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Plucky Tommies, Angelic Nurses and the Others: Identity Constructions in Hegemonic and Antihegemonic Discourse of First World War Songs

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The Tommy is a singing soldier. (Patrick McGill, *Soldier Songs* 1917)

1. Introduction

When Gavrilo Princip fired his fatal shots killing the heir to the Austrian throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie, the consequence was not only a war that engulfed most of Europe and then spread beyond the continent, but it also, literally, represented the starting shot of a new era.¹ The Great War, later renamed the First World War, because it was eclipsed by a second, even more cataclysmic worldwide conflagration, combined features of the preceding periods with the modern era, but its effects reverberate through the hundred years that have elapsed since its conclusion: fascism would not have found the fertile ground it thrived on, and the polarisation between East and West is still very present in today's politics, both linked to the war that was meant "to end all wars". To debate the extent to which social, cultural and technological developments were part of historical processes that would have taken place in any case or whether, for at least some of them, the war was merely a catalyst would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Some, nevertheless, need to be considered as they have an impact on the discussion undertaken here.

I shall, then, begin with a number of considerations concerning the societal and cultural context to provide the background for the phenomena discussed later. These considerations include the role of the music and songs of the period – mainly in Britain – as performed both professionally and as communal practice. The two levels generally represent two types of discourse: professionally composed songs with a commercial interest and a calculated mass appeal, can be seen as mainly representing the hegemonic discourse of the day, whereas the "folk" music sung by the soldiers in the field with mostly anonymous creators or adaptors and, to a varying degree, a subversive anti-authoritarian thrust, is to be considered as a manifestation of anti-hegemonic discourse (Watts & Andres Morrissey 2019). The analysis of the song lyrics, based as it is on the initial discussion of the historical context, societal perceptions and cultural considerations (as discussed in section 2) in section 3 explores lyrical strategies that construct contemporary hegemonic identities and their characteristics, femininity, masculinity, sense of duty, loyalties, etc., focusing on the songs of the contemporaneous musical mainstream, which at least at the beginning of the war, songs that were characteristic of the hegemonic discourse and with it, the perception of 'good' men and

¹ For the historical background I rely on Arthur (2002), Adie (2013) and Segesser (2014), the latter of whom has also been unstinting in sharing his expertise of the period in private communication.

women. Section 4 then analyses how deviance from the norms manifests itself in the same context by examining the songs of the soldiers on active service, disseminated by means of trench journals and sung on marches or in soldiers' bars and canteens. These songs, representative of the antihegemonic discourse in the counter-culture of the soldiers' (Tommys) thematise rejection of the dominant discourse, especially concerning decency, criticism of authority and existentialism in self-preservation, but as will be discussed nevertheless share some of the prevalent mindsets of the day.

2. Contexts

2.1 Historical and Societal Givens

Even though WWI took place during the reign of George V, preceded by nine years of the Edwardian period, all adults who lived through it had been born in the Victorian era in a society characterised by Victorian values. Fletcher, referring to Brooke's poem *Peace*,² which welcomes the call to arms as a relief of the perceived stagnancy of peace, states that

[Brooke's] lines are a literary call to action to the generation of the 1880s and 1890s, a response to Belgium's plight and Germany's aggression [...] The world crisis, [...], summoned the conscience of an imperial people long slumbering through an extended Edwardian summer. Britain and Ireland, with sudden alacrity, became a kingdom united in defending the values at the heart of the empire. (2014: 41)

This is the context in which we may be able to make sense of how compelling a call to arms was to young men at the time, a call to do one's duty for 'King and Country' so frequently seen on recruitment posters, often with the rejoinder "to maintain the honour and glory of the British Empire" (Figure 1).³

² <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/13074/peace>, (accessed 15 December 2018).

³ <https://prints.national-army-museum.ac.uk/image/327333/lawson-wood-your-king-country-need-you-1914>.



Figure 1: Recruitment poster 1914

Such appeals were necessary because the English-speaking allied countries involved (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and later the US) initially relied on volunteers. But a call to arms, which entailed making the “ultimate sacrifice”, had to have a firm basis in societal values. At the same time it blanked out the carnage of battle. By contrast, this gory reality was depicted starkly in war poetry, e.g. in Robert Graves’ *A Dead Boche*⁴ or Wilfred Owen’s *Dulcis et Decorum*, in which the poet concludes by referring as “[t]he old lie” to the claim that it is “sweet and honourable to die for the fatherland.”

Another societal value, a veritable mindset, was for individuals and the community to face up to hardship, not to show, let alone give in to emotions such as pain, fear, sadness, dissatisfaction etc. Many songs, as we shall see, contain the notion of a “silver lining” in hard times; others exhort men at the front and women at home not to pass on dispiriting messages or letters, that the only way forward was to “soldier” on, unfazed by adversity. For the men, ‘pluck’ was a highly valued personal trait, memorably expressed in Eva Dobell’s poem *In a Soldier’s Hospital 1: Pluck*,⁵ where a soldier “[c]rippled for life at seventeen”, despite his fears and pains “[w]atch[es] his bared wounds with unmoved air”. It was the same unmoved air that prevailed after the war, when the soldiers’ traumata would not be talked about, almost as a matter of principle.

⁴ <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-dead-boche/> (accessed 15 December 2018)

⁵ <https://allpoetry.com/In-A-Soldiers%27-Hospital-1:-Pluck> (accessed 15 December 2018)

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the complaints in Tommies' songs⁶ focused mainly on the quality of the food, the weather, immediate superiors and stolen rum rations, with relatively oblique references to the horrors of the fighting, often with biting sarcasm.⁷

Even though WWI in many ways was a departure from previous forms of warfare, with innovations such as tanks and aircraft, many of the daily routines involved endless marching, thematised in many songs, during which singing was a welcome distraction (Palmer 1990b); and despite the increasing mechanisation, the fighting still involved soldiers clambering out of their trenches to 'go over the top', crossing cratered no-man's land, overcoming obstacles like barbed wire and frequently ending in hand-to-hand combat. This explains why, unlike wars later in the 20th century, WWI still had a larger number of military than civilian casualties; it was to be the last one, in fact.

WWI differed also in another important respect from later wars, one which is relevant to our discussion: unlike in WWII, there was, as yet, no radio. Its absence meant that the authorities could not exercise a tight control over what the soldiers in trenches and at battle stations could and would listen to (cf. Henderson n.d.: iii). As a result, there was more scope for musical entertainment to be openly critical of authority.

The combination of the societal values with the historical context at this pivotal time in modern history goes some way towards explaining the themes and attitudes presented in songs of the time and consequently the importance songs and their lyrics for constructing citizenship and identity in the popular discourse of the period. However, in order to gain an understanding of the potential impact of popular song, we need to examine some aspects of contemporary musical performance practices.

