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**“The Others”: Gender, Conscription and Conscientious Objection
in the First World War**

Author Lee Jones
e-mail lee.jones@politics.ox.ac.uk

Address Nuffield College,
New Road,
Oxford
OX1 1NF
United Kingdom

Tel/Fax (+44) (0)1865 288690

Author details

Lee Jones is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, UK. This paper is based on research undertaken during his previous affiliation with the Department of History, University of Warwick.

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- Title** "The Others": Gender, Conscription and Conscientious Objection in the First World War
- Abstract** Using a Gramscian framework, this paper argues that British men's reaction to the call to arms in 1914 - to enlist, delay or resist - corresponded to their relationship to the hegemonic mode of masculinity developed in Britain from the late nineteenth century, which emphasised sportsmanship, muscularity, violence and chivalry. Those who most closely embodied this model were those who rushed to the colours in 1914. However, as their numbers were small, more coercive measures were required to exploit the attachment to this model of men who, while not embodying it, somehow aspired to adhere to it. The paper examines the use of gendered propaganda to shame those who delayed into volunteering, before conscription was introduced, including official government campaigns and the relatively spontaneous 'white feather movement'. It then turns to those who resisted conscription, the conscientious objectors, delineating their counter-hegemonic struggle to define malehood as a peaceful, non-violent identity.
- Keywords** Conscientious objection, conscription, propaganda, war, Britain, Gramsci, masculinity

'The Others': Gender, Recruitment and Conscientious Objection in the First World War

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF MEN:

Those who hear the call and obey,

Those who delay,

And - *The Others*.

TO WHICH DO *YOU* BELONG?

- British WWI Recruitment Poster (Parliamentary
Recruitment Committee n.d.)

Introduction

What compels men to enlist in armies in time of war? Britons in WWI recognised three possible responses to the call to enlist. First, there were 'those who hear[d] the call and obey[ed]': 150,000 men enlisted in August 1914, and around 460,000 in September. Yet by October, recruitment had slumped to 140,000 and continued to decline. Although a quarter of eligible men did eventually volunteer - including many who 'delayed' - half of Britain's five million troops were only compelled to fight via conscription, introduced in 1916: these were the sinister 'others'. This paper argues that these three responses corresponded to men's relationship to the contemporary 'hegemonic' mode of masculinity; shows how the state and civil society actors sought to manipulate this relationship to increase recruitment; and considers the challenge offered by those who refused to be conscripted.

Hegemony, Gramsci argued, involves the persuasion of the population that the ruling class's dominion is legitimate, 'natural' and 'normal' - particularly through the media and the institutions of 'civil society', which serve as a 'powerful system of fortresses and earthworks' behind the 'outer ditch' of the state in enforcing hegemony (Gramsci 1971, 238; Donaldson 1993, 645). Connell recognised that constructions of masculinity could be part of a hegemonic discourse that encouraged people to participate in their own repression and control, identifying three responses to hegemonic gender constructions (1995, 76-81).¹ First, a minority of men embody and exemplify the hegemonic model. For them, recruitment worked by appealing to a militarised masculinity based on physical vitality, martial virtue and chivalric-nationalistic myths outlined in the paper's first section. Second, many more are 'complicit' in hegemony: while not exemplifying the model, they accept and derive benefits from its 'legitimacy', aspire to its codes and support their maintenance. These men 'delayed': their status depended upon appearing to adhere to hegemonic masculinity, and they volunteered when subjected to attacks on their 'manliness', as the second section shows. 'The Others' were those relatively disempowered, marginalised and subordinated men who do not or cannot live up to such standards and construct their identities differently. They resisted pressure to enlist because they were least compromised by attacks based on hegemonic masculinity. Conscientious objectors were among this group and their counter-hegemonic challenge forms the basis of section three.

Militarising Masculinity: Those Who Obeyed

This section briefly lays out the way the dominant mode of masculinity in 1914 was developed by powerful 'organising intellectuals', who explicitly sought to remove men from a putatively 'feminine' private sphere and inculcate them into a highly

structured 'masculine', 'bourgeois' public sphere, a prescriptive dichotomy that was part of a nineteenth-century attempt to forge a distinctly middle-class identity (Davidoff 1995, 227-273). This involved the use of literature, philanthropy and legislation and staking a claim to universal validity for the codes of manhood they developed. The British empire's relative decline and eugenicist and Social Darwinian thought powerfully shaped these efforts. Britain's poor performance in the Boer War was explained as a result of the degeneration of the 'race' through the enjoyment of domestic luxuries and the resultant loss of male distinctiveness (Bourke 1996, 171; Bet-El 1998, 79-80; Tosh 1999). Bourgeois men therefore launched campaigns to remove boys from the home, providing strictly gendered activities and education, to school them in the art of martial manliness.

