

“Women: The Overlooked Spies of World War II”
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Spy History of World War II
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Gender equality is a hot topic throughout news venues, academia and cultural spaces. Inquiries and research often look to the past to draw on repeated examples of gender bias and the inequitable treatment of non-dominant genders. Sadly, human history is a rich source for examples, which seep through almost every aspect of life. Due to the numerous topics on gender inequality, herein the topic will remain on the more specific issue of the historical record of women spies during World War II, drawing on information from the decade in which the war took place, with brief glances to the social climate before and following to show how gender inequality developed and continued. Despite conscription into the labor and war efforts of the time and the proof of their ability because of this, women were expected to gladly step down from their positions for the men returning from the front; an expectation that was held by both men and women. The clash between the genders that this caused took generations, but eventually led to the greater equality women enjoy today in the workforce and especially the secret services. However, the historic record on women's efforts in espionage remains largely unwritten, attesting to the remaining work on equality measures.

The reason for examining gender inequality during World War II is that the period illustrates a point when social norms regarding gender roles were fluctuating to meet societal necessities. Men were conscripted to military service and women were encouraged to take their places in factories and at other massive occupational vacancies. The health of the economy and the war effort required that women no longer be told their place was in the home. In essence, women were a vast untapped resource available for work. For instance, Maureen Honey writes that "researchers have been drawn to the World War II period as a time when women were encouraged to enter nontraditional jobs in manufacturing, white-collar work, and service/trade fields," (Honey, 672). Quite frequently, the hundreds of women stationed abroad are forgotten

when not glanced over (McIntosh, xii). Women's war stories are rarely or briefly discussed in historical texts of the period despite the existence of huge amounts of evidence (an example of this is David Kahn's extensive work on *Hitler's Spies*, which largely ignores the effort of women for Germany's war effort in the intelligence fields, preferring to give them a few sentences out of the 700 page plus work). The lack of discussion may be due to a *campaign* of gender role consensus that began directly after the war and sexist policy that kept women from service. For instance, Honey tellingly asks, "Why did the media's legitimation of female entry into male work fail to supplant the traditional image of women?" (Honey, 672) In light of this and similar questions, is it possible to recover this history?

Prior to starting my graduate academic work, I undertook a book project that covered a fictionalization of espionage during World War II that paid homage to the period and the Film Noir art style that was birthed by it. Much of the material I came into contact with in the research process of *OP-DEC: Operation Deceit* was male centered. Admittedly, this was suited to the task, because I planned to write about a male spy in his network of mostly male counterparts. However, the main character of *OP-DEC* is a woman: Claire Healey. Claire gets mixed up in this seamy world of clandestine doings, and is regularly asked to undertake the very activities that paralyze her with fear as a means to survive the operation she inadvertently gets involved in. So naturally, the question of women's involvement in espionage during the war progressed from the project. Her experience is allegorical of the real experiences of women during the war. However, research on espionage, regardless of gender, uncovers an image less sensational than the Hollywood image of Film Noir and Spy persons. The activities and incidences that these brave men and women endured were harrowing to say the least, but they were often the quiet efforts of

gathering and reporting information, small and uninteresting to anyone outside those in charge of waging the war and interpreting the meaning of the tidbits sent to them by distant operatives. The harrowing aspect came in what would happen if a spy was discovered, the waiting in the dark-unknown and what if's, or when an extraction back to their nation and a safe haven was attempted. Capture was an unthinkable danger.

The individuals involved in espionage during the Second World War, of course, stretched across the clashing powers. The individuals undertaking such jobs were and still are viewed as human tools, "in some ways the ultimate agents of national interest," (Johnson, 19). Some examples of the organizations responsible for creating and fielding agents were the British Special Operations Executive, The United States branch of the Office of Strategic Services, the many German branches including the Abwehr, and the Soviet intelligence directorate the Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (GRU) (no straight translation available) which preceded the well-known KGB. There were also intelligence branches operating in France (most notably the resistance), Japan and Italy, but for time and space the focus will remain on the European continent and mostly with the larger Allies' efforts.

To understand the enormous history contained in the topic of espionage, it's key to understand how far reaching were the spy efforts. For example, the scope of British Intelligence reached to South Africa and Mozambique. Kent Fedorowich writes that "SOE's successes in both these territories were indeed remarkable," (210). And later he goes on to add, "there was a great deal for London to be worried about in South Africa as the political dynamic was seemingly in constant flux between 1939 and 1942," (217). Alarming, Fedorowich continues by stating, "Much has been made of German wartime espionage activities in South Africa," (212). Therefore, the loss of South Africa or Mozambique, the man power, industry, resources and

tactical location would have affected Great Britain in a devastating way. Operations were underway throughout the militarized zones of Europe and the Pacific, but also within the borders of the United States, by friendly and unfriendly operatives (Kahn, 213-222). According to Russell Braddon, there were 560 SOE Agents active in Europe. Of that number, 130 never returned to England (Braddon, 272). These were both men and women, as the biographies by Braddon, Pearson and Nelson all attest.