2.1. Music and Popular Entertainment

The importance of popular music in everyday life and entertainment before and during WWI cannot be underestimated. Although – or perhaps because – it was not as ubiquitous as it is today, its appeal was probably more compelling since it was much less readily accessible than would be the case once radio and recordings became a feature of everyday life. Nevertheless, gramophones and records were becoming increasingly widely available (Hiley 1998; Druessedow 2008), eventually making their way to soldiers' watering holes and billets near the front. And yet, much of the music outside the parlours of better-off gramophone owners, rather than passively experienced, would have been made. Music very often meant live performances, and an audience would have to venture out for their entertainment. In other words, enjoying music involved engagement.

This engagement could take various forms. Music would be played in the home. Macdonald (2001) points out that at the time "pianos could be purchased on the 'never-never' for as little as a shilling a week, and every respectable household which aspired to an aspidistra in the window wanted a piano in the parlour" (xiii). Pianos were also present in village halls, clubs and pubs "where the popular Saturday night sing-song could be enjoyed, even by the poorest, for the price of a ginger ale, sipped slowly to last

⁶ Tommies are British soldiers. Songs written and sung in anglophone Allied army contexts will henceforth be referred to as Tommies's songs.

⁷ For a detailed discussion about coping strategies cf. Watson 2006.

all evening. There were thousands of accomplished pianists and many who could play by ear” (ibid.: xiv). Just as today many an amateur musician can strum a few chords on a guitar, at the beginning of the 20th century someone would always be able to accompany songs on an upright piano. The same, as Palmer (1990b: 13) points out, was true of canteens, *estaminets* and other drinking establishments in the field.

An important source of music for these performances was the sheet music industry. Newly written songs would be accessible cheaply and widely, with sales figures an indicator of the popularity of a piece of music; “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” was selling around ten thousand copies a day when it came out in 1914 (Pegler 2014: 206). However, for a song to catch on and sell as sheet music, it had to be popularised first, in a place that was “cheap, easy for working people to reach” and “provid[ing] the primary form of enjoyment for the working classes” (ibid.: 208). The institution where “Tipperary” would have started its rise to popularity was the music hall, and it is significant that these theatres provided musical and other entertainment for the working classes.

What is striking about music hall songs is the nature of the chorus. Generally choruses contain a central lyrical idea, which the verses either lead up to or illustrate; textually and melodically they are the most memorable part of a song, where an audience may well sing along (cf. e.g. Steinbrink & Gerl 2008; Kachulis 2005). The same applies for the music hall songs, but with a marked difference: whereas choruses can be very short, in music hall songs choruses tended to be as long as and sometimes longer than the verses. In addition, recordings of the period indicate that the verses, particularly the initial one(s), were at times spoken rather than sung. A good example for this is Jack Sheridan’s recording *When Belgium Put the Kibosh on the Kaiser*, (1914, composer Alf Ellerton) (Arthur 2001: 13). The verses are rather wordy and Sheridan delivers them like a stand-up routine with ad lib comments over the orchestral accompaniment; the verse ends with a sequence from the second to the fifth (the dominant), which is held, creating maximum tension before the chorus begins (on the tonic) with less verbose lyrics, sung rather than spoken. This is significant as many of the soldiers’ parodies only use the tunes of the choruses, but as these are fairly long, they become songs in their own right.

2.2. Tommies’ Songs and the ‘Folk Process’

The music halls, then, and increasingly gramophone records, would have contributed to the repertoire of songs sung in the soldiers’ bars and on marches. In fact, Hiley argues that these would have been more widely adopted than the parodies they engendered (1998: 62) although the degree to which this was the case is debatable. What is significant is that many of these parodies conform to a pattern that is typical for the composition and spread of “genuine folk songs” (Brophy & Partridge 1930 [1965]: 15). For our purposes, I shall posit that folk songs display at least some of the following features:⁸ they have a certain currency in a community; they are sung communally or with the aim of entertaining an audience in a communal setting; they are mainly passed on in oral performance; their tunes and lyrics have a certain fluidity, usually as a result of singers’

⁸ For the present discussion linguistic features like non-standard or marked, mainly archaic language use will be ignored. For a discussion of these aspects cf. Andres Morrissey (in preparation).

preferences and potentially the performance setting.⁹ Three notions are directly relevant in our context:

- origin and authorship of folk songs are difficult or impossible to trace;
- songs are embedded in some form of a continuum;¹⁰
- they frequently address some form of social friction.

Tommies' songs display a large number of the folk song features above, but most markedly these last three.

For origins and authorship of a song to become untraceable, generally a considerable time, sometimes decades, needs to elapse (Watts & Andres Morrissey 2019). However, in the case of Tommies' songs this process seems to have shrunk to mere weeks or even days. "There was a verse-smith in most battalions" (Macdonald 1984: 203), whose work would be passed on in improvised pamphlets, often as carbon copies. Given that their verses addressed specific instances of 'social friction', many such verse-smiths may have preferred anonymity to avoid attention or reprisals. A contributing factor to the swift adoption of their lyrics would have been opportunities to sing them on marches or during sing-songs: variations and new versions would have emerged, much like when original songs become communally sung, while highly individualistic formulations in the lyrics are replaced by more commonplace lines.

A factor that also helped swift adoption was that the verse-smiths had a rich vein of melodic sources to draw on for their new lyrics, a strategy that represents embedding in a continuum. It is a longstanding folk tradition, manifest in particular in English broadside ballads, to speed up the spread of a song by putting new words to familiar tunes. Historically this was a useful strategy for the itinerant ballad singers, whose livelihood depended on the number of ballad sheets (broadsides) sold (cf. e.g. Palmer 1996), as well as for the sale of ballads and songs written in the aftermath of industrial disasters or to document industrial disputes in order to raise funds for widows and orphans of victims or to support workers during lock-outs and strikes. Many of these ballad and song sheets contained unusable or no musical notation, but many had a remark like "sung to the tune of" (cf. Simpson 1966). These tunes could be popular music hall ditties or melodies of church hymns.¹¹ The same tradition continued with Tommies' songs: the tunes were often the lengthy choruses of music hall songs, but they also included children's or other folk songs, with *My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean* a particularly productive tune. Another rich source were church hymns, which all soldiers were familiar with as a result of church parades, "routine and compulsory" (Palmer 1990b: 7), but also because of "[r]eligious observance [as] a sign of that much-prized

⁹ The notion of *contextualisation* is succinctly discussed in Bauman and Briggs (2009).

¹⁰ Elsewhere we have defined this continuum in terms of a *discourse archive* (see Watts & Andres Morrissey 2019). Blommaert supplies a useful definition of *archive* as "the macro-sociological forces and formations that define and determine what can be said, expressed, heard, and understood in particular societies, particular milieux, particular historical periods" (2005: 102).