The best 'manly' alternative to the 'feminine' home was public schooling, which prioritised socialisation over intellectual endeavour (Parker 1987, 52-53). Schoolmasters helped train an imperial race by supplementing fierce Evangelism with militarism and an obsession with 'games'. Citing the specious threat of invasion by Napoleon III, public schools established Rifle Corps from 1860, and by the time Territorial Armies were introduced in 1906, the majority of schools and universities had Officer Training Corps (OTCs) into which boys were (often forcibly) corralled (Parker 1987, 63-64). By 1875, drill regimes imported from continental armies were introduced to all schools, state and public (Summers 1976, 119). In 1902, the Board of Education issued *A Model Course of Physical Training* in conjunction with the War Office. It was largely cribbed from the *Army Red Book*, and 'the crucial commands were military ones'. Schools were pressured to employ Army-trained instructors, because, as Captain J.C. Roberts reminded them, it was 'impossible to separate physical training from military needs'. Boys' physical training at school 'closely mirrored what was happening in the military training

camps... the military ethos and the War Office's hold over schools tightened' (Bourke 1996, 181-182).

Central to this construction of masculinity was the primacy of sporting 'games', which were thought to encourage patriotism, selflessness, attachment to order, rules and fair play, obedience, and leadership. Violent sports encouraged physical courage, and the endurance of hardship for communal glory and the achievement of masculinity. The importance of a 'manly' physique was not merely emphasised by public schools, but deliberately spread to the lower classes by organisations like the League of Health and Strength (Bourke 1996, 138-40). The enormously influential novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, which went through seventy editions from 1857 to 1896, exemplified this cult of athleticism and corresponding anti-intellectualism (Parker 1987, 49). WWI provided the muddiest games pitch in history for those trained to see war as an extension of boyhood games: '...the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks;/ Play Up! Play Up! And play the game!' enthused Newbolt in his 1898 poem, *Vitai Lampada*. As his famous epitaph noted, Captain W.P. Nevill, apparently directly inspired this poem, kicked a football out of the trenches of the Somme to commence the attack: 'The fear of death before them/ Is but an empty name/ True to the land that bore them/ The SURREYS play the game' (Fussell 1975, 27-28; Veitch 1985)

Since public schooling was only narrowly accessible, the architects of hegemonic masculinity created other ways to encourage the lower orders to adopt their preferred model of male behaviour. The ethos and organisation of public schools was imposed on state schools via the 1902 Education Act, while various boys' movements consciously promoted hegemonic masculinity to working-class boys. William Smith, founder of the Boys Brigade, argued: 'boys are full of earnest

desire to be brave, true *men*... we must direct this desire into the right channel' (Springhall 1987, 55). The Church Lads Brigade (founded 1891) was an openly militaristic front organisation for the National Service League (NSL), and was strongly linked with the Territorial Armies. Its officers were instructed to provide for lower-class boys the 'discipline, the manly games, the opportunities of a wholesome society which a public school gives'. The Lads' Drill Association (founded 1889) aimed to provide 'systematic physical and military training to all British lads' from the age of six, and merged with the NSL in 1906. The Anglican clergy was heavily complicit in these schemes, 'making a conscious effort to recapture through militarism a function of social control... which they could not muster from their own authority and resources' (Bourke 1996, 141; Summers 1976, 113, 120).

Robert Baden-Powell's experience of the Boer War convinced him to create the Boy Scouts to make young men 'strong and plucky, ready to face danger... accustomed to take their lives into their hands, and to risk them without hesitation if they can help their country by so doing' (Baden-Powell 1908, 1). *Scouting for Boys* and the magazine *The Scout* (which sold over 100,000 copies weekly) laid out a clear programme for reclaiming a 'threatened' masculinity (Parker 1987, 146-147). Scouting epitomised boys' removal from the 'feminine' home for extended periods: in the 'great outdoors', concepts of 'manliness', physical strength and healthiness were fused into a chivalric code constructed within a newly-articulated national tradition, linked with the cult of the imperial frontiersman (Warren 1987, 199-200; MacKenzie 1987, 176-198). 'Everybody ought to learn how to shoot and to obey orders,' Baden-Powell wrote, 'else he is no more good when war breaks out than an old woman'. Thus, Scouts were uniformed, regimented and subjected to

military-style hierarchy. *Scouting for Boys* even told boys how to kill a man using a rifle (Baden-Powell 1908, 3, 249).

As Dawson has pointed out, 'masculine identities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination' (1991, 118). Boys' imaginations in this period were deliberately fuelled by what Bertrand Russell called the 'foul literature of "glory"... with which the minds of children are polluted', which popularised and widely disseminated hegemonic masculinity. Many prolific writers like W.H.G. Kingston, Captain Mayne Reid, H. Rider Haggard and George Arthur Henty wrote adventure novels fusing the figures of the schoolboy and the imperial frontiersman. Masculine virtue based upon violence and sexual mastery was whipped up into a genre of manly adventure, where hunting was preparation for war, 'the antipodes... of an effeminate sentimentalism'. The British Empire was represented as 'a place where adventures took place and men became heroes'; a place far away from the corrupting influence of women, where a 'secure, powerful, and indeed virtually omnipotent English-British masculinity' could be attained (Green 1979, 37; Dawson 1991, 120).