Upon undertaking this research, I found that “the topic of women and war is still badly underrepresented,” (Pennington, 1204). The heroic, everyman-made-James-Bond image saturates the research already done. In review of the books on the topic, Reina Pennington finds few primary and scholarly resources to substantiate much of what is written regarding the women who also served as spies and soldiers, and the reviewer does go on to highlight some resources for the reader (1206-1208). Some of the issue may not simply be the lack of interest in women’s history but the lack of trustworthy source material from which to investigate that history. The efforts to put women neatly back in their prewar roles may have mused the information, displaced it permanently, or discarded it as unnecessary documentation. Pennington additionally found “numerous errors, tendency towards hagiography, and perpetuation of myths...about women's real experiences and contributions,” (1207). One of two things could be to blame for such mistakes and blatant revisionism. Perhaps those writing on the topic wish to embellish for greater interest. It may also be, well-meaning historians found a lack in the historical record (either caused on purpose or accident by predecessors) and hoped to compensate by raising a subjugated gender beyond reproach, giving them “special attention,” (1205). Obviously this could be an innocent endeavor to make-up or correct history’s annals. It’s quite easy to perpetuate myths without evidence to the contrary. It’s also a noble idea to saint

these ladies. However, doing so steals the already amazing reality and places their achievements beyond reach of future generations inspired by the work they did. For example, it's like asking women to live up to the standards of impossibly altered photos in designer ads. Once you cross into fiction, the role is no longer achievable, let alone relatable.

Speculation on a campaign against women's equality is useless speculation without research on gender role consensus in that era. The missed opportunities are probable mistakes, though Pennington supports suspicion of an effort to erase women's history by stating that "women's military service and experiences have been left largely to memoirists, biographers, and amateur enthusiasts...replete with errors," and that only recently have academics turned an eye to filling this gap and found sources lacking (1208, 1210). The undertaking will be enormous.

Malicious intent aside, the main hurdle facing historians in research on women's involvement in war is the catch up, the breadth of that unorganized history. Loch K. Johnson states, spies "have been around in one form or another since the Lord told Moses to *send men to spy out the land of Canaan*," (18). Judith L. Pearson writes, "Spying is as old as war," (Pearson 62). The male portion of history is already well documented through innumerable texts, which can serve as a starting point as they often mention the women involved, such as Nelson's diary. Both men and women shared these historical assignments, as gender sometimes privileged information. However, another hurdle aside from the sheer magnitude of research facing gender historians, there is little record of any of it. The reason is due to the nature of the work. Spies toil in secrets. They're "shadowy figures operating outside the law or conventions of war," (19). In bygone days as now, secrets are best kept when there isn't evidence to out them.

There are many ways in which espionage was used and continues to be used today, so much so, that it becomes difficult to pin something down in the category, and likewise the areas

of study which may have information regarding an operation or details of interest to the topic, are probably not on the radar. David Price, in his article *Lessons from Second World War Anthropology: Peripheral, Persuasive and Ignored Contributions*, discusses the unexpected role of Anthropologists in the war, and how they informed intelligence analysts about social norms and the like (Price, 14). More specifically, Price writes: “Ethno-geographic Board, a wartime think tank that pooled anthropologists, linguists, and cultural geographers to generate cultural information of relevance to anticipated theatres of war,” (Price, 17). I found this to be an interesting point where sources might be dug out for further inspection. However, Price concentrates mainly on ethnicity and culture, along with economics, but doesn’t mention gender. The question of why can again only merit speculation and serve to stymy inquiry into how women were involved with questions of why we haven’t yet documented their involvement. Some of those questions might be: Did disinterest in this area of human experience cause researchers to overlook women? Is gender consensus and expectations, conformity and the for-granted patriarchy at the heart of their omission? Despite the lack of women specifically mentioned, Price’s brief article was still compelling. He states:

Wars raise the stakes for anthropologists, exposing the nature of our commitments and principles, and as past wars and colonial campaigns have shown, anthropologists as a group have served both the oppressed and the oppressors.

(19)

Price states that anthropology used during and even as a lens from which to view the Second World War has its biases. The lack of interest in the topic of women in war could very well be due to the phenomena of ingrained patriarchy, which, without thought, ignores subjugated

genders. In addition, the statement suggests that this tendency is exposed by the “commitments and principles” exhibited in the studies. In other words, there is no commitment to women’s war history and the lack of documentation may have been upon social principles. For example, the extensive documentation on Hollywood starlets peddling war bonds, considered by far a more *feminine* occupation by an earlier era’s ideology.

To better understand what factors played out in the loss of a vital part of history, and still pervades today, it’s best to focus on the social staging and the historical social norms of the period, along with a general comparison of the traditional male and female gender roles. Another avenue of interest found wanting was Pennington’s realization that works in print also needed further examination of how women balanced social expectation and career (1209). Social sentiments regarding gender were established well before the outbreak of the Second World War. What women wanted was assumed to be what men and therefore the nation wanted, and their voice was unnecessary in the debate.

In Brian Harrison’s *Women in a Men's House the Women M.P.'s, 1919-1945* (MP stands for Member of Parliament), and Erika Kuhlman’s *Women's Ways in War: The Feminist Pacifism of the New York City Women's Peace Party* are articles that illustrate the attitudes toward women in both politics and labor, and how women juggled work and life. These sentiments carried over into many social aspects and are reflected in the issues in which politically involved women staked a voice. The scope of the work covers the first four decades of the twentieth century, and offers explanations for the exemption of women from praise in war work in Victorian idealized gender roles. The work additionally illustrates the outright loathing of women in traditionally male roles. Harrison writes,

The historian must comprehend the minds of the despised and the defeated, and in this he will be joined by the feminist, who encounters the same anti-feminist arguments (often voiced by women) at each stage of women's advance - into political parties, trade unions, the house of lords in 1957 or Oxford and Cambridge colleges and London clubs in the 1970s; forewarned is forearmed. (623)