¹¹ Tommy Armstrong (1848 – 1920), the great Tyneside music hall performer and song writer wrote his lyrics commemorating the 1882 mining explosion at Trimdon Grange, County Durham, to a music hall tune called 'Go and Leave Me If You Wish It', a tune also used by evangelists (cf. sleeve notes of Martin Carthy's LP *Sweet Wivelsfield* (1974); Lloyd 1952 [1978]: 352).

‘respectability’ which was a hallmark of the disciplined Victorian age” (Macdonald 2001: xv). We will explore some of the songs and their sources in section 4.

2.3. Popular Song as Discourse

Our discussion so far has indicated that there were two types of songs that the soldiers would have been exposed to and would have sung. On the one hand there was popular entertainment, which could be controlled by the political and societal powers of the day and to a considerable degree reflected a hegemonic discourse; by contrast, the Tommies’ songs written and sung largely away from that control would address, at least in parts, issues that popular songs of the time mostly did not. J. B. Priestley (1962) voices this contrast very pointedly:

The First World War, unlike the Second, produced two distinct crops of songs: one for patriotic civilians, like the drivel [of “We Don’t Want to Lose You”]; the other, not composed and copyrighted by anybody, genuine folk song, for the sardonic frontline troops. (quoted in Palmer 1990b: 15)

Tommies’ songs thus represent to a large extent the antihegemonic discourse of the war years, because, in Brophy and Partridge’s words, “[t]hey come from the ranks of private soldiers without ambition to bear office or social responsibility” (1930 [1965]: 15) and in that sense they also reflect the third point highlighted above, i.e. that many folk songs address social friction.

Hegemonic discourse largely negates the existence of such friction. It extolls the virtues of good citizenship, of the dominant group, in contexts with personality cults, of a leader or leaders. Such songs (re-)enforce political givens, represent the status quo as a condition to be maintained and instruct their addressees to perpetuate that status quo. In the context of WWI they would exhort citizens to ‘do their bit’ for ‘King and country’, to make the necessary sacrifices in an implicit ‘*dulcis et decorum*’ rhetoric.

Rather than maintain and preserve the given order, antihegemonic songs will question, subvert and possibly even call for the destruction of this order by uniting supporters in their protest against the system. At the very least, these songs – which by their very nature are well suited to or even expressly written for communal singing – provide a platform for the disenchanting or even disenfranchising to “answer back” (Watts & Andres Morrissey 2019).¹²

The nature of such answering back is, in itself, of interest. We can distinguish between three strategies. The first form of answering back is *explicit* in that it addresses issues in question openly, outlining unacceptable conditions and naming perceived adversaries. It is a somewhat risky strategy as it leaves writers and singers open to reprisals by the addressees and may well lead to persecution or even prosecution.

Over time explicit protest is likely to recede into history, as references and allusions become unclear and targeted addressees die or resign from their positions of power.

¹² A large number of popular songs, of course, do not address social or political issues, at least not overtly. However, some apparently innocuous songs in pop history, particularly of the boy-meets-girl variety, in the #metoo context have become highly contentious, especially those that seem to condone coercion against or pressure on a woman (The Beatles’ “Run for Your Life” is a stark example).

However, this does not (necessarily) remove the sting of the antihegemonic stance from such a song, especially if the ills it addresses remain prevalent and pressing. A case in point is *The Ballad of the Triangle Fire* (Seeger & Reiser 1986: 87) about a fire in New York in 1911, in which 146 young seamstresses working in a sweatshop on the eighth to tenth floors of a factory building lost their lives because doors were routinely kept locked to prevent toilet breaks, and the ladders of the fire brigade only reached as far as the sixth floor. The song was written in 1968 by Ruth Rubin at a time when social protest was arriving in the mainstream, and it is still sung today with reference to similar tragedies in Asian sweatshops. This form of answering back can be described as being *entailed*, in the sense that, by referring to historical ills, current ones are addressed as well.

The third strategy is one that needs to be predominately used by the most disenfranchised groups in that it serves as a rallying cry to a group, but the topic addressed is represented in symbols or seemingly innocuous references to the outwardly mundane. The 'People of Israel' being kept in bondage but eventually freed, the subject of many spirituals, can be interpreted as *encoded* protest, as would *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, a song that seems to be about passing a drink, which is said to represent a set of instructions to runaway slaves about how to get to the Union States before and during the American Civil War. These strategies will be relevant in the discussion of antihegemonic Tommies' songs because to varying degrees they are represented there.

We have now covered the main aspects of the social and historical context, examined the role of music before and during the war and considered popular musical entertainment as hegemonic discourse against the antihegemonic discourse of community "folk" singing. In the remainder of this chapter we shall examine practical examples of both types of songs and the identities they construct.

3. Identity Constructions in Music Hall Songs and Popular Recordings

With music halls as a mainstay of entertainment, also for the lower classes, it is hardly surprising that the battle for hearts and minds and, in the case of fit young men, bodies started on these stages and "the world of show business joined in, with the stars of the music hall including patriotic songs in their acts" (Adie 2013: 11).

3.1. "Keep the Home-Fires Burning": Constructions of Womanhood

An important figure was Vesta Tilley, "Britain's best Recruiting Sergeant" (ibid.: 90). Her impact is evident in the account of millworker Kitty Eckersley who, invited with her husband to the 'Palace' by an enlisted Canadian friend, saw Tilley on stage singing "those songs, 'We Don't Want To Lose You, But We Think You Ought To Go' and 'Rule Britannia', and all those kind of things. Then she came off the stage and walked all round the audience [...] And the young men were getting up and following her" (Arthur 2002: 14-15). This was part of a carefully orchestrated strategy to encourage able-bodied young men to enlist on the spot and to see this as matter of honour and part of their duty as British subjects. The song which Kitty Eckersley refers to was also

marketed as *Your King and Country Want You*, written by Paul A. Rubens in 1914¹³ for a female singer and popularised by Helen Clark, although it was sung by many, including some male artists popular at the time.

By using a woman's voice it constructs an image of the self-sacrificing wife, girlfriend or mother, women who admonish their men "to play their part in war" because "every woman's duty / is to see that duty is done." The lyrics present a perception of womanhood prepared to accept loss ("we don't want to lose you / but we think you ought to go"), accept loneliness ("we shall want you and miss you") and selflessness in the conclusion ("for your King and Country / both need you so"). There is a reference to sacrifice, rather obliquely, in a line like "no matter what befalls you", but the reward for their men is "we shall love you all the more" and "... cheer you, thank you, kiss you / When you come back again." Similar emotions are also expressed in Figure 2.¹⁴



Figure 2: Appeal to women to encourage partners to enlist.

What is also noteworthy is the choice of sports referred to as manly pursuits in the opening lines "We've watched you playing cricket and every kind of game / at football, golf and polo you men have made your name." With the exception of football, they

¹³ The lyrics of the songs in this chapter are taken from Bolton and Jones 1978; Arthur 2001; Palmer 1990a; and/or Pegler, 2014.