Boys' weeklies also integrated patriotism and masculinity. Northcliffe's Amalgamated Press titles, such as *The Magnet* (first published in 1907) *The Gem* (1908) and *The Halfpenny Marvel* (1893) were especially influential. Roberts observes that they had a pervasive effect on working-class boys: 'The standards of conduct observed by Harry Wharton and his friends at Greyfriars set social norms to which schoolboys and some young teenagers strove spasmodically to conform... over the years, these simple tales conditioned the thought of a whole generation of boys' (Roberts 1990, cited in Springhall 1987, 68). Endless variations on the theme of war, empire and manly adventure combined to enshrine hegemonic masculinity

in popular culture, epitomised by the contents of *Boys' Own Paper*, which was read by 1.25m boys. By late 1914, its frontispieces demonstrated the culmination of its message - the characters went from playing at war to actually waging it. The literature sought to shape and instruct reality rather than reflecting the very different experiences of its readership (Boyd 1991, 150). Like the boys' organisations, Orwell argued it deliberately indoctrinated working-class boys into ruling-class values (Orwell 2000 [1940]).

When war broke out, those who had been raised to embody the hegemonic construction of masculinity knew exactly what to do, having been prepared for it all their lives. As Siegfried Sassoon later recalled, 'being in the army was very much like being back at school' (Sassoon 1972, 219). Finally, here was a supreme opportunity to achieve masculinity, to prove themselves true men, and they greeted the war with passionate delight. C. E. Carrington recalled that he rushed to enlist 'to demonstrate my manhood, and to be allowed to indulge a taste for anti-social violence' (Bet-El 1999, 180). Recruitment posters assumed they would simply 'step into place', and they did: such were 'Those who heard the call and Obeyed' (Anonymous n.d.-a). Within the first few days of the war, a public school battalion had been formed and two thousand Old Boys immediately enlisted (Veitch 1985, 373). Their education had been so militarised that Old Boys were offered immediate commissions in 1914, and no further military training was considered necessary. 250,000 members of the Church Lads Brigade enlisted. Baden-Powell claimed that seventy per cent of Scouts joined up, while 25,000 volunteered for the Scouts Defence Corps, freeing up men to go to the front (Bourke 1996, 142). Public schools competed to send *alumni* off to the slaughter. Winchester's list of enlisted Old Boys ran to twenty-nine pages by October 1915, 'a record of which we may be justifiably proud,' the school magazine boasted (Parker 1987, 32). To keep

track of this 'manly' (and perversely 'sporting') competition, the *Times Educational Supplement* even published a 'league table' to show how many Old Boys had enlisted from each school (Veitch 1985, 374).

Those Who Delayed

However, as Gramscian theory would predict, although over 600,000 men enlisted in the first few months of the war, after an initial surge, recruitment soon dried up. The resultant elite alarm stemmed as much from men's failure to recognise 'male' duties as it from Kitchener's grim demands for more men. However, if few men beyond the middle classes embodied hegemonic masculinity, the government correctly assessed that many more were complicit in its domination and would be susceptible to reminders of male duties. Both the state and (again, as Gramscian theory would predict) its 'fortresses' in civil society utilised the imagery and ideology of hegemonic masculinity to systematically manipulate men's gender insecurities.

Early recruitment posters and atrocity propaganda depicted Belgium as 'an innocent woman in need of a paternal male's protection. Such chivalric imagery became charged by and infused with sexual implications... [in the official] chronicle of murder, rapine, pillage, arson and wanton destruction... Belgium is the raped and mutilated maiden, left to die' (Kent 1993, 22-23; cf. Wilson 1986, 25).² Recruitment efforts directly reflected the constructed division between the 'feminine' private sphere and the 'masculine' public sphere, but insisting that their place was outside the home, defending it. Propagandists stressed the manliness of activity, versus the womanliness of passivity: 'It is far better to face

the bullets than to be killed at home by a bomb' (Anonymous 1915b). 'Home' expanded to mean the entire country; to escape its feminine clutches and achieve masculinity meant leaving Britain behind, and going to war (Leed 1979, esp. 41-59; Kent 1993, 12-14).

As a war of attrition unfolded, alarm at the working class's refusal to conform to the bourgeois models of gendered behaviour intensified. The propaganda machine became more aggressive, recycling the theme of passivity in an attack on non-hegemonic masculinity, clearly expressed, for example, in the assault on professional football. Professional sport had always inverted the public school ethos, since winning (and money) was more important than 'honour', and the war provided an excellent opportunity to denounce it. One Saturday, the *Times* lamented, just six volunteers came forwards when Cardiff played Bristol Rovers; the Arsenal game yielded just one recruit (23 November 1914, p. 6). The establishment press was suitably outraged, and readers urged newspapers to 'suppress all notices and descriptions of Football Fixtures, to save the lowering of our prestige in Allied countries' (*The Times*, 24 November 1914, p. 1). In 1915 the Football Association was forced to suspend its activities for the war's duration. Meanwhile, recruitment posters depicted men in cloth caps looking at a long line of men, telling them to 'Come into the Ranks... Don't stand in the Crowd and Stare', an assault on working-class 'Spectatoritis' (Anonymous 1915a). Chelsea FC was coerced into forming a battalion - swiftly followed by other clubs - and posters realigned sport, fitness and war along hegemonic lines (Veitch 1985, 371). 'This is no time for football', the *Evening News* editorialised; players and spectators alike 'are summoned to leave their sport, and to take part in the great game. That game is war, for life or death' (*The Times*, 3 September 1914, p. 6).