Harrison is highlighting the sexist backlash which women's issues, including women's rights, often faced in social and political spheres. Harrison goes on to say, in regards to Allied politics, that the driving factor behind these sentiments was based on *male equivalence*, which "often promoted women as substitutes or precursors" for work that was deemed unmanly or that the men simply were not available to fill, such as jobs vacancies in a time of war (625). Equivalence or substitution was based on ideology of the feminine as the weaker or gentler, but always secondary, gender. For example, Harrison states, a "certain puritanism on sexual matters influenced women M.P.s throughout the period," (639). Puritanism held women back from speaking up for themselves or taking on roles reserved for male counterparts, teaching that an outspoken woman was improper. Kuhlman writes, "soon after the European war exploded in 1914, the first feminist peace organization in U.S. history, the Woman's Peace Party (WPP), was formed" (80). The purpose of the WPP was to provide female consultation to the administration on war and peace and they idealized themselves as the *every-woman*, which was to be gentle and opposed to war (80-81). The WPP was separate from men, and intended as merely an advisory board with little clout. Their journal, *Four Lights*, had an "impact on the feminist peace movement [that] reverberated into the 1940s, when a new generation of feminist pacifists

resurrected the journal,” (81). A similar organization was formed in Britain in 1940 called the Woman Power committee, which “pressed government to take women's war-work seriously,” (Harrison, 645). Lastly, there was the Women’s Auxiliary Corps (WAC) (McIntosh, 90). Such groups, in their respective times, sought to achieve respect for women’s efforts in war time, even if for varying reasons. These reasons are actually important to understand, because they frame the thinking of the time that shaped policy and the social fall-out of such policies. Despite their seeming feminist rhetoric, they also believed in a *woman’s place*.

During the First World War, women’s groups struggled to have a voice in wartime. Most, if not all, were pacifist. Kuhlman reminds her reader that “the pacifists' criticisms went beyond the mere objection that women were unfairly excluded from the debate over war,” (81). These female progressives of the late 19th century “took the educated working woman as their model, rather than the idealized Victorian wife and mother,” (Kuhlman, 81). In addition, after realizing the slanted reach of their paper, they opened the periodical to racial minority women (82). Many of the articles in the paper focused on how “women's work went unrealized by the press,” (84). For example, main stream media of the time referring to the American Red Cross, usually represented by stylized women in nurse’s uniforms, gave the impression that the recruitment ads only meant to target women, but not acknowledge their work (84). This too is an aspect of the idealization of the feminine gender as passive. It was considered poor taste for women to be praised for what duty was expected of them (90-95).

The *Four Lights* journal was a sounding board used by the WPP to “expose the oppressive nature of militarism...[and] the connected oppressions of sexism, racism, capitalism, and militarism in their work,” (87-88). The militarism to which they spoke was *internationalism*, the actions of the United States on the world stage, by which the nation attempted to control

world affairs and policies, in line with patriarchal views of the time (85). WPP's "gender-conscious analyses of culture and society led them to conceive of internationalism as a truly equitable relationship among nations," (85). A passage from Kuhlman's article quotes Olivia Howard Dunbar from her work in *Four Lights*, regarding the carefully orchestrated consensus, down to the use of language as "verbal fuses" to justify military action in Europe:

A war that has scarcely begun has already achieved a sinister influence upon the words of our common speech....Words that have had forced upon them an extraordinary igniting power are now successfully used as verbal fuses, even where their use is utterly paradoxical. Conspicuous among these, of course, [is the word] *democracy*. A war instigated in the name of national vengeance is now declared to be a fight for *Democracy*. Many docile-minded persons are acquiescing in the policy of conscription because they are assured it is *democratic*. The slaughter, starvation and utter humiliation of a foreign people is urged as a means of converting it to *Democracy*. The word *peace*, recently conscripted, has likewise come to find itself in the strange company of the word *force* and *courage* and is now used to describe the attitude of persons who think and act with the majority. Quite as significant, perhaps, is the interned word...*liberty*. (92)

Howard Dunbar's analyses of misappropriated terms are still used in the same way today, with the same argument against such subterfuge and shady stratagem. For instance, some believe the

United States administration that involved the nation in a war with Iraq did so under less than honest means, using these same keywords to affect consensus.

Four Lights had an agenda, according to Kuhlman. Not all statements made in the paper were valorous. Kuhlman reminds the reader that “for all their radical ideas, *Four Lights* nonetheless reflected accepted nineteenth-century attitudes of white *purity* and *civilization*,” (89). The movement and its paper was a tool of pacifism, which may have worked against women who worked for the war effort during the Second World War, by continually striving to paint all women as pacifists and immoral if otherwise, because what respectable women would want “the fruits of their reproductive labor [to] become the victims of war,” (Kuhlman 89-95). *Four Lights*’ authors perpetuated a myth about women and sought to hem women into limited vocations based on perceived gender differences. The outspokenness of the articles also won them the derision of the United States Government, which curbed their postal distribution via the Espionage Act (June 15, 1917) (93). In these ways the progressive-feminist paper worked against the gender they intended to raise up.

The WPC, a broad spectrum group who met concerning women and labor issues during the war, was opposed by labor-class women due more to economic issues, a sense of middle and upper-class entitlement. Lower economic class women felt the group worked for the middle-class women and no one else (Smith, 935).

On March 20, 1941, the discussion of woman-power in Britain was presented: “we are all working to a common plan, and we are all going to raise points which affect women's interests,” (Harrison, 635). The debate failed to arrive at an agreement and often alienated all parties involved. For instance, “the committee drafted a letter to [Ernest] Bevin (union leader and Minister of Labour during the Second World War) inquiring about the government's plans on

post-war work for women, and regarded his reply as *most unsatisfactory*,” (Smith, 937). The sentiment passing around was that the WPC, perhaps women in general, were being presumptuous regarding their roles in society, as women were truly incapable of doing men’s work in a manner that warranted their staying past fulfilling the need brought on by the absence of the preferred gender. Conversely, the WPC women regarded politicians as difficult, if not ignorant, and sexist. The clash was prodigious and thus important to the changes that came in the latter half of the twentieth-century (Harrison, 635-6, Smith, 937-8).

