along with food, resulting in the poor suffering far more from material deprivation during the occupation than those with money to spare.

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[86] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*.

[87] Sagging

[88] Approximately 23 lbs.

[89] Good for me

[90] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Saturday, June 9th, 1917.

Travel

Of course, not all the impacts of class in Belgium during the years of occupation were quite so physical. Travel was quite restricted within Belgium, in part due to German fears (not unfounded) that young men would try to cross the border into Holland to escape the occupation and join the Belgian army or fight with the Allies.[91] Both Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp took trips over the course of the occupation, however their experiences were very different. Brand Whitlock had the ability to travel home to America on a planned vacation, but Mary Thorp only went as far as Antwerp. Mary Thorp's journey was not only much shorter in length of time, but also shorter in distance.[92] Brand Whitlock, on the other hand, could cross borders. Whitlock was also free to travel to the countryside, and even made a trip to the front simply for the purpose of experiencing what it was like. Mary Thorp considered it a novelty to so much as ride a train.[93] This was not entirely due to the influence of class, as Whitlock's status as a diplomat for a neutral country made it possible for him to travel where the movements of other civilians (even upper-class men of higher status than Whitlock) would be intensely restricted. Mary Thorp's experience was closer to the general experience of travelers in Belgium under occupation. As historian Larry Zuckerman explains, "to go anyplace, a person had to spend hours in line, answer questions, and buy a pass. Even then, the railroads served military traffic first, and what should have been short trips became long and unpleasant."[94] Brand Whitlock had two great advantages

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[91] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, P. 97.

[92] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows"* Thursday, August 16th, 1917, and Friday August 17th Saturday 18th Sunday 19th, 1917.

[93] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows"* Thursday, August 16th, 1917, and Friday August 17th Saturday 18th Sunday 19th, 1917.

[94] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, P. 97.

in his ability to travel: his status as diplomat allowed him access to a car for far longer than even the richest of Belgian citizens, whose cars were requisitioned relatively early on by the Germans for the war effort. Secondly, his status as an American (a neutral nation and the source of much of the food relief) allowed him relatively free access to places he wanted to go.[95]

While lack of ability to travel was less dire than food in terms of life or death matters, it added to the emotional strain of those living under the occupation in Belgium. Contact with loved ones was difficult, and in many cases impossible. Brand Whitlock hardly mentions this difficulty, but Mary Thorp brings it up repeatedly. Her contact with "Valérie," an older woman who was a dear friend of Mary Thorp's, who also lived in Belgium during the war, was often cut off. As early as January 1917, Mary Thorp was already fussing over Valérie in her diary: "Had a card from dear Valérie she is not well, suffers from cold & can't get her usual supply for milk. Poor Dear! & to think we are losing three years of the happiness of friendship! it means so much at our, & especially her age."[96] She also laments her inability to see Valérie when another friend brings news that the older woman is not doing well: "Mary tells me poor dear Valérie is very exhausted & miserable, & seems to have lost all her spring, so thin & no longer combative. How I deplore I can't get to her, & pray God I may see her again, happier than now."[97] As Larry Zuckerman explains, "Telegrams and telephone calls remained illegal, as did uncensored letters. All mail had to travel in unsealed envelopes, and sneaking letters in or out was a crime."[98] In

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[95] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, P. 97.

[96] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Jan 31st, 1917.

[97] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Saturday, February 3rd, 1917.

[98] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, P. 97.

fact, starting in May of 1917, the two women could not send letters to each other at all due to new restrictions regarding mail near the Front.

Valérie lived in Ghent, which was particularly difficult to reach as it was in the Étape (the area nearest the Front, subject to different rules and restrictions than the rest of German-occupied Belgium). Illustrative of the resourcefulness of those living under the occupation however, Mary Thorp did not leave it at that, reporting to her diary on April 26th, 1917:

> I made investigations at Central Post office to see if there were any means of writing or wiring to dear Val, in the Étape—none, except it serves the furtherance of German affairs. Nevertheless, I tried a 10c post-card pretending something about German lessons— & will see if it comes back to me as it did before.[99]

On May 7th, she received a reply, writing: "The make-believe "German business" post card I sent to Val on the 26th of April reached her; to-day I got a reply, in the same style, written on May 3rd, so I will try to continue this to tell her I am alive."[100] Obviously, this method of communication was far from ideal, but it was a better method than none at all for communicating with loved ones. Mary Thorp's difficulties in connecting with loved ones (and being unable to travel to visit them) was by no means unique, but it was not shared by Brand Whitlock, who could more or less go where he pleased, and see who he wanted to (within certain reason).

Between the difficulties in acquiring food, the trouble with keeping warm, and the near-impossibility of travel or (in some cases) contacting loved ones, it seems clear that the upper classes were more fortunate in their lifestyles during the years of occupation, but as Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock's accounts show, all was not quite so simple. The initial difficulty for

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[99] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* April 26th, 1917.

[100] *Ibid.,* Saturday, May 7th, 1917.

middle class (in particular lower-middle class) people who would not stand in bread lines is more drastic than it might appear to a modern observer. In 1914 Europe, class was precious, and was worth protecting even at the potential cost of one's life. Brand Whitlock makes reference to this when he observes: "Many persons who had never known want, and many too proud to expose their condition to the world, would have perished if it had not been for that society,[101] so marvelously organized."[102] As class dictated most impacts of the occupation discussed in this chapter, it seems little wonder that it was worth so rigorously defending: no wise person would have preferred a working-class life under the occupation regime, despite the futility of having money and status when there were no goods to buy. In times as desperate as they often could be under German occupation, every small advantage helped, and as Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock's testimony reveals, class could be the tipping point between life and death, or even emotional well-being. Brand Whitlock never even mentioned troubles in contacting loved ones, but for Mary Thorp, whose closest friends were frequently on her mind, difficulties in contacting them posed a large challenge to her on a daily basis. As the next chapter discusses, however, class was not the only intersection creating differences in Belgian citizens' experiences.

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[101] The A.D.

[102] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative,* Vol. 1, P. 519-520.

Chapter 4

Nation: Where's Your Family From?

In occupied Belgium, a great deal of a person's status in society was based not only on their class, but also on their nation of origin. This could influence a person's status in two ways: first and most obviously, there was the power imbalance between the occupier and the occupied. Germans, as the occupiers, held the most power, but it was not as simple as a one-to-one hierarchy. Belgians held less power than Germans, but there were more national groups in Belgium during the time of occupation than simply Germans and Belgians, which complicated the dynamics of nationality, and people from other nations, such as Mary Thorp, who was English, and Brand Whitlock, an American, faced different challenges than Belgians under occupation.[103]

Aside from German legislation regarding people's nationalities, the second most significant way in which nationality could impact a person's social standing was through observation. While Germany, Belgium, and foreign citizens all living in Belgium under the occupation fell somewhere on the hierarchy between the occupiers and the occupied, observers (people from neutral countries) had both a certain separation from this hierarchy and a modicum of power over everyone involved in it. Germany, as the belligerent power and occupier, and Belgians, as the occupied, were both "observed" by neutral diplomats such as Brand Whitlock, who could relate the things they saw back to their neutral governments, potentially influencing the neutral countries' decision to stay out of the war or pick a side and join in.

Impacts of nation were tangible, and hardly subtle: Belgians found themselves celebrating American holidays as they were not allowed to celebrate their own nationality. The German

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[103] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Nov. 19, 1916.

occupiers attempted to split the country on national lines between the Flemish and the Walloons, and all Belgian men faced the threat of deportation to German. All this is to say that the narrative of nation in occupied Belgium was not a very simple one. It was in many ways closely related to power dynamics and is therefore incredibly relevant when considering intersectionality in Belgium during the period of occupation.