As casualties mounted, recruitment efforts became more manipulative, exploiting gender tensions within families. Some of the resultant output was relatively mild - posters declaring 'Women of Britain say - Go!', or showing a mother saying, 'Go! It's your duty lad'. Men were constantly reminded that their masculinity would be judged by their actions, with a son asking, 'Daddy, what did *you* do in the Great War?' However, just as the state's failure successfully to prosecute the Boer War had fuelled a racialised, gendered domestic panic, so the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee's (PRC) output became increasingly virulent as British generals' strategems disastrously failed. Women were urged to facilitate men's assigned roles, being asked, '4 Questions': did they realise that German atrocities could soon be repeated in England, or that 'the one word "Go" from *you* may send another man to fight for King and Country?' Was a man 'to hang his head in shame because *you* would not let him go?' (MacDonald 1988, 27). Other posters played on individual women's insecurities by suggesting that if their 'best boy' did not enlist, they did not see her as 'worth fighting for', and would probably 'neglect' them in the future (Spartacus Educational 1993).

Many women who wished to make an active contribution to the war effort and prove themselves as active citizens rapidly subordinated themselves to patriarchal authority in order to produce more recruits (Kent 1993, 14-37; Haste 1977, 57; Roach Pearson 1987, 214; Woollacott 1994). The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and its violent counterpart the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the immediately suspended their activities and directly subordinated themselves to the state, which was thus able to harness a crisis in gender relations and exploit the narrowness of mainstream feminist ideology in order to co-opt many women into supporting their recruitment drive.³ This became more blatant as the war progressed. One poster used in Ireland shows a man

watching Belgium burn, being taunted by his rifle-toting wife: 'Will you go, or must I?' (Anonymous n.d.-c). This sort of material remained representative of British propaganda until the introduction of conscription, when the leitmotif of gender shifted to encouraging women into the workplace to support their men on the battlefield. Until then, the message of the PRC's 160 posters was clear: 'if one was born a male, one became a soldier' (Bet-El 1999, 189).

However, this attempt to harness gender insecurities very nearly backfired, illustrating the limits to state control of civil society, the fragility of hegemony and the insecurities of the British elite. In August 1914, Admiral Charles Fitzgerald founded the Order of the White Feather, which encouraged women to hand out white feathers to unenlisted men to designate them cowards. Again, this 'implicated women in a recruiting rhetoric that hinged on a masculinised sexual identity policed by women and the humiliating threat of appearing unmanly' (Gullace 1987, 184). One woman remembered the reaction of her father, Robert Smith, when given a feather: 'That night he came home and cried his heart out. My father was no coward, but had been reluctant to leave his family. He was thirty-four and my mother, who had two young children, had been suffering from a serious illness. Soon after this incident my father joined the army' (Spartacus Educational 1993). Smith's complicity in hegemonic masculinity was exposed, forcing him to adhere to its principles. Any ununiformed man was a target: at least two recipients of the Victoria Cross were given white feathers. Wounded men or those unfit to serve were openly taunted on the streets, some being so ashamed that they were driven to suicide (Gullace 1987, 179, 200, 203; National Campaign Against Conscription n.d.). Nor were underage boys immune. James Lovegrove recalled:

On my way to work one morning a group of women surrounded me. They started shouting and yelling at me, calling me all sorts of names for not being a soldier! ... They stuck a white feather in my coat, meaning I was a coward. Oh, I did feel dreadful, so ashamed (Spartacus Educational 1993).

Lovegrove immediately enlisted, three years before the legal threshold. One journalist noted that men who enlisted because of such pressure were 'not volunteers; they are conscripts. They have gone in because it would have been so infernally unpleasant to have stayed out' (Spartacus Educational 1993). Women would publicly complain that their husbands were not making the grade as men. One was regarded as 'nothing but a coward and... if he were half a man he would be away in France, where the bravest were, defending his country' (Bet-El 1999, 181). In an advertisement placed on the front page of the *Times*, 'Ethel M.' told 'Jack F.G.': 'If you are not in khaki by the 20th I shall cut you dead' (9 July 1915).

British patriarchs' reactions betrayed deep suspicion of female patriotism and alarm at the inversion of traditional gender roles. One MP described the campaign as a 'sort of terrorism' tantamount to 'compulsion [of] the meanest and least excusable form' (Stanton 1916). The Home Secretary was asked to arrest women handing out white feathers on the grounds that they represented a grave threat to public order, and was forced to issue state employees with signifying armbands to protect them from harassment (Gullace 1987, 204-205). Eventually, even some of conscription's most ardent pre-war opponents demanded its introduction to spare men from the 'tyranny of unofficial conscription'.

Virginia Woolf later highlighted women's centrality in the operation of hegemonic masculinity. Women who handed out white feathers fostered the 'manhood emotion', men's susceptibility to the taunt of cowardice (1968, 182).

They acted as the ‘mirrors [which] are essential to all violent and heroic action’, serving ‘as looking glasses possessing all the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size’ (1929, 35-36). But although women subordinated themselves to patriarchal authority in order to assist in the war effort, vested with new authority, they rapidly overstepped their prescribed gender boundaries, taking on masculine traits and provoking a fierce reaction, reminding us of the inherent instability of hegemony as a form of domination based on consent in the first instance. Likewise, as the conflict over football illustrated, the trickle-down effect of the public-school ethos had been limited, despite conscious attempts at cultural colonialism - which often failed, as in the example of the Boys Brigade (Springhall 1987). Labourers, it seemed, would rather watch the action rather than take part. On the other hand, men like Robert Smith, who would rather stay at home with his family, were complicit enough in hegemony to make them susceptible to attacks on his masculinity.