In all aspects, the role of women in society stagnated in the limited mother and homemaker titles. For example, “women were slow to get into the diplomatic service, the first British woman ambassador not being appointed till 1962,” (Harrison, 628). Also, Harrison quotes a female factory inspector as saying,

When I stand up ... my appearance, my dress, my manner
of speech - all are criticized... I, too, am on trial. In addition
to proving my legal case, I am also required to prove my
right to be a factory inspector. (629)

In review of female MP contributions, “journalists complained that where the women did contribute, they made no distinctive contribution on policy,” (642). And, sadly, “several inter-war women M.P.s made a point of denying feminist allegiance,” and in so doing worked against women’s equality (643). Women in a position of power were often bullied into accepting and promoting the status quo regarding gender roles.

Winston Churchill, who became Prime Minister of Great Britain during the Second World War, held a “belief that the war had brought about profound changes in the status of women” and this sentiment appears to be “shared by contemporary authors attempting to

evaluate the effect of the war on British women,” (Smith, 925). The clash between the sexes was instrumental in affecting such a change. For instance, “most notably Churchill and F. E. Smith, bitterly resented women's advent, and a M.P.'s occasional remark can reveal a world of prejudice,” (Harrison, 628). And furthermore, “before 1945 women encountered the widely held idea (explicit or implicit) that men and women should occupy separate metaphysical space - that is, concern themselves with different areas of policy,” (Harrison, 636). The sentiment wasn't reserved to just policy making. It ran throughout all avenues of society and private life. Across the Atlantic, “the CIA did not always have a gender-neutral perspective on intelligence work,” Lake cites the example of the notable agent Virginia Hall who “was relegated to a desk job as an analyst” despite her productive and essential field-work in the war (Lake, 41).

Other factors affecting women's equality in work and the war effort were regulations put in place by governments, such as the “marriage bar” enacted to alleviate unemployment during The Depression, “supported by trade unions and even by many unmarried women workers,” (Smith, 941). The marriage bar was policy that once married a woman must vacate her job. Also, the intelligence portion of Allied governments was run by old men, politicians and military who lost touch with internal issues and social advances of the nation (Fedorowich, 217-219). The black sheep of the allied family, Russia, was the most advanced in its use of women. In Russia, women served in the military and in factories wherever they were conscripted to (Kahn, 407). The social constructs facing women who were part of the Axis powers were similar if not more limiting under the fascist regimes (Kahn, 106, 274, 334, 345, 359).

Due to coverage on television and in cinema, the spymaster has a definite and shared image throughout cultures. Most notable and most sensationalized is of course James Bond. The Bond character, however, has little to do with reality, though he exhibits some of the traits

required for such a vocation. The fact that Bond is a man, is also telling of the culture, as is his facing off with sex-kitten anti-agents bent on his destruction through lascivious means. Bond is a Cold War construct, born of author Ian Fleming's experiences in Britain's Naval intelligence. It is highly unlikely he met such women during his service and also that the books were written and film adapted to suit sensationalism.

Researching the real world spies uncovered semi-average people. Semi because the examples reveal a class bias, if not gender, and a fortitude for suffering beyond the comfort of the average individual. Their biographies speak of resilient character and privilege. Largely, the spy was drawn from the upper and upper middle classes. It is safe to assume this was done because of the access to education available to this subset, the likelihood of them speaking several languages and also having the social understanding required for deep cover positions (such as *belonging* in the ritzier places most military and political persons of interest would frequent). This seems outright snobbery, but the intention was most likely to have a viable agent in the least practical time. It takes less effort to train a multi-lingual individual with refined social graces to imitate a poor person through stereotypes than to train someone who doesn't speak any but their native language and lacks social skills imperative to believably portraying a fellow member of an upper social class. The least awkwardness could result in a blown cover. This reasoning is well supported in Braddon and Pearson's biographies.

Though there are few examples available of women spies, those written about are fabulous women who, perhaps by the doubt in female ability that persists today, inspire and astound. Two such women are Nancy Wake (SOE) and Virginia Hall (Foreign Service Office, SOE and CIA). Through their biographies, Elizabeth P. McIntosh's book *Sisterhood of Spies*

(142-144), Wayne Nelson's Biography and David Kahn's work on spies (274, 359), there is evidence of other women serving in the European theater for their respective nations.

Judith L. Pearson chronicles the life of Virginia Hall in her work *The Wolves at the Door: The True Story of America's Greatest Female Spy*. A native of Maryland, Hall was stationed throughout Europe before the war as a Foreign Service worker for the United States Government. This work led to her social and lingual education. Eventually, Hall wound up in France and remained after the German invasion (23). What is most unique about Virginia Hall is that she suffered a hunting injury, which resulted in the amputation of one of her legs from below the knee (10-25). Despite her best effort to disguise her injury during her stint as an SOE operative, Hall won the nickname "The Limping Lady" from the confounded German counter intelligence, who utterly despised her prowess (Pearson, 157). That prowess included being arrested, detained and sent back to England following a harrowing retreat across Spain, where she was recruited and airdropped back into France (Pearson, 160-162). In her new SOE position, Hall was the hub for incoming agents "instructed to contact her when they first arrived in the area," (Pearson, 80-81).