The Occupiers and the Occupied

One of the most obvious impacts of nation in occupied Belgium was power difference between Belgian citizens and the occupying Germans. Many German policies and laws within occupied Belgium were in fact designed to emphasize Belgians' lack of power compared to their German occupiers. Petty rules such as the implementation of a curfew as punishment for showing national spirit were specifically created as a way to emphasize the futility of resistance to German rule during the period of occupation. As historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver describes:

> Travel was severely restricted by German rules, the confiscation of private vehicles, and the dearth of public transportation. For the first time in decades, distances were expressed in walking hours. Public space was unrecognizable: the country was bristling with borders and many areas were off limits (beaches, railway embankments, parks). Information was scarce. Activities slowed down in all domains.[104]

Power-plays such as these were actually a significant aspect of the German occupation of Belgium; everything from setting the time an hour different to restricting movement of Belgians within their own country only served to reinforce the power imbalance between the Germans and

[104] Schaepdrijver, "Belgium," in: John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I*, P. 390.

the Belgians. This is part of the reason Belgian resistance generally manifested in non-violent ways: small acts of resistance to delegitimize German rule were the primary form of resistance under the German occupation.[105] When the Germans changed the time of Belgium to Central European Time, Belgians resisted by simply keeping to the old time, making matters frequently fairly confusing.[106] Brand Whitlock explains the Belgian resistance as follows in his memoir:

> In Belgium resistance was mounting steadily; not the foolish and impotent resistance of blind force, the *franc-tireur,* the concealed assassin and the flaming revolt, but, what is so much stronger, so wholly irresistible, baffling to bayonets and *mitrailleuse*,[107] the moral resistance of a whole united people. Belgium had forgotten the old quarrels, the old divisions of politics and race, even those more acerbic differences of religion. The old saying that "Walloon and Flemish are but given names, the family name is Belgian" had become a verity, testified by a thousand acts a day. The old social cleavage was not so wide; men of all ranks worked together. Despite the prohibition, many little patriotic medals were being sold. The numismatic art is carried farther in Belgium than in any country in the world, save France; the whole history of the land is told in medallions. There were portraits of the King and Queen; one of them bore the profile of the King and on the reverse the words "*Belge toujours*!"[108]
>
> Even the children resisted. There is a word, considered highly improper in the French language, which, in the human need for human expression began to have a tremendous vogue; a gentleman inadvertently uttered it in the presence of Cardinal Mercier one day, and then instantly begged his pardon. But the sensitive face of the great man lighted up with its sweet, humerous smile, and he said:
>
> "*C'est un mot qui vole de bouche en bouche maintenant, et tout le monde s'en sert.*"[109]
>
> It does not sound so terrible in the English ear. One afternoon a little girl of six years, the daughter of a noble family, was in the train with her nurse, and seeing a German soldier eating a sausage, remarked,

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[105] Schaepdrijver, *No Country for Young Men*.

[106] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*. Vol. 2, pp. 266-267.

[107] Machine guns

[108] Belgian Still!

[109] "It is a word that flies from mouth to mouth now, and the whole world uses it."

> "*Maman, voilà un cochon qui en mange un autre.*"[110]
>
> Thereupon a German officer who was in the tram leaned over to her and said to her very seriously and severely, that he could speak French, English, Italian, and Spanish, and the child gravely looked up at him and said:
>
> "*Ah! Comme cà doit être commode pour voyager!*"[111]
>
> When in the middle of January orders were issued to the effect that all foreigners—except Germans—should report at the École Militaire to be enrolled, and the turn for the English women, for the most part governesses or nurses, came, they did not forget the splendid injunction to "be British and sang "Rule Britannia!" in the face of the officers.[112]

The salient point of Whitlock's anecdotes is the idea of unity. Flemish and Walloon, Cardinals and laypeople, young, old, foreigners, even: vast elements of the Belgian population were united at least in that they were against the German occupation, and rather than mounting an armed resistance doomed to bloody failure, that unity was used to undermine German authority in as many small ways as possible, every day. The German rules and subsequent resistance might sound petty, but they served an important function for both the Germans and the Belgians. For the Germans, rules over small matters emphasized German control and influence over Belgium. For Belgian citizens, however, German rules interfering with everyday life served as a constant reminder of their nation's subjugated status, and so resisting those rules, petty as they might be, served to challenge the idea of German control. Patriotism under occupation was difficult and complicated, and by resisting in small matters, Belgian citizens could delegitimize German rule in a situation in which armed resistance was impractical if not entirely impossible for helping the Belgian cause.

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[110] "Mother, there is a pig that eats another."

[111] "Ah! That must be convenient for travelling!"

[112] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative,* pp. 503-504.

Curiously, Brand Whitlock's impression of the Belgian resistance, overwhelmingly positive as it was in his memoir written after the war, was fundamentally different during the war, while he was writing his personal diary. Calling the *Libre Belgique*, the most famous and daring of the underground Belgian periodicals, "a useless piece of bravado,"[113] and criticizing the mayor of Brussels for defying the Germans early in the war, calling his actions "hysterics" and "grandstanding,"[114] Whitlock makes it clear that despite his talent for picking up on nuance, he simply did not understand the importance of this form of resistance, and did not grasp its significance to the occupied Belgians. There is no way to be certain of why his opinion on the matter changed after the war, or even if it truly did. He may simply have praised the resistance after the war because he was writing for a larger audience, although he certainly found plenty of positive things to say about the resistance in his memoir, as illustrated in the above quote.

Whatever the reason for his apparent change of heart, it seems clear that Whitlock's initial criticism of the resistance came as both a function of his position of power (which kept him in some ways isolated from the perspectives of Belgians' daily lives, for all his influence in occupied society) and a function of his position in the CRB, which saw him mediating disputes between Germans and Belgians, other neutral diplomats from countries involved in the CRB, and also England. Anything which made that balance more difficult to maintain seemed to Whitlock to be an unnecessary twist in an already complicated tangle he was desperately trying to make tidy. The Belgian resistance would have been one such twist, causing countless disputes and complications in German relations with the Belgians. What Brand Whitlock did not understand during the war, however, was nonetheless made clear in his memoir: the Belgians relied on their

[113] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* June 22, 1915.

[114] *Ibid.,* Nov. 24, 1916.

non-violent resistance to reaffirm what little power they had, and to invalidate the German occupation government.

Patriotism for Who?

One of the ways in which Belgian patriotism manifested under German occupation was in vicarious patriotism. Belgians were generally restricted from doing things with overt national pride for themselves (or worse, for the French), and were not allowed to publicly make displays of their own flag,[115] but every time they thought there was an American holiday (their facts were not always accurate, and Valentines' Day became very red white and blue one year),[116] they did for another country what they could not do for their own. As Brand Whitlock explains in his memoir:

> I have already in these pages spoken of the phenomenon that occurred when the Germans ordered down the Belgian flag; everywhere a Belgian flag came down an American flag went up. It was a beautiful tribute to our ideals, and a pretty compliment besides, though not without its embarrassments and its dangers even, for while the Germans said nothing, they did not altogether like it and when their quick intuition apprehended this the Belgians displayed American flags everywhere, more and more, until Brussels looked as though it had been decorated for the Fourth of July. Le Jeune, the barber, said to me the other day, speaking his French slowly with the savoury Brussels accent:
>
> "I am going to buy me an American flag."
>
> "Why?" I asked.
>
> "To show in my window," he said.
>
> "And why do you want to show the American flag in your window?"
>
> "Oh," he said, "to rile the Germans." (Pour embêter les Allemands.")[117]

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[115] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* Nov. 2, 1914.

[116] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, P. 507-514.

[117] Whitlock,. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, Vol. I, P. 507.

Neutral countries, especially those seen as standing in solidarity with Belgium (countries involved in the CRB, such as America, Spain, and Holland were particularly targeted for this) were the focus of a great deal of national pride which otherwise was frustrated. Belgians celebrated American holidays as though they were their own, to the extent that Brand Whitlock became concerned and requested that a celebration *not* be held on George Washington's birthday in 1915. A very sedate procession was instead arranged discreetly without his knowledge ahead of time, whereby Belgian citizens payed their respects at the American Legation. There was a small, modest celebration, but the turnout was enormous—simply measured over time so that the Germans could not reasonably object.[118]

As Brand Whitlock notes, America seemed to be the focus of this particular manifestation of national spirit more than some of the other neutral countries, even those involved in the CRB. The reason Whitlock gives for the refocusing of Belgian national pride on America is an inherent similarity between the worldview of the two countries, citing Belgians' love of liberty[119]; it might however be more accurate to say that America simply represented a great deal to Belgium at the time of occupation in which Belgium could not otherwise access. Liberty was important to both countries, but Belgium likely would not have found itself valuing *America's* ideals of liberty and freedom had Belgium itself not been deprived of exactly those two things. Had Belgians been free to exercise their own national pride, they would not have had to turn to the celebrations of others' national holidays to express pride in their own ideals. This was one of the stranger manifestations of national pride that emerged during the period of occupation under the

[118] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, P. 507-514.

[119] *Ibid.,* P. 371.

Germans, but it was not the only way in which a person's nation of origin influenced their day-to-day life under German occupation.