The Others

We now turn to ‘The Others’, those men - arguably, a majority of the populace - who were insufficiently attached to hegemonic masculinity to enthusiastically or shame-facedly enlist. The shift to coercion through conscription was masked with reference by other aspects of hegemonic ideology, like appeals to the democratic state as the defender of the common good. Many men unhappily accepted the legitimacy of such arguments or thought it pointless to resist. Pre-war expectations that the internationalist character of labour would preclude a massive conflagration were not borne out: like women’s groups, British unions, which had called a historical peak of a million workers out on strike in 1912, quickly fell into corporatist arrangements with the government. Although strikes resumed in 1916,

serious labour resistance to conscription took place only in a nationalist backlash in Ireland in 1918, and in relatively isolated community-based actions (Hennessy 2004; Pearce 2001).

However, some men did resist, and in this section I will focus on a small segment of 'the Others': conscientious objectors (COs), who refused to be conscripted and are therefore among the clearest protagonists of a counter-hegemonic struggle. COs varied considerably, from those who refused military service but would serve in Non-Combatant Corps or accept Alternative Service under the Home Office Scheme, to those who refused any form of association with the war effort, known as 'Absolutists'. I will focus mostly on the Absolutists here, since again they articulated most clearly the terms of the overall counter-hegemonic struggle to assert the 'sacredness of the individual personality' (No-Conscription Fellowship 1915). This section explores COs' alternative views of manhood and how their resistance was articulated.

COs widely refuted officially assigned gender roles, whereby men fought and destroyed while women nursed and mourned. The emotions they were required to feel as men disgusted them: 'In war hatred becomes a duty, love ridiculous; to win the war by the denial of every spiritual faculty of man is thought to be the only possible course', wrote John Graham. Conversely, 'We labour generally to preserve life, to nurture the weak, the aged, the child. We build and sow and reap. We avoid lying, tricks and chicanery. We try to be pleasant to all'. Men like Graham rejected social categorisation, believing that 'the sacred worth of human personality' united 'all mankind in an inviolate brotherhood... There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither German nor English, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; beyond these differences of race and class and sex, we

are all one' (Graham 1922, 31-32, 36). Graham not only rejected bifurcations based upon nationhood but also sex, a comprehensive denunciation of everything hegemonic masculinity stood for. Chivalric notions of courage came under solemn assault. Stanley Baldwin suggested that, 'Our brave boys at the Front will be trying to poison women and children faster than the enemy is killing our own civilians' (Bell 1935, xii). Likewise, *The Tribunal*, the official newspaper of the No-Conscription Fellowship, also inverted key aspects of hegemonic masculinity: 'Does not this spiritual attractiveness of the soldier's calling, so appealing to very many, come from the fact that for them the soldier is a picture of the Protector of the Weak ...? [In fact] the soldier does not protect us from such horrors as Louvain or Lille, but creates by his act the very danger he would avert' (1916, 1).

As noted above, the Anglican church was deeply complicit in creating hegemonic masculinity. The tribunals established to adjudicate applications for CO status generally included local clergymen, who would issue such rulings as, 'You cannot serve your God if you don't serve your King and Country!' (Plummer n.d.) Articulating their struggle in religious terms, some COs engaged in a battle to reclaim Christianity as an ideological resource. 'Our Church was a warm, friendly place until the spirit of war came rampaging round', recalled John Brocklesby, who was one of seventeen forcibly-conscripted COs taken to France in early 1916 and sentenced to death before the tribunal system was introduced (Brocklesby n.d.-a, 5). 'We have brought in (to the injury of the Spiritual life of the Church) Football Clubs, Cricket Clubs, Scouts, Tennis Clubs & the like galore... we have sacrificed the Spiritual to the Physical and Social', Harold Wild told his congregation as he left the Methodist movement in protest. He rejected wholly the fusion of Christianity and the warrior-male ethic inherent in 'muscular Christianity', believing 'of the Christian way [the soldiers] have not been informed... Its mission

betrayed, the Church may still continue to speak but it speaks with a voice that is cold and dead' (Wild n.d., 7-9).

COs drew on the figure of Jesus Christ as an alternative role model to that offered by figures like Kitchener, as explained by Dr Alfred Salter, a Quaker CO:

Look! Christ in khaki, out in France, thrusting his bayonet into the body of a German workman. See! The Son of God with a machine gun, ambushing a column of German infantry, catching them unawares in a lane and mowing them down in their helplessness. Hark! The Man of Sorrows in a cavalry charge, cutting, hacking, thrusting, crushing, cheering. No! No! That picture is an impossible one, *and we all know it* (Graham 1922, 47, original emphasis).