Through Maurice Buckmaster, F Section, SOE Head, Hall was indirectly connected to the next person of interest Nancy Wake (Pearson, 63). In Russell Braddon's *Nancy Wake: SOE's Greatest Heroine*, the reader is told that Wake moved to Paris, France at twenty-two from Australia. Always an "independent and lively person," Wake worked as a freelance journalist and even a nurse in a psychiatric asylum (15). Unlike Hall, Wake married into money when she met Henri Fiocca (16-18). Fiocca taught her the French language and how to properly behave French and upper class (17-20).

Wake's biography introduces a number of female intelligence workers, including Madame Sainson, an active member of French Resistance who assisted Nancy in some assignments. Sainson assisted escaping "downed" airmen. According to Braddon, Wake thought Sainson was dangerously bold in her activities, highlighting a moment (with pictures) that she and two of her boys had their picture taken with enemy combatants (Braddon, 73).

On the Axis side of the war, there is precious little reported by David Kahn. For instance, the sensationalized Mata Hari is exploited as a consensus building figure for post war women, warning them against loose morals. Many depictions of 'enemy' female spies are folded into her image, despite her brief service to Germany (Kahn, 36). In addition, the only woman mentioned in Fedorowich's paper is "Anna Levi, a well-known prostitute or 'taxi-dancer' who was used as [a] decoy", later exonerated as a bystander in return for her cooperation and "re-entry into the Union" (South Africa), (Fedorowich 226 – 227). The Axis, though many would like to see otherwise, had a similar notion of a woman's proper place in society as mothers and homemakers. However, their means of controlling this status was more lethal (McIntosh 65-67). Kahn does state that the Germans saw the usefulness of women as spies, writing up specifics in appearance and skills, which imply the use of seduction and other nefarious means to get information (274). They saw women as quite capable of the violence required (359).

With such a negative image of women, how did female spies like Hall and Wake end up in the service? The industries throughout Britain, France and the United States, once conscription was activated to fill the quota of needed soldiers, could not produce as effectively due to the absence of the men. War time demands on labor called for an increase in *manpower* which meant hiring more women. To attract women into the workforce, an active campaign of recruitment took place to fill the void by glamorizing and calling on women's patriotism. This recruitment

led to other opportunities for women, including war service (Gowing, 147-148). Margaret Gowing explores the topic in her article *The Organisation of Manpower in Britain during the Second World War*, and found that employment “demands had been met by an increase of over 1/2 million people, largely women, in the working population...and by the virtual abolition of unemployment,” (152). In Great Britain, 1941 marked a progression toward a lack of enough employable bodies, “a *famine of men*, which would in turn breed a hunger for women,” (153-4). Britain, in an effort to have an efficient system, was moving people around to accommodate vacancies, a logistical nightmare, (157-159). However, pay scales remained skewed by gender despite the lines being blurred (Smith, 926-27).

Mobilizing women relied on a few factors, such as age, family responsibility and health (Gowing, 158-159). Special considerations and tact were used during this process, which would not have been afforded to men (160). Unlike Smith, Gowing saw wages set to attract men or women to a certain vacancy, not to keep one or the other out (165). Researchers who were tasked with finding an answer to the labor shortage found that there were “nearly eleven million women outside the labour force-over two-thirds the total number of working age,” (147). Stereotypes and long held beliefs in women and women’s work had to be laid aside if Britain meant to win the war. Ernest Bevin “had a sure instinct” which displayed an understanding of the “extraordinary obligations on women to work, without causing public bitterness and discontent,” and also “set a new measure for national potential,” (167). Bevin and other politicians basically conscripted women into the war, as women were now “to be allowed on to jobs previously reserved for men,” (Smith, 928). Above all, women were to “be regarded as temporary workers and allowed to do men's work only until the end of the war,” (Smith, 928). The largest

population of professional occupation women could be found at the “Research and Analysis Branch in London” (McIntosh, 92).

The active recruitment should not be regarded as having lowered standards, but simply to have opened their doors to a gender they previously disregarded as employable. For instance, prior to the war, Virginia Hall actively sought out an occupation that would put her in the kind of service she felt would best serve humanity. Hall stayed in France after German occupation, working in the Service Sanitaires as an ambulance driver. Hall used her position for subversion, getting information while seeking a position with a resistance group against the Nazis, and these groups resisted her as a foreigner not a woman (Pearson, 47-50).

Nancy Wake got involved in the war effort when the German’s invaded and set up Vichy and Occupied France. She wanted to restore French autonomy and despised everything the German’s did (Braddon, 15-25). Wake was recruited by the SOE after an over two-year plan to extract her from Nazi occupied Vichy (109-111). Nancy had been assisting the resistance in small but noticeable ways without training, government expectation or compensation (73). Thus, both Hall and Wake had already been doing freelance spy operations and the effort gained the notice of the branches interested in such work through other operatives in the field. Since they were already working, the SOE most likely thought it best to bring them into the fold, for better control and benefit to the British war effort. Nancy’s life was threatened at the time of her extraction, and they felt it best to bring her in instead of wasting her (107-111).