As an Englishwoman, Mary Thorp faced a number of challenges which were reserved for people the German occupiers considered threats. Like young Belgian men the Germans feared might flee through Holland and join the Allied or Belgian army, Mary Thorp had to check in every month at the École Militaire[120] so that the Germans could keep track of her and make certain her movements were not suspicious. The English faced particular suspicion because they represented a country of the Germans' enemies—the one Allied country on which most of the frustration and hatred was vented within Germany.[121] Brand Whitlock makes note of this friction between Germans and English people living in Belgium under occupation as well, discussing at length in his memoir one of the most famous incidents of the German occupation of Belgium, which was the execution of the Englishwoman Edith Cavell, a nurse.

In the autumn of 1915, Edith Cavell was arrested and executed for assisting French and British soldiers escape the country, as well as helping Belgian men get out to join the army. The trial was swift, biased, and followed very rapidly by the execution. [122] The trial was not the only thing which outraged the Allies, however. Nurse Cavell's execution was not the only product of the German kangaroo court in occupied Belgium.[123] However, she (unlike most of the others) was English. The implications of this are somewhat complicated; had she not been English, her trial and execution might not have been quite so quick. Belgians had already suffered many

[120] Military School

[121] Whitlock, *Belgium: A Personal Narrative*, P. 374-275.

[122] *Ibid.,* pp. 84-158.

[123] *Ibid.,* P. 451-494

outrages like this. The feature that really set Edith Cavell apart was that she was English, and this was what made public outrage about her death grow and spread so quickly. Her nationality not only caused her death, it paradoxically also caused her name to be more widely remembered after she died.[124]

Flamenpolitik

One of the most intentional ways in which national feeling was manipulated during this period was the German policy of *Flamenpolitik*, the attempt to divide Belgium socially on national lines between the Flemish and the Walloons. The Walloons, the powerful French-speaking urban minority, held most of the power in Belgium in 1914, and the more rural Dutch-speaking Flemish majority had a long-standing issue with this power imbalance.[125] Seeking to destabilize Belgium and not-so-subtly emphasize the ties (which existed at least linguistically) between Germany and the Flemish population, the German regime changed policies in Belgium regarding the Dutch language, offering changes the Flemish themselves had long been pushing for. The catch was that this was widely acknowledged to be simply a power play through which the German occupiers hoped to benefit after the war; there were even fears that the Germans were preparing Belgium for annexation.[126]

Flamenpolitik, of course, reveals some very interesting quirks of national spirit within Belgium at the time of the First World War. As previously discussed, the recruitment drive at the outset of the war was intense, as was the surge of national pride which manifested as the

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[124] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, pp. 106-110.

[125] Schaepdrijver , *La Belgique et la Première Guerre mondiale,* Pp. 36-41.

[126] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Monday, Jan 22, 1916.

Belgian army resisted the German invasion. None of this clearly anticipated the fractures the German occupiers hoped to take advantage of within Belgian society. When the *Flamenpolitik* policies began most Belgians saw it as another simple power play by the Germans, but this time the matter was more complicated than simply changing the time on the clock. *Flamenpolitik* offered tangible gains for the Flemish population of Belgium—gains which the Belgian government had not granted them, despite years of Flemish campaigning for change. Accepting and acquiescing to the German *Flamenpolitik* policies was tantamount to collaboration, given what the Germans were trying to use those policies for. By rejecting the policies, however, the Flemish people were making a bitter sacrifice for the selfsame country which was denying them these rights in the first place, with no guarantee that Belgium would provide (even in the near future) the gains the Germans were offering in the present. It made for a difficult situation.

There were Flemish citizens who bought into *Flamenpolitik*, but they were fewer and farther between than one might expect. What they lacked in number, however, they made up for in the amount of verbiage expended on them. Mary Thorp, who was not even from Belgium, expresses outrage in her diary at the actions of the Flemish Belgians who went to Berlin to discuss German policies in Belgium, writing:

> We are wrathful & indignant at … the behaviour of a few mad & treacherous "Flamingants" who have been to Berlin, to discuss "with gratitude!!!" the Flemish question with the Chancellor "Scrap of Paper".[127]
>
> His answer most perfidious; the game is merely to divide the Flemish & Walloons in Belgium just as they make every effort to put Belgium against England. Their pretext is that Flemish & German are so near in language etc etc, but the Dutch are the nearest to Flemish, so why don't those mad idiots of Flamingants go over to the Dutch!!!

[127] German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg during the war very infamously described the treaty guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality as a mere "scrap of paper."

> Fortunately they don't represent all the Flemish people, & I hope no one will be misled, which is the Germans' object.[128]

In spite of the Flemish citizens tempted into collaboration with the Geman occupiers by the policies of *Flamenpolitik*, the primary impact of these policies was to make all of Belgium more suspicious of German intentions for their country after the war.[129] There were fears of annexation (not entirely unfounded),[130] and despite the supposedly benign impact of *Flamenpolitik,* German attempts to foster good will largely fell through with the implementation of a new policy in the fall of 1916, contemporaneous with when *Flamenpolitik* would supposedly have begun to come into its own.[131] Instead of *flamenpolitik,* however, 1916 was the year in which the occupying Germans began to deport Belgian men to perform labor in Germany.

Deportations

Several factors contributed to the deportations, some of which will be discussed at further length in Chapter 5, but the most crucial detail necessary to understanding the practice is simply that German respect for Belgian autonomy was nigh-nonexistent. As previously discussed, the German presentation of the ultimatum at the beginning of the war revealed a fundamental lack of respect for the autonomy of Belgium. Germany would not have presented that sort of ultimatum to a country it felt was worth its respect, and as Belgium could not defend itself militarily from a German invasion (simply in terms of numbers and strength of arms), German "military

[128] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Monday, March 5, 1917.

[129] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, P. 146-147.

[130] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Friday, August 3, 1917.

[131] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium* , P. 151.

necessity" justified the invasion and subsequent occupation. Likewise, when Germany found itself in need of labor in 1916, military necessity once again looked to Belgium for the solution to that problem, and found lots of unemployed Belgian men (known as chômeurs). These men were out of work because the Belgian economy had been paralyzed by the German occupation, and they were not the only Belgians who would be deported over the course of the war for labor, but they were used as an excuse for the deportations to start.

Most of the industrial capital which would have been necessary to maintain the small country's highly industrialized economy had already been requisitioned by the Germans, and so unemployment was structural under the occupation regime. Germany had already mobilized about as much of its own country as it felt that it could at this point. Military necessity called for more soldiers, and for that Germany needed a labor force to replace the men who went to war. The Belgian men who were deported did not represent a viable source of labor the Germans could use to satisfactorily replenish their own men participating in the War. It could also be argued that the deportations were of a more punitive nature than a pragmatic one, which would in part explain the paradox of attempting to create a poorly treated, coerced labor force out of a group of people Germany was simultaneously attempting to win over.

Regardless of whether the Belgians were deported as a means to fill a labor vacuum or as a punitive measure, the deportations themselves speak volumes about the attitude the German occupiers held towards the Belgians in general. Flemish and Walloons alike were deported, against their will, revealing *Flamenpolitik* to be little more than a manipulation designed to fracture Belgian society along nationalist lines. Those who refused to work returned to Belgium in terrible states of health, and mortality rates were high under the brutal working conditions

(exacerbated by lack of food) which the deported Belgian workers faced.[132] Workers could sign contracts, but to do so was viewed as a form of collaboration. It would ensure that the worker's family received compensation, but it was also a document which the Germans could use to claim that the men had volunteered, when the reality of the matter was that the vast majority of the Belgian workers sent to Germany were simply coerced into going.

The coexistence of *Flamenpolitik* policies and the deportations of the Belgian workers underlines a fundamental power imbalance between the German occupiers and the Belgian citizens whose country they were occupying. As an occupying force, it seems obvious that the Germans held more power during this time period in Belgium than the Belgians did, but there was a great deal more to this than simply holding a bigger stick. The Germans were not only able to hold power over Belgian bodies (which they could deport, if they chose), they were also able to sow mistrust even between Belgians themselves, although the German occupiers never truly managed to use this to their advantage.