'Can you imagine Jesus sticking a bayonet into a German?' Brocklesby asked his congregation in a sermon that outraged his church community (Brocklesby n.d. -a, 13). The architects of hegemony clearly could. A military representative at Manchester asked a CO if he believed that 'the meek shall inherit the earth'. 'But,' he went on, 'how can they inherit it without anybody to fight for them?' At another tribunal near London, a CO attempted to explain the meaning of a Bible passage 'in the Greek'. 'Greek!' shouted the chairman. 'You don't mean to tell me that Jesus Christ spoke Greek. He was British to the backbone!' (Graham 1922, 71). Religious COs' resistance was as much about reclaiming a fundamental part of their identity from the architects of hegemony who had co-opted figures like Jesus as it was stressing an alternative construction of masculinity, evoked in this cartoon depicting a Christ-like, brilliantly androgynous youth as 'the ideal'.

FIG 1

In addition to the propaganda and shaming campaigns detailed above, COs came under a torrent of abuse which more directly called their masculinity into question. Regarded by most of the population as a 'crowd of shirkers', their treatment on 'alternative service' deliberately stripped them of their male dignity by forcing them to work in menial, pointless and unprofitable endeavours (Lansdowne 1919). When COs were housed in prisons, local populations were often extremely hostile, and riots - often started by women - became frequent by 1917 (Graham 1922, 235-237, 248). Tribunals, established to safeguard the right to conscience, instead sought to force as many men as possible into the army (Boulton 1967, 126). They launched frontal assaults on COs' masculinity, frequently asking what the petitioner would do if his wife or mother was being defiled or assaulted by a German - invoking all the imagery of Belgian atrocities and the construct of man as warrior-protector. Tribunal members attacked men's bodies and their refusal of hegemonic stereotypes, linking mental and physical degeneracy. At Holborn, one demanded: 'Do you ever wash yourself. You don't look it. Yours is a case of an unhealthy mind in an unwholesome body'. At Shaw, Lancashire, another stated: 'You are exploiting God to save your own skin. You are nothing but a shivering mass of unwholesome fat!' (Graham 1922, 71). *The Daily Express* dubbed the COs 'pasty-faces' in their abusive tribunal reportage. This assault on the body continued as COs denied exemption were forcibly dressed in khaki. For those who protested, more physical assault awaited them as they faced maltreatment in prison.

Some individual COs apparently accepted the charges of effeminacy being levelled at them. H.F. Bertiole, a CO who produced many cartoons during the war,

was happy to present COs as rather soft-looking incompetents, exposed to ridicule from women and old men. Such imagery echoes that used against ‘shirkers’ prior to conscription, but here the COs’ smiles suggest they experience no shame (Bertiole n.d.). Elsewhere, COs actually represented themselves as women, as in this postcard for a campaign to have ‘weak’ COs replaced in prison by sympathisers (Anonymous n.d.-b).

FIG 2

However, many COs quite rapidly flocked towards organisations like the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and the National Council Against Conscription (NCAC), which rejected this imputed passivity, developing a ‘deviant subculture’ and doctrines of resistance which attempted to restore the male status stripped from its members by the state. COs’ organisations reaffirmed their members’ masculinity by subverting the images and discourses of hegemony for their own purposes. Renouncing passivity, they embarked upon ‘an *active* protest against what we consider to be the greatest evil in the world’ (Graham 1922, 220, emphasis added). Unlike individual COs who questioned the nature of soldiers’ bravery and attempted a critique of hegemonic masculinity, COs’ groups strategically heaped praise upon soldiers. NCF chairman Clifford Allen wrote: ‘We yield to no one in our admiration of the self-sacrifice, the courage and the unflinching devotion of those of our fellow-countrymen who have felt it their duty to take up arms’ (No-Conscription Fellowship 1915). This life-long pacifist labelled WWI ‘the most wonderful exhibition of self-sacrifice and unselfish heroism of which history has record’ (Graham 1922, 332-33). Terence Lane assured his tribunal: ‘I do not wish to cast any slur on the soldier who deserves the utmost honour for doing what he conceives to be his duty’ (Lane n.d.). By establishing common ground with

their detractors, COs sought to create political space within which to articulate their own motivations. Their discourse makes it plain that here was their war, 'their own Western Front... it presented similar opportunities for acts of physical courage, stoic endurance for the cause and it gave the movement its own heroes' (Pearce 2001, 158).

To form this discourse, COs subverted the strident language of military propaganda and the dominant discourse of heroism and self-sacrifice. 'Refuse to be Military Conscripts!' demanded one leaflet entitled 'United Against the British Prussians', in the urgent tones of a recruitment poster: 'DON'T DELAY! CRUSH CONSCRIPTION!' 'Long live Voluntaryism!' cried a NCAC leaflet. Some socialists joined this call, with *The Trade Unionist* calling upon labour in January 1916 'to crush under its heel this loathsome and abominable outrage' (PRO n.d.). COs labelled the architects of conscription 'Brit-Huns'. In a cartoon of a 'CO's Coat of Arms', 'the special distinguishing marks worn by those courageous enough to fight the Huns' are not soldiers' insignia but the arrows on the prison uniforms of those incarcerated for resisting conscription, 'the armorial bearings of the fighters for freedom' (Collins 1917). Resistance was articulated within the same liberal traditions being used to justify the 'democratic' imposition of conscription, while subverting martial ideas of sacrifice. In 1916, seven COs imprisoned at Wakefield told the Home Office they were refusing alternative service in favour of 'fighting the old fight for individual liberty and freedom of conscience' (Barrit *et al.* 1916). Roland Philcox told the NCF from Shoreham Camp: 'My five comrades... have decided to remain faithful even to the gates of death... I should consider it an honour to die for our cause. I have been a soldier in the real fight for freedom all my thinking life' (Graham 1922, 116). He repeated this argument at his tribunal

appeal: 'I am seeking to shoulder, not to shirk my social duty, and like a soldier I may not leave my post' (Philcox 1918, 3-4).