¹⁴ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/9/94/Lawson_Wood_-_Parliamentary_Recruiting_Committee_-_Your_King_%26_Country_Need_You.jpg (accessed 15 December 2018).

index middle-class or even upper class (polo) pursuits, even though the addressees would have included a fair proportion of working-class recruits.

The impact of the song was of course strengthened by public and peer pressure during music hall performances as described by Kitty Eckersley, but also in the form of the White Feather campaigns, where women – but also children – would press a white feather, the emblem of cowardice, into the hands of men not in uniform. The experience of Rifleman Norman Demuth is typical: “[...] I was given a white feather when I was 16, just after I had left school. I was looking in a shop window and I suddenly felt somebody press something into my hand and I found it was a woman giving me a white feather” (Arthur 2002: 19).¹⁵

But also in other contemporary songs, women served their purpose of encouraging men to fight for the cause while they bided their time at home. Probably the best-known song of this kind, still known and sung today, is *Keep the Home-Fires Burning*, written in 1914 by 21-year old Ivor Novello, future impresario of note in Britain, and American poet Lena Guilbert Ford (Arthur 2001: 17). In this song, the role women were meant to play is perhaps best evoked in the lines

Let no tears add to their hardships
As the soldiers march along
And although your heart is breaking
Make it sing this cheery song.

Putting on a brave face is also in evidence in the song *Send Him a Cheerful Letter*, which exhorts women to “Tell him you’ve ne’er felt better / Though it’s all the other way” (ibid.: 35). But a central motif in both of these and in other songs is the image of the “silver lining / through the dark cloud shining”, and to be strong, “till the lads come home”.

¹⁵ It has to be noted that women, in order to be taken seriously in their demands for political participation, engaged in such activities to demonstrate that they were willing to engage with their country in such difficult times (Segesser 2018, personal communication).



Figure 3: Family as more desirable than a Victoria Cross

Besides being portrayed as the keeper of the hearth and the wife and mother of the children as in Figure 3,¹⁶ another role women appeared in was that of the seductress, both in recruitment posters and in music hall song. A telling example for this is *I'll Make a Man of You* (1914, music Arthur Wimperis, lyrics Herman Finck); according to the sheet music cover sung by “Miss Minnie Love”, it represented an alluring promise to young and not so young men. Again, the voice is that of a woman and in the chorus she names the enlisted men she goes out with each evening of the week, concluding with “but on Saturday I’m willing if you’ll only take the shilling / To make a man of any one of you.” The suggested availability of a beautiful woman on a stage must have been a thrill for most men in a society which at least on the surface was rather prudish, and the fact that music halls often had recruitment officers ready to take the names of volunteers, giving them the opportunity to “take the shilling”, the traditional first pay of the newly enlisted, there and then, was effective indeed.

A third powerful projection of female identity was the nurse. According to Adie (2013) many young women signed up as nurses directly from the relatively sheltered drawing rooms of middle-class Britain, motivated to do their patriotic duty, only to find themselves in traumatic surroundings of field hospitals, witnessing horrendous injuries and often being the last human being to sit by dying soldiers. In a world that was almost entirely male, dominated by pain and bloodshed, they often were depicted as saintly, in many images with their arms open in a gesture of acceptance and welcome, but also reminiscent of angels, sometimes even sporting wings. One of the most enduringly popular songs was *The Rose of No-Man’s Land* (1916, music Jack Caddigan, lyrics James Alexander Brennan), according to Pegler “one of the first songs written about the

¹⁶ <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003675383/> (accessed 15 December 2018).

women who served during the war” (2014: 274). It presents the perspective of a man, presumably a soldier, reminiscing about “[...] a rose that grows in ‘No-Man’s Land’ / And it’s wonderful to see.” Later in the chorus, “the one red rose the soldier knows” is described as “the work of the Master’s hand”, combining the feminine beauty of the rose with the aspects of perfection and sainthood that is such a central motif in many propaganda posters of the period (Figure 4).