Despite Belgian resistance against the German occupiers' attempts to insinuate themselves into Belgians' daily lives and interactions with each other, the Germans in fact had managed to gain a certain degree of influence. *Flamenpolitik,* for all that Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock maintain that it was a transparent ruse, did in fact sway some people, otherwise it would not have come up in their diaries as an issue except as yet another thing to ridicule the Germans for. Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock are in agreement in their reaction to the *Flamenpolitik* policies. They were both made angry by them. Had the policies not seen at least modest success for a time, there would have been nothing to be angry about. Part of the purpose of the *Flamenpolitik* policies, after all, was to create friction between Belgians themselves, promote suspicion within

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[132] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Tuesday, January 30th, 1916.

Belgian society, and cause splits where it could.[133] Based, then, on Mary Thorp's reaction to the men who went to Berlin to meet with the Chancellor on the subject, it seems safe to say that these policies at least in some sense managed to create the fractures the Germans hoped for.

National identity, obviously, became painfully difficult to untangle for Belgian citizens during this time period, but there was still another role nation played in dictating large aspects of occupied Belgian society. Neutral nations had a crucial role to play in what happened in Belgium during the years of occupation. Ambassadors like Brand Whitlock remained in Belgium so long as their country remained neutral, reporting back to their home countries what life was like in Belgium under occupation, and how the German occupiers behaved. During the German invasion, for example, it was the neutral countries to which Belgians presented their case regarding the German Atrocities. Likewise, throughout the rest of the occupation, the Germans were accountable in certain ways to the neutral nations. As neutrals, these were the countries which were not at war with them, but which (given the right provocation) could feasibly join the Allies, as the United States eventually did, forcing Brand Whitlock to eventually leave Belgium. For this reason, it was critical to the Germans to present themselves well in Belgium: here they were being observed by neutral nations, and although they were not directly answerable to neutral nations in terms of their policies, neutral nations held power over Germany in terms of potential. They could not pass policies and laws dictating what Germany could or could not do, but they could in some cases influence Germany's actions.

In peacetime, obviously, international laws were passed, but neutral countries could not write *new* international laws during the war to dictate the behavior of the belligerent countries. This is in contrast to Germany's ability to write new policies for Belgium whenever they felt like it. The

[133] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, pp. 45-47.

nature of neutral countries' power over Germans in Belgium was entirely different than the power of Germans over Belgians during the time of occupation. By virtue of being able to observe Germany's actions close-up, however, and having the potential to hold Germany accountable for its actions, neutral countries were influential in occupied Belgium. The CRB was run and managed by neutral countries and it was neutral countries' ability to hold *both* sides of the war responsible for their actions when the war ended which made it possible for the CRB's food relief work to continue without being stopped by England or interfered with too heavily by Germany.

Nation's influence in occupied Belgium during the First World War was full of paradoxes. Unlike gender and class, nation is less typically of a cause for power imbalances between people, except in periods of war. An occupation society such as Belgium under German occupation in the First World War, however, was dictated as much by peoples' nationalities as it was by some of the more typical dictators of power in the identities of the people living there. Even an occupation society, however, where it would seem obvious that the occupying nation holds more power than the nation of the occupied, is full of contradictions. In Belgium during the war, Brand Whitlock may have seen a nation unified against the Germans in peaceful resistance, however there were fractures within fractures along the lines of nation. The English in Belgium faced daily challenges not posed to the Belgians as much, but when British citizens living in Belgium faced outrages relatively common to the Belgian people under German occupation rule, the whole world heard about it, as in the case of Edith Cavell. It is worth keeping in mind that there were many Belgians killed under German courts who never received any name recognition, let alone fame, and certainly not to the level Edith Cavell eventually gained. The Flemish were presented with opportunities which they had previously not had, such as the use of Dutch in

universities, but they were simultaneously disenfranchised by not having the ability to actually take those opportunities without seemingly collaborating with the Germans against Belgium, and at the same time, they were being shipped to Germany to do hard war labor along with the Walloons under conditions of duress. Nation dictated a great deal of a person's experiences under the German occupation regime, but its impact on peoples' lives in Belgium at the time was by no means straightforward.

Chapter 5

Gender: The Trouble with Manpower

The role of gender in occupied Belgium during the First World War was no less complicated than the impacts of class and nation. There were clear structural benefits for males throughout 1914 Europe, including the rights to vote and to run for office, neither of which were rights available to women at the time. Working-class men also held an advantage, as they had access to higher-paying and more secure jobs than were available to working class women. In contrast to the rest of Europe during the time period however, there were a number of situations specific to society in occupied Belgium which put men at a distinct disadvantage, including increased scrutiny from the German occupiers and the potential of being deported to Germany as workers. The individual disadvantages women *did* face under occupation, such as material want and increased demands on their workloads, were exacerbated by the pre-existing power imbalance existing at the time in Europe for their gender, but as with class, the occupation complicated many structural impacts of gender. It is important to note that occupation did not completely subvert these structural impacts however, despite causing some perhaps counter-intuitive effects for the people living under German occupation.

In terms of our protagonists, Mary Thorp was obviously a woman, and Brand Whitlock was a man. The reflection of their distinctive outlooks as impacted by this difference is revealed in a number of different experiences each had and wrote about over the course of the occupation. As mentioned in previous chapters, both Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock were more likely to be keenly aware of the situation of those in a position resembling their own, for example how Brand Whitlock spends more time in his diary talking about the upper-middle class and upper classes he dealt with on a day-to-day basis, and Mary Thorp spends more time discussing the lower-

middle class. Therefore, in terms of gender, perhaps it is unsurprising that Mary Thorp spends significantly more time discussing the struggles of women than does Brand Whitlock. The struggles of women and men under occupation, however, were not always entirely intuitive, and in examining the specific gender struggles of each group under occupation, a greater understanding of the occupation society as a whole can be gained.

As with class, the social positions Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock individually held can be very telling of degrees of power. Brand Whitlock held the position of diplomat. Without it he would not have had such a great degree of power in the occupation society. However he only achieved the position of diplomat because he held certain advantages (in his case, class and gender); had he been a woman, Brand Whitlock never would have achieved the position of diplomat. Likewise, Mary Thorp became a governess (thereby claiming a space between classes in a position which put her in regular contact with both upper and lower echelons of society) in part *because* she was a woman. Both Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp held gendered positions in terms of their jobs. Both of their life trajectories were intensely influenced by their gender, and although this was true for many people during the time period, the occupation society in certain ways became challenging for traditional gender roles.

In simple terms, despite men's inherent advantages in 1914 European society, and their access to positions of higher power than were available to women, under occupation the prewar gender order was altered, and not in men's favor. Men were prevented from travelling or moving freely, and women were suddenly able to travel without chaperones. Women were given an agency they typically would not have had during the time period, (despite the many struggles they faced during the war) at the same time that men's agency was reduced. Women faced all of the same difficulties as the rest of Belgium under occupation, however, and their structural

disadvantages made these common problems all the more difficult to deal with, ultimately putting these women in what was still a position of significant disadvantage (even compared to Belgian men) during the occupation.

Challenges to Gender Roles under Occupation

Perhaps some of the greatest challenge for gender roles in Belgium under the occupation came about as a combination of only a few factors: lack of mobility, scarcity, and (specifically) the requisitions. Under German occupation, industrial machinery was removed from the country, forcing vast numbers of working-class men into unemployment. The country's extensive industry was frozen, its equipment removed, and with it, the capacity Belgium needed to acquire enough food to feed the country. There are several ways in which this created fractures in established gender roles. First, and perhaps most obviously, massive, structural unemployment meant that the traditionally male job of providing for a family could not be completed, and instead families had to rely on the relief organizations to provide enough food. This was not as straightforward as it seems, though: unemployment (and the need for relief) was a problem, but it was also a sign that one had refused to work for the Germans.[134] To complicate matters, unemployment benefits had recently become a right for the first time in Belgian history, meaning that the unemployed no longer had to rely on charity. Women, however, did not qualify for unemployment benefits, and so they still had to rely on generic relief.[135] The problems with

[134] Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, P. 150-153.

[135] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "A Civilian War Effort: the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918", in *Remembering Herbert Hoover and the Commission for Relief in Belgium: Proceedings of the seminar held at the University Foundation on October 4, 2006* (Brussels, Fondation Universitaire, 2007), pp. 24-37.

this came into even starker relief later, when the Germans began to deport unemployed Belgian men to work in Germany, leaving women who could not receive unemployment benefits behind.