This martial style of discourse was not merely used for public rhetoric. Privately, COs wrote about a future world ruled by love, but using military metaphors - the triumph of the 'Army of Reason' and the 'Sword of Justice' (Elliot 1916). Even religious objection had become a martial undertaking. E.J. Watson stated at his court-martial: 'However long the sentence you pass upon me, and however many sentences may follow, I will continue to obey the orders of my Commander, the Prince of Peace' (Watson 1917, 4). A correspondent to the Quaker MP T. Edmund Harvey told him he did not understand Harvey's wish to 'convert militants even more than to resist militarism', because a 'true follower of our Lord... [is] 'a "militant" in the best sense of the word. Such a man does not sit down when there is wickedness in the world... he is a wrestler against "the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"... he takes his stand for the Kingdom of Heaven' (Gregory 1916).

In order to reclaim their masculine identities, stripped from them by the state, COs framed their struggle in thoroughly militaristic terms, appropriated and subverted from hegemonic discourse, replacing militaristic with pacifistic content. Absolutist COs promised to render national service, but offered their own definitions of service. 'We have always desired to assist the life of our nation, when this does not involve destroying the life of other people,' the NCF stated (No-Conscription Fellowship 1916, 1915). 'We appreciate the spirit of sacrifice which actuates those who are suffering on the battlefield,' Clifford Allen said, 'and in that spirit we renew our determination, whatever the penalties awaiting us, to undertake no service which is wrong... we are advancing the cause of peace and so

rendering... service to our fellowmen in all nations' (Brock 1961, 3). As men, the Quakers said, 'our lives should prove that compulsion is unnecessary... They should manifest a sense of duty not less strong than that which has driven many whom we respect... into the fighting forces' (Religious Society of Friends 1916). In fact, COs made even higher claim to masculinity-as-patriotic-duty than the architects of hegemony themselves. 'I want to say very emphatically that the members of the NCF believed in national service long before many who are now advocating it', Allen argued (Graham 1922, 57). So, concluded *The Tribunal*, 'let us unflinchingly do what we severally believe to be right, and let us stand courageously and unitedly [*sic*]... The greatest service we can render to mankind is to bear uncompromising testimony against war and the spirit of war' (The Tribunal 1918, 2).

Implicit in this notion of 'service' was a willingness to perform the ultimate male ritual - to sacrifice one's life for the cause. As a result of the slaughters at Ypres, the Marne and the Somme, the theme of sacrifice saturated the national consciousness by 1916. Tribunal applicants, even if recognised as COs, were told they could not remain in their present occupations 'as that would not entail self-sacrifice' (Preston 1916). Again, COs did not question the need for men to sacrifice themselves, but subverted heroic-sacrificial discourse for their own cause. 'I cannot take part in it in any way, neither can I assist those who do the combatant work. No fear of prison, or any punishment, or even the death penalty, can or will change my firm determination to adhere to this belief to the bitter end', Hubert Lane told his appeal tribunal (Lane 1916, 15). Arthur Willy's determination was equally grim: 'I intend to resist to the last degree. They may break my soul upon the wheel of Militarism, but they will never break my principles', he wrote (Willy 1916). Despite suffering deportation to Alexandria and ritual torture, J.B. Saunders

stated defiantly: 'I'll die fifty times rather than endorse the wicked thing... They can have my body; my mind I will destroy rather than let the military cult take it' (Graham 1922, 150-52). 'All of us,' the NCF said, 'are prepared to sacrifice as much in the cause of the world's peace as our fellows are sacrificing in the cause of war' (No-Conscription Fellowship 1915). This was not meaningless rhetoric, since before a legal right to conscientious objection was won, COs were sentenced to death. Even after a legal right was established, absolutist COs were often brutally treated. At least seventy of them died.

Even those who accepted alternative service desired an opportunity for sacrifice. 'Military duties are not imposed as penalties, but are conceived as an honourable form of service for those who believe in war, though great sacrifices must inevitably follow,' the NCF Executive told Asquith in 1918. 'The same must apply in the case of those conscientious objectors who can accept other forms of what they deem to be useful national service' (Graham 1922, 228). Religious COs in particular drew on a long culture of sacrifice and martyrdom and, yet again, they staked a claim to higher standards of sacrifice than soldiers. The Fellowship of Reconciliation told its members that Jesus 'opposed evil with good, hate with love, violence with meekness. On the Cross He accepted the full consequences of this choice of weapons... Let us learn again at the feet of Him whose name we take. His way is best' (Fellowship of Reconciliation 1916, 2). 'His way' was open to COs in the form of 'Field Punishment Number One', which consisted of being suspended by the arms on the wheel of an artillery carriage. The popular name for this soon-to-be-outlawed torture was, unsurprisingly, 'crucifixion'. Partisans felt a CO suffering this ordeal 'has not failed the physical test. He bears on his body the stigmata of Peace' (James 1917, 32). John Brocklesby, one of many to undergo this punishment, invoked a culture of religious sacrifice going back to Foxe's *Book of*

Martyrs when he quoted Joseph Jackson's poem about the martyrdom of Bishops Ridley and Latimer, 'a high water mark of heroism in our country's history' (Brocklesby n.d.-b, 2):

A faithful few of valiant souls
Who pioneer the path for Man's March Godward...
And in their striving bleed and fall
At the hands of those they strive to serve.
And as they fall their red life-stream
Stains o'er and o'er a Noble Crimson Banner
And then mankind a whole [*sic*] shamed by its fearless few...