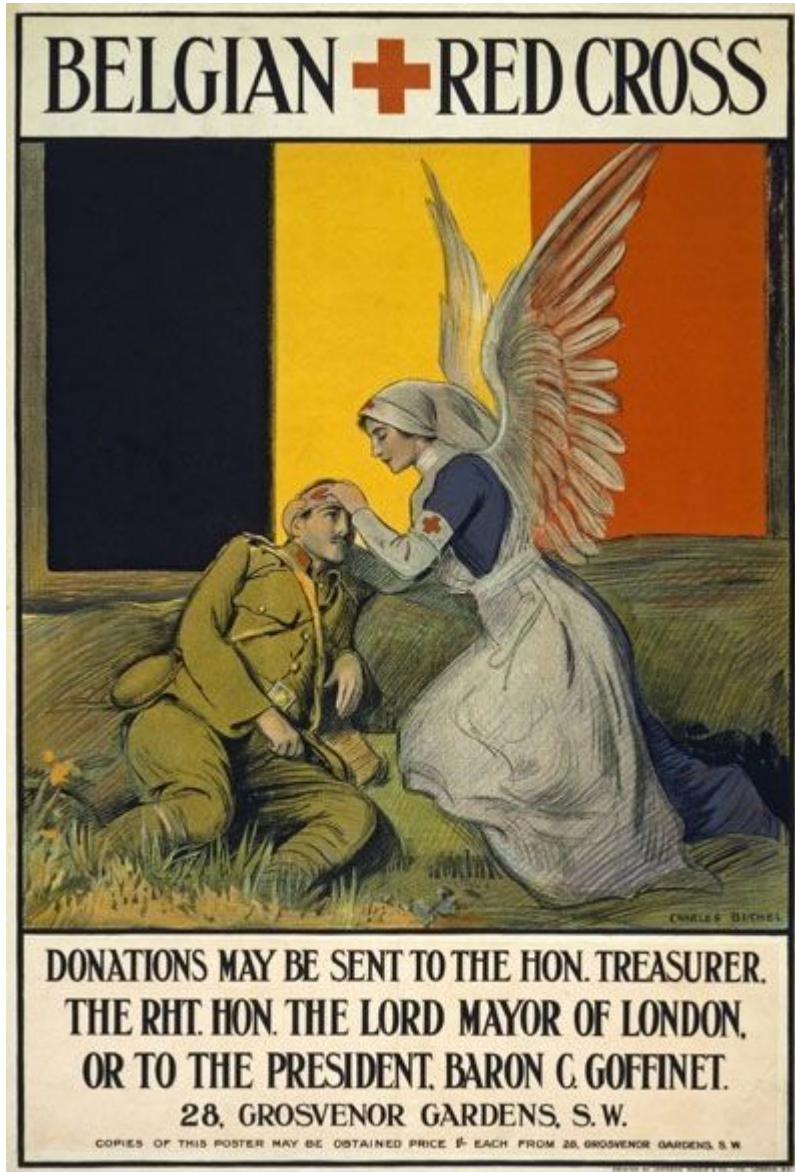


Figure 4: Nurse as an angelic saviour of the wounded

But the songs also present an image of women that seems to belie the urgent call for emancipation of the suffragette movement. *Your King and Country Want You* contains the lines “It’s easy for us women / To stay at home and shout”, belittling the status of women. But there is worse: other songs misogynistically ridicule women as inept do-gooders. In *Sister Susie’s Sewing Shirts for Soldiers* (1914, Herman Darewski with lyricist R.P. Weston), the eponymous heroine’s good works are an annoyance to her father, and the soldiers “send epistles, / Say they’d sooner sleep in thistles / Than the saucy, soft, short shirts for soldiers sister Susie sews”. *Good-bye-ee!*, written in 1917 by R.P. Weston and Bert Lee describes “Lady Lee, who had turned eighty-three / Sing all the old, old songs she knew” during a concert for convalescent soldiers on home leave, and her promise “to kiss each one” leads into the chorus implying that this makes all of them run. Here the do-gooder is not only portrayed as inept, but also as old, inappropriately flirty and therefore ridiculously unattractive. Needless to say, both songs were very popular with audiences and considered hilarious.

What seems to be largely absent in popular song about women, even though they are the subjects of many posters, is their portrayal as housewives called upon to economise in the kitchen or as workers filling in for absent men. These posters, however, all illustrate a feature that was definitely present in many songs, the notion of making the best of a difficult situation, to “turn the dark cloud inside out” and to “Smile! Smile! Smile!” in the face of hardship. This last element is also very frequent in songs that construct the male counterpart of the good community member.

3.2. “Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag”: The Plucky Tommy

Your King and Country Want You, although presenting a woman’s perspective, also creates images of manhood in the appeal to a patriotic obligation when “your country calls you / to play your part in war”. The same patriotic obligation is revisited in the last stanza as the moral “duty / To the men who first went out”. The reward for the man who answers the call of duty to the nation and to his comrades is a promise of hero worship of posterity when “your name, in years to come / Each mother’s son shall bless”.

In this portrayal of men it is not only the appeal to typical societal values, duty and honour, but how it presents the nature of the war. The implication is that war is a continuation of sportsmanlike competition, but the phrase “to play your part in war” also implies an element of play acting. Even in later years, when the enthusiasm for the war had been dampened by its duration and the evidence of its human costs manifested itself in invalided veterans on Britain’s streets, music hall songs glossed over the horrors. The song *Good-bye-ee!* portrays “Brother Bertie” as an upper class rookie officer reporting for duty “With a smile on his lips and his lieutenant pips / Upon his shoulder, bright and gay”, and his commitment euphemistically as going “away / To *do his bit* the other day” (emphasis added).

While complexities of pre-war treaties meant that the UK had no choice about being at war, the situation was very different in Australia and New Zealand, and in the US (Segesser 2014). None of these countries had conscription and all relied on voluntary enlistment. For the ANZAC troops as well as the US forces, recruitment was supported by music hall or vaudeville songs. In order to persuade Australians to enlist for the ill-fated Dardanelle campaign (February 1915 to January 1916), *Boys of the Dardanelles* (1915,

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Marsh Little)¹⁷ provided a rousing anthem for potential volunteers. Like British recruiting songs, it appealed to the addressees' sense of duty, not just to Australia, metonymically referenced as "the dear old flag", but also to the Empire. The song opens with the lines

Old England needs the men she breeds
There's fighting to be done.
Australians heard, and were prepared,
To help her every son.

In contrast to many other recruiting songs, this one does not avoid mentioning the realities of war, but it links them to heroism and glory with the words "How they fought and fell the cables daily tell, / Boys of the Dardanelles".

A similarly persuasive song in the US was *Over There* (1917, George M. Cohan). It too was a rousing song, constructed rather simply with a great number of repeated phrases, "get your gun" and "over there" in particular. Its appeal, both as song for sing-along but also in terms of its values appealing to young men is aptly characterised by O'Dell:

The repetition practically demands a sing-a-long, like a cheer at a high school pep rally or the fight song at a college football game. [...] The song also does much to call up various uniquely American themes: patriotism ("Hoist the flag and let her fly, Yankee Doodle do or die"); religion ("So prepare, say a prayer"); and perseverance ("And we won't come back 'til it's over, over there")(2005: n.p.)

Nevertheless, there were strong opinions questioning whether American involvement in the war was a sensible option, based partly on isolationist perspectives and partly on pacifism. The latter found its expression in what is now considered the first commercial anti-war song, *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier* (1915, music Al Piantadosi, lyrics Alfred Bryan) performed by Ed Morton, even though the voice of the song is the mother of a grown-up son. This song must have had a considerable impact as it gave rise to a number of reactions contradicting the title line, on recruitment posters as well as the 1917 song *I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Slacker* by Theodore Baker.¹⁸ In this song aimed at Americans, "whether you're a boy or a full-grown man", there is the exhortation to "play a *manly* part in the nation's plan" (emphasis added), in other words, the metaphor of *acting* is used here too, blanking out the reality of fighting. But the overwhelming theme, beside the call of duty in this song, is to avoid the accusation of cowardice. Probably the most radical expression of that sentiment, although it comes from the voice of the mother, is expressed in the lines

I love my boy as only a mother can love
His life to me is dearer than my own

¹⁷ <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/boys-dardanelles> (accessed 12 January 2019).

¹⁸ Source of the song <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013564426/> (accessed 12 January 2019). For a feminist discussion of motherhood and recruitment cf. Zeiger (1996).

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But I'd rather he were dead than see him hang his head
When our men go out across the danger zone.

This sentiment of a parental sacrifice being preferable to “own[ing] a shirk as a son” is echoed in the lines “Make your daddy glad / To have had such a lad” in *Over There*, where the use of a past seems to indicate that a son dying a soldier’s death is something to be proud of.

The contempt for cowardice is emphasised in a song that attacks the pacifist stance of conscientious objectors. Even though ‘conchies’ often acted as medics and ambulance drivers and were respected on and behind the frontlines for the dangers they braved when rescuing the wounded, there was a strong perception of them being cowardly and unpatriotic. Their treatment was often appalling, and their portrayal on the music hall stage was thoroughly negative (cf. Arthur 2002; <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/richmond-castle/history/attitudes-to-cos/> and Figure 5).



