



## Irish women and the Great War

by Fionnuala Walsh, *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, x + 254 pp., £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-1084-9120-4

Jennifer Redmond

To cite this article: Jennifer Redmond (2021) Irish women and the Great War, *First World War Studies*, 12:1, 77-78, DOI: [10.1080/19475020.2021.2003548](https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2021.2003548)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2021.2003548>



Published online: 16 Nov 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 52



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

**Irish women and the Great War**, by Fionnuala Walsh, *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, x + 254 pp., £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-1084-9120-4

The centenaries commemorating the First World War saw a significant reappraisal of the impact of the war on communities in Ireland. Although scholars for some time have been challenging the myth that this was a British, not an Irish war, public consciousness was finally pierced with new publications and events that critically engaged with Ireland's role in this history. Walsh's book, coming after the centenaries have passed, is a welcome reminder that the Great War affected all people in Ireland. This book is the first monograph specifically on women in Ireland during the war. It is a welcome addition to the literature, based on a rich array of sources, from personal accounts to prelates' letters, trade union perspectives to census material, private family papers to support groups and government reports, and more. The multiplicity of perspectives gives a view of ordinary people, landed gentry and government officials. The book details newspapers and novels and covers the discourses that emerged during the war and were created afterwards to explain it.

The book has a thematic structure examining mobilization, family life, work, politics and demobilization. There are surprises in each chapter that attest to the innovation in methods and scholarship. For example, while the general perception has been that only a select number of women in Ireland chose to actively engage with the war through volunteering activities, Walsh has found that Irish women between the ages of 20 and 54 years were almost as likely as their British counterparts to join the Red Cross. Some of these women even served in nursing roles outside of the United Kingdom. The average length of time spent in service to the Red Cross (from a sample of 200 women) was twenty-five months, demonstrating a significant commitment to the work.

The discussion of sexual morality in the book chimes with studies on the apparent obsession in modern Ireland with women's dress, behaviour and general deportment but confirms that such anxieties were present before independence. The chapter on working lives gives a strong comparative analysis of women's employment trends and prospects during the war in Britain and Ireland. The virtual collapse of the female dominated 'luxury trades' had a similar trajectory in both countries, but as Walsh highlights here, the regional disparities in industrialization in Ireland meant women in Ulster were more deeply affected by factory closures than women elsewhere in the country. The focus on training women during the war in domestic economy skills – at a time when industrial skills were more in demand – speaks to Walsh's point throughout the book that women were often guided – through rhetoric, philanthropic endeavours and even government employment schemes – towards appropriately 'feminine' activities.

Walsh's conclusion highlights the gendered roles women played and their consequences afterwards. The conclusion challenges the contemporary images and rhetoric about women undertaking traditionally masculine roles in the workplace. Historians have analysed the political conservatism in Ireland in the 1920s after universal suffrage, but Walsh makes an intervention in drawing a clear continuity in women's roles during the war and after independence. Walsh's closing argument – although the war did not significantly alter gender identities in Ireland, it did change the lives of women irrevocably – is a worthy point.

The tables provided in five of the six chapters of the book are a wonderful addition to our knowledge and demonstrate the depth and breadth of research conducted for this book. The accessible writing style and thematic structure mean this book could be enjoyed by the interested reader as well as the academic, but the strong primary source element of the book makes it ideal to use as an academic teaching resource. The discussion of bereavement is

sensitive and rich with detail – the dread Belfast mothers felt at seeing the red bicycles of telegram boys is particularly poignant.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Jennifer Redmond

Maynooth University

✉ [jennifer.redmond@mu.ie](mailto:jennifer.redmond@mu.ie)

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6819-5623>

© 2021 Jennifer Redmond

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2021.2003548>



**British Cyprus and the long Great War, 1914-1925: empire, loyalties and democratic deficit**, by Andrekos Varnava, New York, Routledge, 2020, xiv + 242 pp., £120.00 (hardback), ISBN 9-781-1386-9832-1

The fact that First World War is one of the most researched subjects among historians makes it difficult for authors to approach it with a new view and offer an original perspective. Andrekos Varnava, with his latest monograph, managed to do so, focusing on Cyprus and the period from the start of the war until the Island's proclamation as a Crown colony. The main areas Varnava studies in his book are the impact of the war on one of the smallest parts of the British Empire, the loyalties of the population, and the role of elites, both the colonial administrators and the local leading elites, in constructing the political future of Cyprus.

In this review, I would like to focus on my objection on Varnava's claim that the majority of Greek Cypriots actually opposed unification with Greece. The author analyzes the Cypriot society efficiently, describing the Cypriots as a diverse group of people with different ideologies, identities and goals during and after the Great War. In an effort to tackle the simplified view that Orthodox Christians supported *enosis* (the union of Greek communities) while the Muslim Cypriots rejected it, he stresses that 'truly the silent majority' (p.115) opposed unification with Greece. Only a small nationalistic elite, he claims, promoted union with Greece at the early stages of the Cyprus question. I believe that this conclusion overlooks that the demand for *enosis* was broadly adopted by all social strata. During the period, the unification movement began to take shape, the Greek-Cypriot bourgeoisie was economically weak and closely knit to a state of dependency with feudalism and the clergy. Sensing the burden of colonialism that had kept the Island undeveloped, its members, seeking release from this burden, appropriated the *enosis* motto. Such a regime change on the Island required both intellectual as well as political tools for its realization. Both were already available: merchants and intellectuals; newly founded schools and newspapers; a rising bourgeoisie that hadn't experienced Ottoman occupation and had developed relations with Greece; and the return of doctors and lawyers as the main representatives of this new bourgeoisie from Greece. Also, the echo of the Cretan issue,