Active recruitment came from several venues. Honey found that in Great Britain “the major [propaganda] campaign conducted by the Office of War Information (OWI) was the one to recruit women into the labor force,” (677). OWI’s efforts toward women included “giving them role models for filling jobs unfamiliar to them,” (684). A similar effort was underway in the

United States upon the nation's inclusion in the war, as evidenced by the iconic *Rosie the Riveter* propaganda posters. In addition, recruitment into the armed forces was eventually undertaken by the Allies, to free men from desk jobs as they could better serve in the active theater. Smith highlights the controversy that this scheme incited stating that "the proposal...provoked one of the most heated debates to occur within the government during the entire war," (Smith, 933). An agreement was eventually reached in Britain that satisfied most parties: "conscription of certain women was introduced at the end of 1941, the women called up could opt for industry instead of the Forces," (Gowing, 159). In this way, "liability for service in the women's Forces was placed on unmarried women and childless widows between 20 and 30," (156).

The controversy of including women in military conscription has long roots stemming from chivalry and exacerbated in the Victorian Era. In the First World War, the conservatives had moved to include them:

In 1918 the party thought it wise to educate the new electors by mobilising women into the Women's Unionist Association. Labour, by contrast, could attract the family woman embedded within the working-class community, the type of feminist (socialist or Liberal) whose hopes rested on social welfare, and the progressive middle-class woman whose rational or philanthropic reformism. (Harrison, 644-645)

The similar tactic of recruiting or mobilizing women of a certain morality or class continued into the Second World War. This could be the reason women of means, like Hall and Wake, were chosen above the labor class women who were likely to be just as patriotic and eager to serve

their nation. In other words, due to their being of lower classes, it was viewed that they should fill the jobs associated with their class, but also that there were class prejudices regarding morals.

Regardless of morality and economics, the use of women during war was meant to fill a temporary void. Smith writes that “recent research...points [out that]...the wartime changes in the status of women for the main part proved to be transitory,” (Smith, 925). A reason behind the temporary rise in status of the female gender is that it filled a temporary need. Once the war ended, the justifications for women in the workplace were seen to end as well. As stated before, Bevin and other politicians agreed to it as temporary from the outset. However, the cat was already out of the bag and getting it back in was going to prove a greater challenge. Now, women knew the social propaganda keeping them home-bound was false. They could effectively fill jobs previously held by men.

The British mobilization of women took place well before the American move. Obviously, this was due in part to entering the war at different times. Virginia Hall was first recruited by the French after leaving her Foreign Service post and subsequently hired by the British Intelligence agency (Pearson, 52). After extensive training, Hall voluntarily returned to France, a surprising thing to do for a member of any gender, considering the difficulties she faced (239). Hall was trained on radio operation, which she later found to be a stressful game of waiting and isolation (195). It wasn't enough to deter her from the work. Hall resigned her position on September 28, 1945, and soon after became “one of the CIA's first female agents,” in 1948 (241, 243).

American support for women intelligence workers came from high places, but wasn't sufficient enough to remove barriers. For example, General Donovan found women to be an integral part of the war effort, from clerks to high administration, even serving in the clandestine

operations (McIntosh, 11). When the OSS was put together the various areas all “employed women either in support functions or in operations,” (12). According to James M. Cannon (who served under women’s inclusion critic Lt. Comdr. Edmond Taylor) “they proved they could do the work as well as men,” (214). Sadly, support was given with qualifications such as “first time in my experience,” or with an air of surprise (214).

The recruitment of women was faced with gender bias and outright sexism at all points. Once recruited, the lines blurred somewhat, all but dropping from existence in the field. According to Hall and Wake’s biographies, though they were segregated in gendered quarters, the training undertaken was co-educational. Once injected in the field, “women lived perilously in occupied areas, organizing guerrilla groups, unmasking traitors, subverting morale of the enemy, or arranging safety nets for downed Allied fliers,” (McIntosh, xiii). Some inside the SOE believed that “women agents would be able to move more freely and would be less suspect than male agents,” (Pearson, 64).

Additionally, “anti-feminism can take subtle and only half-conscious forms,” (Harrison, 629). The most damaging effect of patriarchy on gender is that it becomes half-conscious. One form is in the existence of an attitude that boy’s will be boys, that dismisses often crude behavior, where women are held to higher standards of decorum. For example, a man whistling on the street at a woman is seen as playful, but a woman to do so at a man was repulsive. Or, the idea that men are stronger than women simply because they are men and may be physically larger than the women in question and that women were expected to be delicate. At the same time, the diminutive *girls* was used to refer to the women operatives by everyone in the home office and field, even by themselves (McIntosh, 17).

Reductive mindsets saw sexual harassment as an acceptable and common place annoyance, but mostly harmless and complimentary of the victim (Lake, 43). The Women's Auxiliary Corps (WAC) suffered harassment from American soldiers, who spread the idea the WAC's purpose was to service the male American soldier overseas (McIntosh, 90). The burden of war, while promoting equality from need, "was accompanied by increased sex differentiation," which became reflected in stalled equal pay initiative (Smith, 936). Women's advocacy committees attempted to address this issue, stating that "the government's claim that equal pay for women replacing men had been established...[was] a myth," (Smith, 932).

Gender developments had a lasting effect that was felt far into the latter half of the century. For instance, Smith writes,

the war years might more accurately be described as a continuing tug-of-war between a government committed to traditional patterns of sex discrimination and women's groups seeking to make permanent the wartime steps towards sex equality. (945)

Before the war, Virginia Hall was consistently overlooked for posts due to her gender, and Pearson cites the Great Depression as a commonly used reason alongside stereotypes (24, 67). Those stereotypes were long standing ideology so engrained in society that even today it's not considered poor taste to say: she's "doing a spectacular man-sized job," as a counterpart of Hall, SOE's Mrs. Norris wrote in a letter to Hall's mother, (216). Although Hall performed as well as a man, if not better, at the close of the war her services were deemed completed and now reserved for male counterparts seeking to continue in intelligence work.