These lines bear a striking resemblance to a quite different anthem for doomed youth - Rupert Brooke's *1914*:

These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that British men's responses to the call to arms in WW1 corresponded to their relationship to the dominant modes of masculine behaviour defined by British elites from the late nineteenth century onwards. Those who rushed to the colours were its exemplars, while those who 'delayed' were

complicit in hegemony and thus susceptible to attacks on their gender identities originating from the state or civil society. The 'others' who continued to resist had to be conscripted, the consensual veil of British liberalism being torn aside to reveal the coercive apparatus beneath. The paper focused on conscientious objectors' challenge and we will conclude by briefly reflecting on what their activities reveal about the difficulty of counter-hegemonic struggle.

The consensus which emerges from various accounts is that many COs, despite their pacifism, nevertheless articulated their resistance by representing themselves as soldiers fighting for a worthy cause. On the one hand, this may simply have been a strategic device, particularly on the NCF's part, to subvert the dominant discourse to promote alternative forms of male behaviour. On the other, it seems to have expressed the genuine self-image of many COs. Partly this reflects their absorption in a political struggle (see Moore 1948, 6). Yet it also reflected the pervasive influence of militarism and COs' failure to fully transcend hegemonic political and social mores.

Olaf Stapledon, a Quaker CO, expressed this neatly when he recalled that, despite his professed pacifism, he applied (unsuccessfully) for a commission, then took up alternative service in an ambulance brigade, because 'it offered a quick route to the front... the wielders of the white feathers drove me to take up the best imitation of military service that conscience (or sheer funk) would tolerate... Somehow I must bear my share of the great common agony'. The unit's bizarre fusion of pacifism and militarism expressed itself in disgruntlement at the style of its uniform and delight in being awarded medals (1935, 359-70). A different CO recalled being upbraided by another for his absolutist stance whilst in a Non-Combatant Corps, as it was 'disgracing the regiment' (Millar 1935, 235). In

successive drafts of his memoirs, Roland Philcox wrote first of his 'experiences', then 'adventures' and finally the 'story of *Mein Kampf*, "my struggle"' (Philcox n.d., 1-4). Another partisan subtitled his 'Story of an Adventure', 'The Men Who Dared' (James 1917). Though denouncing many of the more despised aspects of hegemonic masculinity, COs were clearly unable to wholly reject it. So pervasive was patriarchal militarism that even women articulated their experiences in martial terms: the aid worker Ruth Fry wrote of her *Quaker Adventure*; feminists called for women's 'national service' to be ranked among men's; Nina Boyle of the Women's Freedom League urged 'all Suffragists to stand to their guns and man their own forts, and not to let themselves be drawn out of their movement for any purpose whatsoever' (Fry 1926; Kent 1993, 20).

By 1914, militarism formed a series of metaphors which the British population 'lived by' (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980). While they were undeniably courageous, most COs were insufficiently radical to transcend hegemonic notions like service to and sacrifice for the nation-state, which even as they shunned some aspects of hegemonic masculinity, they retained as part of their male identities.⁴ As Marx warned in his *18th Brumaire*, true 'social revolution... cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future' (Marx 1977 [1851], 302). It was not until the inter-war period when the scale of the carnage became apparent and popular hopes for significant social change (better welfare, housing, etc) were frustrated, that militarism declined as a popular force. Nonetheless, COs arguably played an important role in the vanguard of this broader social shift, particularly in articulating a counter-hegemonic vision of malehood. Elites in the build-up to WWII could not rely on the same degree of social acquiescence for militarism, and had to legitimise Britain's struggle in far broader terms, appealing to ideas of freedom

and social progress, rather than of male 'duty', which ultimately ushered in a far more progressive post-war settlement.

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¹ I do not make a totalising causal claim for hegemonic masculinity. As Ferguson (1998, ch. 7) points out, many men felt compelled to enlist because of severe economic deprivation caused by the onset of war.

² Cf. continental propaganda: Germany portrayed Belgians as violently patriotic, justifying suitable 'reprisals' (Terraine 1980, 22-34).

³ Exceptions existed. Sylvia Pankhurst broke from the WPSU in 1912 over its decision to abandon socialism to attract more middle-class support for a narrow franchise agenda. She co-founded the Women's Peace Army in February 1915 with other suffragettes like

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. Sylvia's mother, Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the WPSU, denounced them as traitors.

⁴ Cf. some conscription-resisters apparently engaged in armed resistance in the Scottish Highlands. See *Voice of Labour*, 15 April 1916, in PRO: HO 45/10801/307402/2.