Figure 5: Effeminate COs vs. fighting soldiers

In *The Conscientious Objector's Lament* (1917, Gitz Rice and Davy Barnaby), performed by Alfred Lester to great hilarity, the conscientious objector is presented as deviant on three levels: to begin with, the sincerity of his convictions – the fact that his objections to military service are guided by his conscience – is cast in doubt in the opening stanza with a claim of exclusivity that projects insincerity in “My conscience is the only thing that helps to pull me through”. The following line takes up the notion of ‘objection’, but not to military service as such: “Objection is a thing that I have studied thoroughly, / I don’t object to fighting Huns, / But should hate them fighting me” clearly suggests cowardice, a theme that is taken up in the chorus where the speaker demands that other men and soldiers be sent to “face the danger”; however, the list culminates in “Send out me brother, me sister and me mother / But for Gawd’s sake don’t send me.” There are

two implications here, firstly, that the cowardly speaker would have anybody but himself fight for “Old England”, including his own family. However, by including sister and mother in the list of fighters to be sent into battle, he reveals himself to be less of a man than these women. This glaring lack of manliness is an overall motif of the song as indeed it was in the public perception of the time. Hibbing points out that

the First World War brought with it reconstructions of manliness that drew upon preexisting clusters of ideas about men. The binary [...] was a pivotal one in this period: that of the military man versus the conscientious objector (CO) to military service. (2003: 337)

The notion of unmanliness is starkly represented in the postcard (Figure 5), where the COs, weedier than the ‘real’ men, are not just represented as being engaged in the foolish undertaking of sweeping and cleaning the trench under heavy fire (not depicted but referred to in the doggerel underneath the image), but they are given the accoutrements of housewives – the very antithesis of the manly warriors with their guns – in the form of pinney, broom and pan and brush. The motif of effeminateness is also central to the song lyrics, in the exchange of women’s names between sergeant and speaker, but also in the ‘campiness’ of his expression: “But *oh*, I *got so cross* with him”, the “*nasty* officer, he is *a horrid brute* / [...] who] was *terse*” (emphasis added) with the speaker for not adhering to military form, i.e. “I did not salute.” The stanza ends with

But I cut him twice today,
Then he asked the reason please?
I said, “I thought, dear Captain,
That you still were cross with me.”

with further elements of camp behaviour and expression (“cut[ting the captain] twice today”, addressing a superior officer as “dear Captain” and finally assuming that the officer is “still [...] cross”). In sum, the image of the conscientious objector presented in the song not only makes him appear profoundly unmanly but is strongly suggestive of homosexuality, a crime in Britain until the 1960s.

However, there is another aspect that merits attention: the use of *me* as a possessive determiner and the spelling of *God* as *Gawd*. Whereas the former simply indexes non-standard English and by implication a lack of education, the latter is a clear indication for Cockney or at least London pronunciation. This means that the conscientious objector is not only in breach of societal norms of duty and bravery, as well as unmanly to the point of being sexually deviant, but also uneducated and low class, in some contrast to the middle class values portrayed in the first stanza of *Good-Bye-Ee!*. That the conscientious objector uses an indexical Cockney feature in his speech may also point towards the almost proverbial wiliness of lower class Londoners and the vulgarity of barrow boys, who are known to turn situations to their advantage.¹⁹

¹⁹ In *Dad’s Army*, the British sitcom about the Homeguard of WWII Private Walker, the only character who is of fighting age but obviously shirks active duty is a black market profiteer with a pronounced London accent.

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There is, however, also another side to the same coin: lower class characters of this kind from Dickens to Ealing Comedies are often perceived as lacking respect and being resourceful in all circumstances. This much-prized personality trait manifests itself in a song that has enjoyed lasting popularity to this day, *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag and Smile, Smile, Smile* (1915, lyrics by George Henry Powell, music by brother Felix Powell). The hero of this song, Private Perks, is an “artful little dodger”, and, like the iconic Dickensian street kid, is small and deals with everything life throws at him with unruffled composure. In other words, he displays that prized character feature of ‘pluck’. But he also represents the courageous soldier in the second stanza and in the third acts as both an example for a war hero “back from Boche shooting” who encourages “all his pals”, and they promptly “enlist [...] like a man”.

The chorus, sung twice after each stanza extolls one of the key virtues of the day, to smile in the face of adversity and not to worry. All that is needed for happiness is “a lucifer to light your fag”, like rum a popular way to alleviate the pressures of army life, and the best remedy against “worrying / [which] never was worthwhile” is to ‘smile’, a lexeme that is repeated fourteen times over the entire chorus. What the song ignores entirely is the harsh and bloody reality of the trenches and the mindlessness of exercising and marching for the troupes in reserve.

In conclusion, songs representing hegemonic perspective focus on the virtues of the good citizen: selfless women, mothers, wives, sisters and girlfriends, beatified nurses and even the seductress, all working for the good of King and country. Their male counterparts are manly, dutifully patriotic, unflinching in the face of danger, plucky with an indestructible sense of humour. Both men and women are expected to compartmentalise pain and fear while seeing everything in a positive light and focusing on that “silver lining”. Grousing is not an option, at least not in songs of the first months and years of the war. As time goes by, more critical tones surface in the popular song lyrics, although they are usually tempered by the protestation that all sacrifices will have been worth it. For instance, *The Last, Long Mile* (1917, Emil Breitenfeld) is a sustained complaint about the endless marches, with the chorus detailing the resulting discomfort, i.e. inches of dust, the weight of the gun, “the socks of sisters / That raise the blooming blisters”, etc. But the ending of the second and final stanza relativises these complaints with the promise of victory and that then hardships no longer matter:

And someday we'll be marching
Through a town across the Rhine,
And then, you bet, we'll all forget
These mournful words of mine! (Arthur 2001: 126)

4. “We cannot fight, we cannot fuck, what bloody good are we!”²⁰ Soldiers’ Subversions

Whereas initially music hall songs with a patriotic slant, as we have seen, avoided references to death and injury with soldiering and active duty euphemistically referred to as “doing your bit” or “playing your part”, the Tommies’ songs by contrast presented a very different view: bawdy, biting critical of authority, sarcastic or, slightly more rarely, cheerlessly sombre. Their considerable currency can be attributed to the fact that many of the songs were based on marching rhythms, which made them an obvious choice for singing on marches, and also on the fact that the period generally favoured communal singing, for which the soldiers’ canteens and *estaminets* were ideal settings. Subversive singing, however, was also a vital means of alleviating pressure and pain (Hanna 2018). In addition, songs on marches and during recreational phases were largely beyond the reach of the political and cultural powers that had influence over the content of popular music at home and thus control over the hegemonic discourse.