Likewise, Wake's bravery, which was made greatly evident when she manipulated a ride from a carload of Nazi officers at a time French natives were forbidden to use vehicles for personal use, was not enough to save her from sexist and diminutive codenames like The White Mouse or The Witch (73, 133). Conversely, she was respectfully known to her Maquis operatives as Mme. Andrée and Hélène to the SOE office in London (136). This double standard was also evident in how some of the resistance workers she relied upon treated her. One Maquis commander attempted to bully Wake into ordering things he wanted from the British government, like money and guns, not necessarily for the war effort (145-148). Eventually, Nancy established her worth and authority in her post through her efforts in regards to the D-Day invasion and the expertise she showed in prepping drops. Her accuracy was uncanny (157, 215).

In Wayne Nelson's autobiography, *A Spy's Diary of World War II: Inside the OSS with an American Agent in Europe*, Nelson writes about the varying reception of women serving alongside his OSS operatives. He seemed awestruck by the women present in the OSS, Maquis, and Italian resistance, while others were driven to play hero and some to deride the women's presence. Nelson even mentioned concern that his male counterparts would endanger themselves to help the women, who they couldn't always be sure were on the up (1248, 1256, 2532).

The vacillation faced by women in these roles was due to a lack of proof in their ability to perform, via long held gender traditions which purposely held them back. Despite being trained alongside the boys to fulfill every task of a spymaster, Hall and Wake were primarily administrative. They oversaw operations, which generally kept them out of the fighting: reporting via radio, running documents and orders, moving escaped prisoners or soldiers to safety via a network, knowing their network and placing new network operatives, gaining an

understanding of the area in which they were ensconced. Hall and Wake both knew how to use a gun, and Wake was eventually called to use it, as the fighting in her area became grim.

“Discrimination against women in government service during the war was obvious,” McIntosh states, going on to give specifics from department X-2 and other areas, where women were the equals of their male counterparts in education and experience (97-98). Women working back home, the Rosies, regarded that work “as being equally important,” (McIntosh, xii). “The men in the organization had mixed reactions to the women who were sharing their assignments,” (McIntosh, 214). They saw them fulfilling the goals with just as much ability, but longstanding teachings told them this was improbable and, worse, unseemly. They treated the women accordingly, diminishing them in coded rhetoric, like calling them ‘girls’ and hazing.

Bosses and authority figures saw “the injection of sex into a wartime situation establish an intolerable obstacle to discipline,” Capt. Oliver Caldwell described his sense of the situation (McIntosh, 214). Across the Pacific, “women in china have been one of the hottest issues in the theater,” quoting Agnes Greene an operative in China (McIntosh, 226). General Joseph Stilwell and Clarence Gauss “both agreed that the presence of females in the war zone was unacceptable,” due to terrain and other hardships they felt men were more capable of handling, (McIntosh, 225). The general later changed his tune, when experience showed him the worth of women in war (McIntosh, 226). Eventually, inflammatory stereotypes were replaced by images highlighting the “strength, dependability, and compassion,” of women (Honey, 677).

To unilaterally say that women were not accepted because of their gender could be considered generalizing, as both Wake and Hall were met with both respect and derision in undertaking their training and eventual posts. The facts, however, support that women were not afforded “a level playing field,” and this is clear from the way in which many acted in their jobs

(Lake, 43). For example, Hall felt compelled to prove herself worthy of her post, making her a perfectionist at the work, and causing her and others a great deal of stress (Pearson, 130). In addition, those having to rely on women like Hall, such as downed pilots, were wary of taking assistance from the female amputee, more due to her gender than the amputation she veiled (99). Hall had some trouble with her counterparts in the Maquis and elsewhere, when they “made a lark of the mission” or refused to respect her expertise (184-185). Maquis didn’t like “taking orders from a woman,” especially one who wasn’t French, but there were several who were highly loyal to her, because she stubbornly did her duty and proved a brave fighter in their cause (Pearson 208-9).

Nancy Wake’s husband panned her idea of helping out in the war effort at the outset of the German invasion, saying she was foolish to think she could, but giving no reason aside from her gender as to why (Braddon, 23, 50). He later died serving his country as he had feared would happen to his wife (244). During Nancy’s training, there was competition between the sexes, jokes and jibes that reflected the latent sexism of the system (128-135). When the time came to serve, men were displeased at having to work with her in the field (135). Though she won the respect, and they regarded “her as their complete equal as a soldier, they never the less protected her with the utmost gallantry because she was a woman,” (Braddon, 213). Throughout the biography on Wake, you see her adopting the traits of her men in order to fit in: dressing like the men, speaking like the men, smoking and drinking like the men. So much had Wake revamped her persona, that she was unrecognized “out of uniform” by friends and colleagues (Braddon, 249).

The atmosphere in which Wake worked was a dangerous one. There were Maquis who captured and tortured two French women, one a traitor and the other a local girl who did no more

than pass through the wrong place at the wrong time. There simply is no excuse for the sexual brutality against either. The traitor should have met a firing line (as per military regulation) once convicted and Nancy did give her up as a spy to that fate. However, the sexism and gender stereotypes had provided an environment in which such behavior was easily condoned (220-223). The fraternity atmosphere and fear of in-fighting causing them to lose against the greater threat, silenced men into conforming with what was considered masculine behavior in war time.