This combination of factors would have presented a significant problem to the Belgian population even if all of the men deported had actually been out of work, but the selection process for who got deported was not always terribly discerning on that point. The chômeurs, as they were called (the supposedly unemployed Belgian men), had the option of signing a contract which would provide funds for their families on the condition that the men perform manual labor in Germany. To do so would provide for their family (fulfilling a traditional gender role) but would also turn them into collaborators, and few chose to sign the contracts. Refusing to sign a contract would not prevent a man from being deported, it would simply prevent his family from receiving any compensation from the Germans for his absence, making the decision of whether to sign a contract or not a very difficult decision for many Belgian men.[136] Obviously, Belgian men faced a number of contradictions under occupation society, but they were not the only ones.

Belgian women's lives, even in roles as simple as homemaker, were repeatedly challenged over the course of the occupation. Simple traditionally gendered tasks, like cooking and cleaning became difficult if not impossible as food to cook became less available and the quality of the soap available became appalling, as Mary Thorp mentions in her diary.[137] Clothing fell into disrepair, as mentioned in the chapter on class, and women, whose traditional jobs included keeping up appearance, could not acquire new cloth with which to repair their family's clothes or to make new clothes. Mary Thorp makes note of this too, reporting:

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[136] Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, P. 133-135

[137] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* October 29th, 1916.

> This war means to us a return to the medieval ages in many things… Country women are spinning the wool from their own sheep, in the measure allowed by the Boches, for everything is "regulated." A well-known family in Brussels, fearing to have their mattress wool requisitioned like in the étape & at Antwerp, have sent theirs to be spun, to make clothes for the poor. There is such a scarcity of wool & cotton. They say Bruges is very animated by "cafés chantants, cinemas etc for the benefit of the German troops, & that the greatest quantity available of ("articles de modes" dress, millinery) etc etc is sent there for the "ladies" (quantity not quality, fortunately) who are friendly to the soldiers.[138]

Thorp's distain and suspicion for women who "misbehave" is obvious in this quote and was a widespread sentiment among even fellow women throughout this time period. This sort of gender discrimination will be discussed at further length later, however the salient point is that the time commitment to spin wool is of course significantly greater than it simply is to buy woolen material at a store. By creating such a different environment in which gendered work was to be done, the occupation changed the nature of gender roles.

Impacts of Deportations

Another way in which the gender roles were made more difficult to fulfil in Belgium during the German occupation was, as already mentioned, in the deportation of Belgian men to Germany. This impacted the women as well as the men. On a perhaps obvious note, the emotional strain of living under an occupation was increased by the loss of loved ones—and not always a temporary loss. Mortality rates among chômeurs were remarkably high, as the treatment of the men was generally terrible. As historian Allan Nevins describes in his publication of Brand Whitlock's journals,

[138] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Sunday Oct. 14th, 1917.

> The process of deportation was brutal. Men were often torn from their families without opportunity to say good-bye, were left unprovided with necessaries, and were transported in freezing weather in unheated freight-cars without protection. The mortality was high.[139]

By all accounts, the treatment received by the deported was not the sort of treatment one extents to permanent workers, or really to men one values at all. Too much work, too little food, and cold made for a deadly combination, resulting in the deaths of many chômeurs in Germany. Mary Thorp agrees in her diary, describing the physical states of the men who had returned from Germany after refusing to work upon arriving.

> Men that have been sent back from Germany because they would not work for the Boches are in an awful state of ill health, tuberculosis, etc. They say that German soldiers (meaning well) advised them to lie flat on their stomach to quell the terrible hunger they endured there.[140]

The men she described had been there for a reasonably minimal period of time. Those who refused to work were eventually sent home simply because there was no point in keeping them in Germany. They were not being productive, and Germany did not have a particular wealth of spare food to feed them. The toll taken on these men's health was not minimal, despite the relatively small amount of time they had spent laboring for the Germans. Things only got worse the longer one stayed, and as Nevins already pointed out, the mortality rate was high.

The loss of the men and their return without their health (if they returned at all) took its toll on other parts of society as well. In a rather telling anecdote, Mary Thorp relates the story of one woman's reaction to her husband's deportation.

> I forget if I mentioned the fact of the woman who took her 9 children to the station when her husband was packed in the train for Germany, & after

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[139] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, Introduction.

[140] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Tuesday, January 30th, 1917.

> bidding him goodbye she gave all her children to the Boche officer in command & ran away. He immediately let the man out of the train & freed him for good.[141]

What this anecdote reveals is that it was difficult for the women who were left behind to care for their families on their own, as the loss of their husbands to Germany to work placed the entire responsibility for the family's day-to-day wellbeing in the hands of the women. This posed an even greater problem in the occupied society than it would have anyway, as normal jobs were more difficult and time-consuming than they were in normal times, typically due to a lack of supplies. For example, had the woman with nine children from the story also been spinning wool from her sheep, it might be genuinely impossible for her to care for all nine children and make enough money to support them without at least physical presence of her husband to provide assistance with some part of the work. Hence the kind of desperation which could cause her to pass her children off on the nearest German officer when her husband boarded the train for Germany. The German army certainly lacked the time and resources to take care of the children, but without the support of her husband, so might the woman.

There is no telling for sure if this story occurred or not, as Mary Thorp only mentions hearing about the story of it happening, not having witnessed it herself. She had actually mentioned the same story previously, on November 20th, explaining then:

> We have heard some instances of pity shown to poor women in despair, by the German officers in command of entraining the chômeurs; one woman was at the train with her 9 children & said to the officer: "As you send my bread-winner away, I will leave you my 9 children to look after" & the man was allowed to remain.[142]

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[141] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Dec 2nd, 1916.

[142] *Ibid.,* Dec 2nd, 1916.

The stories are not precisely the same, although they are fairly close. Certainly, however, even the existence of such a rumor implies certain things about the occupied society: dealing with Germans was a day-to-day fact of life, particularly at pivotal moments such as the deportations of ones' husband. Also the Germans were not always entirely unreasonable, or at least, they could be forced to see reason when forced to see things from the Belgian point of view. And third, things were so desperate in Belgium at the time that it was considered brave and daring to have challenged the German authority as this woman did, but it was also considered an almost unforgiveable thing to collaborate with the Germans—this despite being forced to deal with them every day. The combination of these factors led to a very complicated relationship specifically between women and the German soldiers.

Desperation v. Anger

As Mary Thorp mentions, there are women who take advantage of the number of soldiers in Belgium to make some money off of the influx of men into the cities. These "ladies," as she calls them somewhat sarcastically, represented another facet of the role gender could play in determining a person's occupation experience. Not every woman could afford to not collaborate with the Germans. If, like the woman with nine children, this was expressed in such a way as to poke fun at the Germans, or to otherwise not work with them, it was considered acceptable, even something to applaud. If, however, a woman's solution to the problem was to get a job which involved close dealings with the Germans, her actions would be considered reprehensible, and the community would condemn her for her choices, no matter how necessary they might have been do the struggles of life under occupation.

Another example of controversial gendered work was the making of sandbags by Belgian women. Sewing sandbags might seem like innocuous enough work, but those sandbags were being used to protect the German army—the same army which was at war with the Belgian army. To make matters worse, the women who made the sandbags also fraternized with the Germans. As Mary Thorp explains:

> For the […] Boche exhibition at Luna- Park on the 15th, they made the women sand-bag makers dress up & dance with the German soldiers, and had the scene photoed for cinemas & their illustrated papers to make the world believe that the Belgians fraternize with them.[143]

Belgium did not have a great deal to lose, but it had managed to maintain an international image of being the morally upstanding victims of German invasion. By dancing with the German soldiers, not only were these women collaborating in a way, which was viewed very negatively by the occupation society they lived in; they were also allowing the Germans to take control of the narrative of occupation—one of the few things Belgium itself still had a modicum of control over. The power struggle to control the occupation narrative continued even after the war, but the difficulties faced by these women which forced them to take part in the making of the sandbags in the first place rarely entered into the debate about their method of making money during the time of occupation.

In some ways, these struggles mirror those of the deported men, given the option to provide for their families by signing a contract with the Germans, but at the expense of losing the respect of the community. In the case of the women, however, they remained in the community when facing these problems, whereas the men who faced these same problems would quite often be in Germany with the rest of the deported and therefore less face-to-face with the societal

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[143] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* 15 Sept. 1916.

condemnation they might receive. This is not to say that the men whose families received benefits from the Germans because they had chosen to sign a contract were entirely supported, even by their fellow deported Belgians (in fact, the families of men who signed contracts were cut off from relief by the CN). Women who were forced into collaboration for financial reasons were arguably more ostracized than the men who were forced into collaboration for the same reasons. Perhaps part of the cause for this was the simple fact that deported men who returned home to Belgium after refusing to work in Germany were in terrible physical shape, and so those who did give in therefore seemed more sympathetic than the women who remained in Belgium and (at least seemingly) had a less dire alternative to collaboration than the deported men did.