The Tommies’ songs, adapted, rewritten, passed on and taken up by new groups of communal singing circles, for the most part and for a considerable amount of time after the war, excluded those who stayed at home. McGill in his foreword (“Dedication”) to *Soldier Songs* sums up the nature of these songs up with a little hyperbole and a lot of truth:

None will outlast the turmoil in which they originated; having weathered the leaden storms of war, their vibrant strains will be choked and smothered in atmospheres of Peace. ‘These ‘ere songs are no good in England,’ my friend Rifleman Bill Teake remarks. ‘They ‘ave too much guts in them.’ (1917: 14)

Another contemporary collector, F.T. Nettleingham had similar compunctions about Tommies’ songs:

It is a great pity that a large number of the wittiest – albeit, of a coarse kind—the gayest – as regards tune – and most frequently sung – therefore popular – creations are so untranslatable as to render them unprintable for general consumption, but as some of them have undoubtedly been in the Army for more than 100 years, it seems probable that they will remain unwritten heirlooms for an indefinite period, and in peace-time will be handed down through the generations by drummer-boy to drummer-boy. (1917: 11)

As it happens, McGill’s perspective was somewhat too pessimistic and Nettleingham correct about the resilience of the songs even in peace times. But for civilian consumption a lot of the words in the songs – and not only expletives – had to be toned down when they were finally collected and edited, “every ‘bloody’ to ‘bally’ or ‘rotten” (Palmer 1990b: 17), many years or decades later, sometimes handed down from veterans to their children.

How Tommies’ songs were received in peace time by those previously excluded from singing or even knowing them is amusingly told in Lyn Macdonald’s account of a

²⁰ The line is taken from a version of *Fred Karno’s Army* (see 4.2 for a discussion).

coach tour of “Old Soldiers” with their wives to Arras and Ypres. Driving past an old *estaminet* still in the same place so many years later,

old Fred White [...] whipped out his mouth organ (and also his dentures the better to play it) and they began to sing [...] one irreverent ditty after another. The tunes were familiar. The words were not – and many of the fruiter choruses trailed off [...] as the tolerant smiles of their wives became a trifle fixed (1990: 1-2).

There are two aspects in this quotation that illustrate (as well as explain) why many of these songs were not current outside the army. The “fruiter choruses” obviously referred to the bawdiness of some of the material, but also that the songs were “irreverent” with “the tunes [being] familiar” but not “the words”. The following discussion focuses on three types of songs, the bawdy, the “irreverent” and the melancholy.

4.1. “I’m Charlotte the Harlot”:²¹ Bawdy Songs

Apart from the merely coarse ditties like *Do Your Balls Hang Low*, which revel in puerile sexual humour, a predictable topic of bawdy songs focused on relationships with and/or misogynistic perceptions of women. *Mademoiselle of Armentières* provided a fertile ground for parodies of either kind, a stark example being *Three German Officers Crossed the Rhine*,²² which in several verses details intercourse between an insatiable innkeeper’s daughter and said officers, resulting in “Nine months later she gave a grunt” and the birth (with a predictable rhyme) of a “fat little Prussian”, whose rapacious sexual appetites include “the cat and the donkey” as well as “the devil and his wife”.

The second example, *That’s the Wrong Way to Tickle Mary*, parodies *Tipperary*, which is popularly assumed to be a WWI classic even though several collectors (including Nettleingham and Palmer) dispute that it was a soldiers’ favourite. Using the phonology of the original, it reflects to an extent how the young men, many still in their teens, were overwhelmed by finding themselves in an all-male environment with no tempering female influence, with such easy availability of sex in brothels that “the spread of venereal disease forc[ed] Allied authorities to decommission hundreds of thousands of troops” (Gier 2008: 14; for a detailed discussion cf. Grayzel 1997). The lyrics portray continental women as more experienced and demanding, and the speaker learning from the experience

That’s the wrong way to tickle Mary, that’s the wrong way to kiss
Don’t you know that over here, lad, they like it best like this?
Houray pour le Français! Farewell Angleterre!
We didn’t know the way to tickle Mary, but we learnt how over here.

²¹ This is a line from *Charlotte the Harlot*, a parody of the popular *Gilbert the Filbert*.

²² Source: <http://projects.oucs.ox.ac.uk/jtap/tutorials/intro/trench/songs.html>, accessed 29 January 2019. This song also allowed insulting the enemy, a category not to be discussed because it focuses less on identity projections and does not represent antihegemonic discourse.

Parodies based on *I'll Make a Man of You*, a third example, must have been an obvious choice. Taking up the motif of the days of the week, one parody shows the stages of a courtship with increasing sexual references, which ends with “But on Sunday after supper / I whopped my dingus up her / and now I’m paying seven and six a week”, the last line being a reference to minimal child maintenance (7s 6d) payable to an unmarried mother. The tune of the chorus is also used in *I Don't Want to Be a Soldier / Join the Army*,²³ a vain desire for most of the singers, which contains references to London and several Cockney features (h-dropping, *me* as a possessive determiner, alveolar nasal for ING, *gawd*):

I don't want to join the army, I don't want to go to war,
I'd rather hang around Piccadilly underground,
Livin' off the earnings of a high born lady / lady typist
I don't need no Froggy women, London's full of girls I've never 'ad.
Dear oh Gawd almighty, I want to stay in Blighty
And follow in the footsteps of me dad.

Interestingly, the salacious rhyme in line 3 is replaced with more innocuous wording although few singers would have missed the word it replaced.

The bawdy songs with their vulgar language thrived in the all-male environment with the testosterone of youth and the bluster of the warrior adding to the mix. It may be debatable whether they consistently address social friction; however, if we widen the notion to include – unfulfilled – sexuality, they would represent *entailed* protest (as discussed in 2.3) with the exception of the last example, which is a clearer example of *explicit* antihegemonic discourse. In terms of identity constructions, however, the manifestations of this kind of manliness are very similar to that projected in the hegemonic discourse of the popular songs.

4.2. “There’ll be nobody left in the bloody platoon”:²⁴ Protesting the Conditions

Tommies’ songs in the second category, ‘irreverent’ songs, are characterised by the critical attitude towards authority and the military context in general. Perhaps the most telling song that reflects the absurdity of soldiering is *We’re Here Because*, sung to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne* and consisting only of the repetition of these three words. In other songs, the army is presented as a farcical troupe, for instance in *We are Fred Karno’s Army*, a reference to the impresario whose touring company included Charlie Chaplin. The song exists in many variants, adapted by the various army units from English-speaking nations, and headed by different leaders (e.g. Joe Soap), always implying that the unit is inept in combat. Some versions refer to the Commanding Officer, who “boasts and skites / from morn till night” about his bravery “safely in the rear” while “the men who really did the job / Are dead and in their graves.” The tunes of these songs are hymns, e.g. *Onward Christian Soldiers*.

²³ For more information and versions, cf. <https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=39835>, (accessed 5 January 2019).

²⁴ This line is from the Australian *The Digger’s Song*, a song also popular in WWII.