Across battle lines, German resistance toward female inclusion was great. Mata Hari, one of the shortest lived spies of the Second World war, became a poster image for improper female behavior, an image that still exists in common vernacular (36). David Kahn almost entirely ignores the contribution of women to the Reich, diminishing them to minute sexist mentions: the ubiquitous “beautiful Nordic Blonde,” (353). The evidence Kahn puts forward suggests that the Germans mainly regarded their women as mothers and homemakers, but they also saw some women as utterly cold and brutal, a trait necessary to do the spy work they needed (274, 359). The most desired for spy work, and the most talked about in Kahn’s work, were young Aryan men, some teenagers, but it is unclear that this was an issue on the historical level with the Germans or that the author was uninterested in the contributions of female spies (363). Perhaps, as stated before, there are few documents from which he could write about them, and the evidence was too scattered to gather efficiently.

Regardless of the lack of faith from superiors and society, women served with distinction in World War II. Wake told her biographer that she was proud of her efforts in the war (273). He quoted her as saying, “In those days we knew what we were fighting and we had a job to do,” (Braddon, 273). Her associates saw her as “a leader,” and she won the hard earned respect of Maquis contacts: “She is like five men,” (Braddon, 195, 214). Wake was awarded three Croix de

Guerre avec Palm, the third with star (F), the Resistance Medal (F), the Medal of Freedom with Bronze Palm (USA) and the George Medal (UK) (Braddon, 277). Virginia Hall was the first woman in war to get the Distinguished Service Cross (UK), (Pearson 239). She was also the recipient of the Croix de Guerre avec Palme (F) (Pearson, 241). Later, Hall became a source of expertise for the US who once rejected her efforts (Pearson, 172).

Despite overwhelming odds, during the years of World War II, women overcame social limitations and served their country with honor, whether on the home front or the war front. Each was brave in her own way. The contributions she made were the equal of her male counterpart. The stylized image of the female spy from films appears to be a peculiarity of cinema. For the most part, the history that can be found on these women is all very sanitary. An exception is Germany's "League of Lonely War Women," which was designed to increase birth rates and raise morale, and also the purchase of prostitutes for German prisoners of war by the United States, (McIntosh, 65-66). This tantalizing fact may be the source of the umpteen Mata Hari incarnations perpetuated in fiction and Hollywood. Is it possible the US used these prostitutes to gain secrets? There was no mention of this in the readings covered.

Regardless of their brave efforts, women still struggle for equality over seventy years later. This was not due to a lack of effort on the part of those who could address the inequality of women. For example, "women workers' organizations were also concerned to safeguard post-war employment opportunities for women," because of experience: "women workers in the First World War had been dismissed en masse from their jobs at the end of the war," (Smith, 937-938). The mood of the societies was that they had to reabsorb all of the men who were sent off to war, and ensure they could find positions in either their old jobs or something similar. To the

governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, there was no higher priority, a means to honor the sacrifice of the brave soldiers they universally saw as male.

Smith writes “developments at the end of the war suggest that feminists were correct in fearing a return to pre-war conditions,” (939). Men like Ernest Bevin made sure of it with “the 1942 Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act [that] required the restoration of pre-war practices,” (938). Thus, a course was set for ejecting women from the labor force of which they proved capable of supporting. As early as the end of the war and through the rest of the decade and 1950s, the western European and American culture was inundated with images of “*the feminine mystique*,” to popularize the middle-class homemaker role for women (Honey, 687). The underlying, and cutting message was: you’ve outlived your usefulness. Thus, “Just about every major intelligence service shrank in size after the Cold War,” (Johnson, 18). In addition, “many of the [female] OSS officers who sought to join the CIA after the war found no opportunities to continue their espionage career in the field,” (Lake 42). Instead, “employees with two X chromosomes were relegated to the steno pool, or midlevel analysis work at best,” (38). Such broad discrimination successfully squashed women’s morale.

The happy homemaker is an image that lasted into the 1980s when a shift in the economy and the women’s rights movements of the 1970s brought women back into the workforce. Television like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) and films like *Nine to Five* (1980) were cultural discussions on this phenomenon. Thirty years had passed since the war and gender stereotypes were slow to change in the many social corners (43). Both of these productions handled the message with delicacy and humor.

While women were entering the workforce in greater numbers, including being recruited in the 1970s for spy work, high level positions remained closed to them (43). What happened in

addition to economic changes were high profile gender discrimination cases in the late 1980s (43). Gina Bennett, who is a mother of five and a CIA agent, says,

I do not think women, any more than men, have to choose between family and a CIA career anymore." She adds, "Not only has my husband been completely supportive of the fact that my job was a calling for me, but my children have understood the concept of serving the greater good. They do not treat me as if I am making a choice between them and my job. They understand that they are partners in what I do, and they are proud of me. I couldn't do what I do without that. (40)

In more recent years, women like Bennett have come into the fore. For example, *Jen*, who helped bring down Osama Bin Laden, "Jen is a new kind of CIA officer: smart, self-assured -- and female," (Lake, 38). *Jen's* are now quite commonplace. However, gender stereotypes still exist. For example, Lake writes that a senior leader of the agency believes that women are more oriented to the work of targeting (analyst) than men, because of an innate ability for detail, (41). Like in World War II, the sexism that held women back from performing their perceived duties was seen as commonsense and accepted scientific knowledge about genders. In some ways, the Second World War should be viewed through the lens of the past, but ignoring the lessons that can be learned in attempting to construct context and excuse the practice of gender discrimination leads to inadequate and missing histories, such as the role of women in war and espionage work, and the worth of that work (Price, 14). The historical perspective also shows that equality is a long hard fight against entrenched ideals for all parties involved. Recovering

women's history may go a long way to negating dismissive excuses like "that's how it's always been" and carve enduring progress instead of transitory successes.

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