It could be argued that there was a more intensely gender-related reason for Belgians' less charitable view of women collaborators as well: simply the fact that they were women. Not because Belgians hated women, but because collaboration looked different for women than it did for men: men might be set to hard labor, where women's collaboration looked more like friendliness to the Germans everyone was supposed to hate, even as in the case of the sandbag makers mentioned earlier. Mary Thorp also mentions this when describing the status of Bruges, commenting:

> They say Bruges is very animated by "cafés chantants, cinemas etc for the benefit of the German troops, & that the greatest quantity available of ("articles de modes" dress, millinery) etc etc is sent there for the "ladies" (quantity not quality, fortunately) who are friendly to the soldiers.[144]

She is not simply talking about women who enjoy getting coffee with the Germans, but women whose company the Germans must pay for. With few to no resources available to them and a wealth of German soldiers moving through town, it seems as unsurprising that some

[144] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Sunday Oct. 14th, 1917.

Belgian women would turn to prostitution[145] as it does that some Belgian men would sign contracts guaranteeing compensation for their forced labor in Germany. To look at the difference in how these two situations were treated, however, one only has to look at how Mary Thorp discusses each in her diary. About the deported men, she writes on November 20th, 1916:

> Every day the German screw is tightened a little more, & our anguish is greater. There are indescribably scenes of sorrow & despair at the entraining of the "white men slaves" for Germany. The poor mechanic, Philip Morris that I have helped before, called on me at his wits end. No more work, no means of getting any, physically run down. I gave him something & he will come & tell me the result of his last hope for work, a man he must see to-morrow. If that fails, he says he can't do anything but go & sign at the German labour office, as in any case he is doomed to be sent away. The men who sign acceptance of departure for work in Germany are promised a good salary & are sent off in reasonable conditions. The 2.000 who accepted at Antwerp received 50 fr or marks each & 20 for their wives in awaiting they can send her their earnings.
>
> Those who protest, & are entrained by force, travel in cattle vans, without food, air convenience for sleeping etc etc. These last horrors of the Boches will make them hated more than ever. When the trains in which these poor fellows travel stop at Belgian stations, there are heartrending scenes between them & the onlookers. We are anxious about Pavlick, if they don't take him now (he is only 17) it may happen next year if the war continues. As I write now, between 10 & 11 pm I hear the whistles of the night trains full of the poor slaves & wounded soldiers.
>
> God help them & us all![146]

Clearly, Mary Thorp generally writes with sympathy of the deported. But for the "ladies" of Bruges who interact with the German soldiers for a source of income, her sympathy is so thin as to be questionably present at all, particularly when she speaks of their "quantity not

[145] Sophie De Schaepdrijver, Sophie. *Bastion : Occupied Bruges in the First World War*. (Hannibal Publishing : Belgium, 2014), Pp. 145-150.

[146] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Friday, November 10th, 1916.

quality."[147] Brand Whitlock makes note of the treatment of women who became close with Germans as well, remarking in August of 1916:

> Francqui brought to our attention several letters from the Governor-General of a similar character. The Comité National gives relief to wives of Belgian officers. One woman, however, had had a baby by a German officer; and the Comité National suppressed her relief. The Governor-General rudely demanded that it be restored! There are several cases of this sort.[148]

There is no particular explanation of the circumstances under which the woman became pregnant, but Whitlock's offhanded remark that "there are several cases of this sort" would seem to indicate that it did not especially matter the circumstances under which the woman (and other women, from the "several" other cases) had become the mother of a baby with a German father. The result was the same: repression of the woman's access to the cash portion of her relief. The message is clear enough that women's relations with German men, specifically German soldiers, were severely discouraged to the point of a standard response within the CN.

In order to understand how this response which Whitlock describes targeted women specifically, one must consider several things. First and most importantly, as previously discussed, women did not have as much power in European society during the time period as men did. In addition, Belgians under occupation, did not have as much power as Germans did. The power dynamic between a German soldier (or officer, as in the example Whitlock gives) and a Belgian woman would never be equal during this time period. This is not to say that Belgian women lacked autonomy in any way. It does however make it significantly more likely that Belgian women's motivations for having relationships (or simply relations) with German soldiers had more to do with survival than they had to do with fun.

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[147] Thorp, *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows,"* Sunday Oct. 14th, 1917.

[148] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, August 15, 1916.

The CN's response of suppressing the relief given in cases where a woman became pregnant by a German soldier exacerbated the precarious situation women could find themselves in in occupied Belgium. These women, now with children, found themselves with even less support than they had previously had. If they had to rely on a German to survive, then so be it. They would have few other options if overlooked by the CN. This is in contrast to the men who signed contracts upon being forced into deportation in Germany; although these men's relief was also cut, they faced less criticism from the people around them. Both the women's situations and those of the chômeurs who signed contracts were cases of people making the best (if morally grey, according to their society's standards) decision they could out of a very limited set of options. The men, however, were not penalized by the Belgians as were the women were. Whatever the motivation for these measures, whether they were gender-related or not, the women were more severely punished by both the Belgian bureaucracy and the Belgian populace for societal infractions than the men were. In fact, immediately after the war, many women suspected of having had sex with Germans were stripped and had their hair publicly shorn.[149]

Gendered Mobilization

Not every gender-related impact in occupied Belgium was so entirely negative. The relief programs working in Belgium during the occupation reveal a certain divide between men and women in terms of who did what, however these trends do not indicate that women were actually cut out of the picture. For example, *L'Assistance Discrète,*[150] was almost entirely run and

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[149] Schaepdrijver, "Belgium," in: John Horne, ed., *A Companion to World War I*, P. 396.

[150] The Discreet Support, discussed in Chapter 2

managed by women; Mary Thorp herself worked for the A.D. (as she called it), and her employer, Mme. Wittouck, helped to sponsor the program.[151]

The CRB and the CN, on the other hand, were primarily run by men. There was a divide, but it was not always a divide between superiors and employees, indicating a certain degree of self-sufficiency by the women who ran and managed the A.D. Brand Whitlock commented on the newfound self-sufficiency of women under the German occupation as well, explaining:

> One of the curious things the war has brought to Belgium is a certain liberation of women. They go out alone without chaperons; some of them walk among the poor side streets, and so forth, which many of them had never seen before. Girls ride everywhere on bicycles, there being no automobiles or other form of transport. Van Holder says girls come and pose at his studio for their portraits; girls of the best families, without a chaperon, as they never did before the war. And Count de Jonghe made a similar observation to me the other day. Women seem to have found themselves; they work, from patriotic motives, but they work.[152]

This description certainly seems to fit the experience of Mary Thorp, who often writes about going into town with no mention of being accompanied by anyone. She also, as previously mentioned, worked for *L'Assistance Discrète*, and paid visits to the homes of those using the program's relief in order to do her work. In addition, she also worked as a governess, a full-time position with a wealthy family which required a high degree of education, and indicated a certain degree of class for the family for which she worked. Mary Thorp not only worked, but she was independent, none of which made her any less beholden to certain expectations of the time

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[151] Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Tammy Proctor, *An English Governess in the Great War: The Diary of Mary Thorp, 1916-1919*, (Oxford University Press: forthcoming 2016).

[152] Whitlock, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock,* August 17, 1916.

period, particularly in regards to the family she worked for.[153] Had she been a man, her qualifications might have had her in a more autonomous position such as a teacher, but her gender came with certain rules. Mary Thorp may have been an individual and strong-willed person, but her social position was that of a woman, and the very fact of her identity as a woman impacted the trajectory of her life, as it did with all women living in Europe at the time, under occupation or no.

There was still another way in which gender influenced life in Belgium during the years of occupation: gender played a critical role in who was mobilized for the war effort, and how. When the Germans invaded, there was a great rush of volunteers enlisting in the Belgian army. But in a highly industrial society, not everyone could afford to leave their jobs, and the entire male population of Belgium could not all enlist at the same time. The lower enlistment levels in Belgium compared to other countries involved in the war was a function of the swiftness with which Belgium was invaded. There was only a single wave of recruitments, and no matter how enthusiastic, this could not possibly include the sort of population percentages of men seen mobilizing in other countries such as France and Germany over the course of the war. The end result was that many men were left in Belgium as civilians under German occupation. These men fell under suspicion for being likely to try to escape into Holland to join the Allied forces or the Belgian army. Many young Belgian men did just that, to the extent that an enormous electrical fence was built (the first such border in world history), complete with guard posts and manned watches, all along the border with Holland. Young men had to register and present themselves at the German "Meldeamt" (registration office) on a monthly basis simply so that the

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[153] Kathryn Hughes. *The Victorian Governess*. Rio Grande, Ohio; London; Hambledon Press, 1993. P. 23-25.