Not only COs but also the lower ranks of NCOs come in for criticism, with a frequent complaint about missing rum rations as in *If the Sergeant Steals Your Rum* based on the music hall song *Nevermind*. An oddly humorous tone characterises this and other songs about the conditions in the field, monotonous food (“Bully Beef”, “plum-and-apple jam” / “Tickler’s jam”), the weather (*Raining, Raining, Raining* to the tune of the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*) or being subjected to enemy fire (*Bombed Last Night*). According to Watson, “men reinterpreted and confronted their fears through black humour, irony and sarcasm. By such means, they steered a middle way in their assessment of risk, recognizing danger without becoming overwhelmed by it (2006: 267), which can also be interpreted as a form of ‘pluck’.

There is a marked contrast to a song still known and sung today, *The Old Battalion*.²⁵ Its stanzas all begin with “If you want to find” listing the ranks of NCOs (“Lance Jack”, “sergeant”, “quartermaster”, etc.), officers (CO, “brass hats”) and the “politicians” safely far from the front lines and enjoying life while drinking, whereas the “Old Battalion” are “Hanging on the old barbed wire”. The tune of the song is “Traditional” (Arthur 2001: 68) and in its many repetitions ideal for communal singing. Palmer’s version (1990a: 118) indicates that its stanzas were augmented with improvised further subjects, always emphasising the ‘us and them’ motif. In that sense it represents a clear instance of *explicit* critical discourse even though its present-day instantiations would represent *entailed* protest.

There is, however, also an interesting case of *encoded* criticism. The Irish song *McCafferty* (to the tune of the Irish rebel song *The Croppy Boy* and referring to an incident in 1861) was surprisingly popular in the rank and file even though the military authorities suppressed it keenly. Its appeal to the soldiers must have been that a private shot two officers after being punished harshly for half-heartedly following an order the private found unacceptable; the soldiers’ commiseration was mirrored by the feelings of the public: according to Palmer, McCafferty’s hanging took place “before a sympathetic crowd” (ibid.: 56).

In terms of identity constructions, these songs are characteristic for the refusal to be cowed by circumstance or fazed by adversity. But they also project a strong image of insubordination and independent spirit against authorities considered with as much hostility as the enemy. That many of the lyrics show such humour, however, also indicates the desire to make the best of a bad situation, the attitude apparent in “turn[ing] the dark cloud inside out”.²⁶

4.3. “Far Far from Wipers”:²⁷ Longing for Home

Unsurprisingly, there were also songs expressing war weariness, which gradually also spread on the home front, for instance the 1916 music hall song *Take Me Back to Dear Old Blighty*. Many of these more critical numbers were taken up avidly by the soldiers, but there were also several songs that were current only in the theatres of war. One was Gitz Rice’s *I Want to Go Home*. Although it is not anonymous like most other Tommies’

²⁵ Also known as *Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire* for obvious reasons.

²⁶ From *Keep the Home-Fires Burning*.

²⁷ The song title refers to Ypres.

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songs, its language appealed because the vocabulary was instantly recognisable to the soldiers: grenades are referred to as “whizzbangs” and “Jack Johnsons”, named for their force after the first African-American heavyweight champion, and the enemy is the “Alleyman”, an English pronunciation of the French *allemande*. But the undisguised fear and longing expressed in the closing lines of the two stanzas, “Oh my / I don’t want to die / I want to go home” must have been a sentiment that all soldiers shared. Arthur quotes from a first letter home by the writer and composer Ivor Gurney: “I want to go home’ is a song our men sang when the last strafe was at its hottest – a very popular song [...] not at all military [...] Not a brave song, but brave men sing it.” (2001: 72). This feeling is echoed in a memory by William Cushing quoted by Palmer:

I remember one night, a night as still and silent [...] as the men, when someone started to sing *sotto voce* that haunting, nostalgic cry, taken up by all: ‘Oh my, I don't want to die, I want to go home.’ I can still hear that murmured wish and longing. These men were not heroes [...]: they were boys who wanted to go home. I wonder how many had their wish. (1990a: 112)

The song quoted in the heading appeals to similar sentiments. It exists in several slightly differently worded versions and is based on a 1902 lullaby called *Sing Me to Sleep* (music Edwin Green, lyrics Clifton Bingham) but it uses some of the same vocabulary.

Far, far from Wipers I long to be.
Where German snipers can't get at me.
Dark is my dugout, cold are my feet.
Waiting for Whizzbangs to send me to sleep.

In contrast to the hopelessness that seems to characterise these two examples, *When this Bloody War is Over*, based on the hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* is less wistful. Although longing for home is also a central motif, it is expressed more defiantly, dominated by a profound distaste for army service in “no more soldiering for me” with all the attendant displeasures, “church parades on Sunday” requiring the sergeant’s passes for personal movement, early morning “reveille”, unpleasant weather conditions “on the firestep” and “in the trenches” and unpalatable food like “bloody Army stew” and “Tickler’s Marmalade”. But the song also seems to mirror the increasing tension between classes that was to lead to labour clashes after the war. NCOs would have to live and work in menial circumstances whereas privates would lead a life of privilege. The reason this song fits into this category is that although it addresses similar grievances as the ones in 4.2, it expresses longing as well as angry frustration without the humour.

These songs represent a mixture of forms of protest. There are elements of *entailed* criticism as the conditions they address are only implicitly blamed on hegemonic powers, but at the same time there is *explicit* condemnation of the conditions of service, the commanders, but also very strongly NCOs, who the privates blame for their miserable conditions. The identities represented here are also less impervious to hardship, there is less or no attempt at putting on a brave face, although being put to

sleep with grenades could be interpreted as being starkly ironic; the soothing tune, however, might contradict that interpretation.

5. To Conclude

In a discussion of a field as vast as WWI songs, difficult song choices are as inevitable as the broader brushstrokes in their analysis. However, I hope to have demonstrated how historical and social exigencies manifest themselves in the song lyrics and, by extension, in the identities the songs project.

Given that this chapter approached hegemonic and antihegemonic discourse as an antithesis, it is noteworthy that some of the prized features in the former are also apparent in the latter. Discourse and identity constructions share the attitude of approaching adversity with bravery, optimism, even humour; masculinity and femininity are mutually based on sex rather than gender, with all the attendant problematic effects this has on gender relations, although these are expressed more distastefully in the bawdy Tommies' song.

And yet, despite the strong hegemonic focus on manliness, another side is present in antihegemonic contexts: a wistfulness stemming from a very basic existential fear. If we consider the carnage that was this "war to end all wars", the horrendous scenes of bloodshed, mutilation and violent death, this is not surprising; what is perhaps surprising is that songs which explicitly address the pain and suffering did not appear in the repertoire of (folk) singers until at least four decades later, songs with narratives of personal tragedy by the likes Eric Bogle, Austin John Marshall, Lesley Hale, Alan Bell, etc. This latter – and present – day culture of memory in song, however, would be a topic for future research.

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