Germans could keep tabs on their movements (or, more accurately, so the Germans could be certain of their lack of movement). Even so, men continued to escape, either to become refugees or to join the forces fighting against Germany as the Germans feared they would. There was another, less classic form of resistance at work in Belgium, however, and it was this more peaceful form of "passive resistance" which tended to shape the day-to-day lives of civilians living in Belgium. As historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver writes in her article "No Country for Young Men:"

> It would […] be a mistake to define civilian resistance in the First World War as half-hearted because it remained unarmed; the refusal to use violence was part of the message. Civilians' task, as underground patriotic culture defined it, was precisely to push back the remit of armed violence and claim the unassailability of civilian life. This entailed demonstrating an absence of fear. This stance led to several confrontations. On the first Sunday of the year 1915, at Antwerp cathedral, the priest read a forbidden sermon to a huge and appreciative audience. On the next day, two officers sent by the military governor of Antwerp came to arrest the priest, Franciscus Cleynhens. As neighbors and passers-by refused to point out his house, a crowd amassed to watch what would happen. Cleynhens was eventually interrogated, but refused to name associates. The little scene demonstrates two things. The first is civilians' wish to show a lack of intimidation, all the more important because the massacres of 1914 had not just been instances of extreme violence, but also of staged violence, replete with humiliations designed to make civilians feel their helplessness, and in dozens of instances targeting members of the clergy. The second is the fact that no violence ensued because the Germans did not wish to unleash any. Cleynhens was interrogated "very courteously," as he himself pointed out in a letter to his superiors; his interrogators wrested the text of the next sermon out of his hands, but were mortified at having to do so; and he was not further importuned.[154]

The primary form Belgian resistance took was a non-violent method which emphasized delegitimizing German power through small acts of daily resistance. The underground press in Belgium was the most extensive underground press system in any occupied territory during the

[154] Schaepdrijver, *No Country for Young Men,* P. 8-9.

First World War, and there were constant, small reminders that the Germans were uninvited guests in the country, things like wearing small symbols on certain days, creative work-arounds to show solidarity with fellow Belgians, and common enmity against the German invaders.[155] Men, particularly young men, were challenged to oppose the Germans in a non-violent way, as the Germans were careful to monitor any men of an age who could potentially try to leave and join the army. This, as with all other things, had its own impact on women.

Gabrielle Petit, a young Belgian woman who spied on the Germans during the First World War, made for an ideal spy because she was young, pretty, and the Germans did not care as much where she was going as they would have a young man. As a woman, Gabrielle Petit would not have been permitted to join the army had she escaped into Holland. This made her, in the eyes of the Germans, less of a threat than a young man would have been. As a spy however, Ms. Petit actually posed a greater threat in the places she went than a young man of her same age might have done. This illustrates one of the ways in which gender roles were complicated by the German occupation during the First World War. As a woman, Gabrielle Petit was able to take a more active role in opposing the Germans than a man in her place would have been able to. However overall, she still lacked power in some very fundamental ways as a result of her identity as a woman. For example, at this time, Belgian women did not have the right to vote.

Gender expectations, much like class expectations, became somewhat unpredictable under the German occupation, but that is not to say that they were fundamentally changed. Women may have gained more freedom during the period, but freedom under an occupation regime was a relative thing. Belgian men lost a great deal of power during this period, but were only so closely watched by the Germans because it was believed that they were the ones who would

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[155] Schaepdrijver, *No Country for Young Men,* P. 6-7.

definitely fight to protect their country, in whatever way they could. Even after the war, some women gained the right to vote in Belgium, but only widows and mothers of those killed by the Germans (or by women held political prisoner). Genuine women's suffrage would not be attained in Belgium for decades after the war ended. Men may have lost power in Belgium under the Germans, but they did not remain powerless after the war, whereas women gained some small fragments of power (simply being able to move more freely than the men was immensely important) which they subsequently lost after the war (when everyone could once again go more or less where they pleased), and when a concerted effort to restore the gender order was effected.[156]

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[156] Schaepdrijver, *Gabrielle Petit,* pp. 132-134.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Two Tales of a City

The history of the First World War is not simple, and the history of the people and societies of the time are even less so. Specifically, the military occupation experience through which the people of Belgium lived during the war was a situation of great complexity. As more and more historians of the First World War have begun to focus on an "experiential" history of the war (one that prioritizes focus not on events so much as the way in which people lived through and made sense of events), the purpose of this thesis was to examine the experiential and subjective aspects of the occupation. How better to study this than through a close reading of the personal writings of people who lived through it? Moreover, the ego document as a source has another advantage: it sheds light on the experience of ordinary citizens: those who did not have the power to change the course of history, but whose lived experience and subjective assessment of events is of equal importance to historians trying to grasp the societal impact of the war.

Both of the protagonists of this thesis would in a sense be considered outsiders to Belgium, as neither were themselves Belgian. One was a diplomat, the other a governess. One was a professional writer, the other a wartime diarist. Both agreed that the occupation was unacceptable, but neither could do anything about it except to document what they saw in diaries, ultimately offering similar, but slightly different accounts. In the cases of Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock, their positions within society and their status as relative outsiders may have allowed them to see certain things which were overlooked by others, but may also have caused them to overlook or fail to understand certain nuances of the occupied society. Intersectionality,

understanding peoples' perspectives based on aspects of their identities, brings a great deal of insight into this study. By looking at their diaries through an intersectional lens, these differences and nuances can not only be allowed for, but also examined for the rich sources of information that they are. For example, the fact that Brand Whitlock did not understand the purpose of many Belgian acts of small-scale resistance against the German occupation reveals a distinct perspective (after all, he spent a great deal of time trying to act as a peacekeeper), and the fact that Mary Thorp very much *did* understand the need for these same acts of resistance reveals that she empathized in some ways more with the Belgians than Brand Whitlock did. These may seem like contradictory accounts, but in reality they simply show how each person's perspective was limited in some way: the idea of "what the other didn't see" is significant because it reveals what each person could afford *not* to see. Everyone living under occupation was intimately familiar with the problems that they themselves faced, but not everyone faced the same problems. The way in which people defined their experience to themselves and the very real problems they faced changed how they "saw" the occupation. The result is a rich depth of experience which can reveal a great deal about how the occupation impacted people in different societal positions.

As I hope to have shown in this thesis, intersectionality not only helps us make sense of "what the other didn't see," but it also helps us understand the changes wrought by the occupation. Not only were Thorp's and Whitlock's perspectives beholden to their class, gender, and national status; but class, nationality, and gender roles were shifting under occupation. Class structure did not break down, but it was certainly altered by the war. Gender roles were simultaneously reinforced by and challenged by the occupation rule. The concept of nationality and nationalism was tried and tested in a thousand different ways, calling into question not only

what nation people identified with but *why*, and not only why, but how to best express their national pride. As much as intersectionality can tell historians about these things, it also serves to complicate matters. Having said this, it has been possible to identify certain patterns with a reasonable degree of certainty.

First, and perhaps most obviously, the German occupation of Belgium over the course of the First World War made for a very specific societal atmosphere which can be characterized by several criteria. The presence of an occupying force is the most dramatic of those criteria, but it is not the only one. The occupied society can also be characterized by a high degree of friction between people of different nationalities, economic hardship, scarcity of materials and food, widespread unemployment, an atmosphere of tension and mistrust, industrial paralysis, frustrated national pride, and anger. These things came in part from the violence of the German invasion, and the rapidity with which Belgium was occupied at the onset of the war, but they were also heavily influenced by the fact that the Germans remained in Belgium for so long while the displaced Belgian army still fought against them. The German Command's attitude towards and treatment of Belgium also served to exacerbate matters. All of these different characteristics of the occupied society, furthermore, changed the lives of the people living there during the period of occupation.

In terms of class, the German occupation of Belgium hardly managed to turn long-established class systems completely on their heads, but there were a number of ways in which members of different classes experienced the occupation differently, and not all of these differences are what one would expect. The poor were faced with long years of hunger and the potential of freezing to death in the winter, and were clearly in a more desperate position than the middle and upper classes, but no class made its way through the German occupation unscathed.

Upper and upper-middle class people faced the potential of being forced to house German soldiers or officers in their homes, and were no more able to travel than anyone else due to the German travel bans and control of the railways. What's more, under German occupation the potential for being arrested on a small (or trumped-up) charge loomed over every class of Belgian citizen. Unemployment, as well, made itself felt at all levels of society, and often the middle classes in fact suffered more acutely from hunger than the poor, due to the class expectations they faced (namely, their reluctance to stand in a bread line), as both Mary Thorp and Brand Whitlock commented on. The relief programs had to take all of these things into account in order to best help the Belgian people under occupation.

Nation also presented significant, complex influences on the lives of people living in Belgium during the German occupation. Not everyone living in Belgium during the period of occupation was Belgian—in fact neither of the two protagonists followed throughout this thesis were Belgian, Mary Thorp being English and Brand Whitlock being American. There were a number of nationalities living and working in Belgium during the war, and although most German policy addressed Belgians living in Belgium, nationality in Belgium at the time was more complicated than simply Belgian or not-Belgian. Obviously, the German occupiers were more powerful in the occupation society than Belgians, but people from Allied countries such as England faced in some ways more acute prejudice from the German occupiers than the Belgians themselves, as was illustrated by strict travel restrictions on English people like Mary Thorp in Belgium during the occupation. Belgians however, as the primary targets of German policy, found themselves facing a larger amount of hardship in a larger number of situations, such as the deportations of Belgian men to Germany, against which Brand Whitlock and Mary Thorp both protested strongly in their diaries. There were many situations in which people from Allied

nations were specifically targeted by the German occupiers in Belgium, however the primary focus of the Germans was not on people from Allied nations, but on Belgians themselves. This made life difficult for both Belgians and people from Allied nations, but in different ways for each.

Even among Belgian citizens nationality (or to be more precise, language,) was a divisive issue: the long-standing divide between Flemish and Walloons was a cause of national friction before the Germans even arrived. During the occupation period, the German occupiers attempted to take advantage of this pre-existing national problem within Belgium by taking the side of the Flemish-speakers, who they claimed shared cultural history with Germany (Dutch/Flemish being a Germanic language). Most Belgians, regardless of language, were not willing to allow the Germans a foothold this way, however there were a few Flemish militants who thought that the situation was the most likely chance they would get to further the rights of the Flemish language in Belgium. Calling themselves “activists,” many fellow Belgians (including fellow Flemings) condemned them as collaborators; and neither Thorp nor Whitlock spared these “activists” their disparaging comments. Mary Thorp went so far as to call them “traitors,” even though she was not Belgian.[157] Ultimately the entire scenario ended up simply increasing the suspicion and tension between Belgians, which had been part of Germany’s initial intent when the policy regarding the Flemish people was instigated: in other words, divide and rule. In this sense the policy was a slight success for the Germans, but ultimately there were no tangible benefits for the occupation regime, simply more societal complications along national lines for Belgians during the time period, much to the frustration of both Whitlock and Thorp.

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[157] Thorp. *Local Gossip and "Side-Shows"* October 13, 1918.

The influence of nation on a person's experiences under the occupation regime was not totally dependent on the Germans and their policies, however. A separate group existed from both the occupiers and citizens living more or less at the mercy of occupation rule: representatives of neutral countries. As observers, citizens of neutral countries held a sort of power under the occupation government: although they were subject to the laws put in place by the German occupiers in Belgium, they also in some ways held the German occupiers themselves accountable for German actions in Belgium. Neutral countries such as America were not yet fighting in the war, but the threat of their entering the war on the wrong side was enough to influence German policy in Belgium itself. Observers with particular ability to report to the government or the people of a neutral country, such as diplomats like Brand Whitlock, or reporters, were particularly exempt from many inconveniences and hardships facing many others living in Belgium at the time. It made sense for the German government to attempt to not antagonize neutral countries which had not entered the war, so not only did citizens of neutral countries have a certain degree of power in influencing Germans in Belgium, they were also generally treated far better than members of any other nation in Belgium during the time of the occupation (although obviously no one under occupation during the war was exempt from a certain degree of hardship). In some ways, this special treatment for observers from neutral countries influenced the way the occupation was seen by citizens of neutral countries such as Brand Whitlock (although he personally was generally sympathetic to Belgium's plight), and by extension, by people living in neutral countries outside of Belgium during the time of the war.

Gender was another factor which influenced the way in which the occupation was seen, particularly by those living through it. Gender roles in Belgium (across Europe, but for our purposes specifically in Belgium) were strictly delimited in the period directly before the First

World War, but the occupation period complicated what was previously been taken for granted. For example the swiftness of the German invasion made it impossible for Belgium to mobilize as many other countries ultimately did during the course of the First World War: all of the men of Belgium could not join the army in a few short weeks. The ultimate result of this fact was that many Belgian men of military age were trapped under German occupation along with the rest of the Belgian civilians, only with more stigma and less freedom. The fact that there were many men of military age still living as civilians in Belgium during the occupation period made the German occupiers nervous, and resulted in very strict regulations for Belgian men (and led to measures such as the deportation of these men to Germany as workers). The Belgian men themselves, meanwhile, struggled to find ways in which they could express their frustrated national pride: a significant number did end up escaping or attempting to escape Belgium to join the army against the Germans.

Women did not face the expectation that they should be fighting to defend their country against the occupiers, however due to their roles in society during the time period they faced their own special challenges of occupation. In cases of collaboration (willing or no) or fraternization with Germans, Belgian women were treated far more harshly than Belgian men, both by their neighbors and by Belgian law. Men struggled with unemployment and failed expectations that they should provide for their family, but women were left with no material to sew new clothing from, no food to prepare, and an inability to so much as receive unemployment benefits, having to instead rely on simple charity. Desperation, not treachery, was the driving force behind many of the women who ended up taking jobs for the Germans, or who became prostitutes during the occupation. Observers, even female ones during the time period such as

Mary Thorp, were not generally sympathetic to this fact, increasing the plight of women under occupation still more.

Men's pride and expected role as a provider and protector was often battered by the way the German occupiers treated Belgian civilians, but women's pride was not even acknowledged, and they faced more pervasive (if less dramatic) hardship than the men did. There were ways in which women benefited from the war, including greater independence and more freedom to travel than men had (as the Germans were afraid the men would escape to join the army), but they were few and far between, and after the war an active effort was mounted to return gender roles to their pre-war status. Men had not been less powerful than women during the period of occupation, they had simply been *less* more powerful than they had earlier been, as men lost freedom at the same time as women gained a few small freedoms. Both groups were living under occupation and facing hardship because of it, so neither actually benefited overall, but there were a few ways in which occupation society granted freedoms to women which had not previously been available to them, as noted by Brand Whitlock when he commented on the sudden frequency of seeing Belgian women in town without chaperones. Belgian men, however, gained no freedoms whatsoever as a function of the occupation.

It would, of course, be possible to extend the intersectional analysis. Class, nation, and gender are only a few of the aspects of people's lives which impacted the way in which they experienced the German occupation of Belgium in World War One. Historians could examine physical ability, or age, or family connections to a member of the military: Mary Thorp had a nephew in the army who was a prisoner of war while she wrote her diary, but Brand Whitlock had no family members in the military. Proximity to the front lines could have also changed perspectives; as both Thorp and Whitlock point out a great many times, life in the areas closest to

the front (the so-called “Étape”) was much harsher, as the occupation regime in those areas was completely military, whereas in that part of Belgium furthest from the front, it was a military-civilian hybrid. The rural/urban difference could also easily be explored, or education and ability with various languages. There are many further questions to be asked, as each answer only raises further questions. Even along the basis of simply class, nation and gender, there are questions which seem to evade, but by examining not only each separately but also their interconnected aspects, Belgium under occupation begins to come into focus.

Brand Whitlock wrote a diary and a memoir to bring Belgium as he saw it to life, and Mary Thorp wrote a diary, but neither saw the whole picture. By examining how they viewed the occupation differently and why, hopefully this thesis has illustrated the ways in which intersectionality impacts even historical accounts in ego documents. Hopefully techniques such as these may be used by future historians or in our modern times, to gain a fuller picture (including how people fit into it) when trying to understand other high-pressure societies or nations under occupation.

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