All Work and No Pay?

Changes to the Gendered Workplace in Germany, 1914-1918

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> *Jede Frau die heute Männerarbeit verrichtet […] ist heute so viel wert wie der Mann, der draußen im Schützengraben vor dem Feind steht*[1].
>
> ~ Karl Helfferich, Secretary of State for the Interior.

> *Any German woman who thinks consciously about these matters knows full well that during the war she is only a custodian for the man who previously held her position […]. During wartime there is a truce between the sexes, and German women firmly reject the notion that they desire to gain any 'war profits' from the war*[2].
>
> ~ Elisabeth Altmann-Gottheiner, senior member of the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF).

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented societal upheaval, during which the social and economic landscape of Germany would be profoundly altered along gendered lines. The drain on the male workforce due to the mass scale of trench warfare necessitated a shift in workplace norms, as women increasingly took up positions in industrial sectors from which they had previously been excluded. In the resulting atmosphere of contradictions and uncertainty, women were urged to take up jobs in production sectors even as elites sought to reinforce traditional notions of binary gendered role assignment which confined women to the home. This dissonance is evident in the contrasting messages put out by political elites in 1916, cited above, which also

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[1] Translation: 'Every woman who undertakes men's work today is as valuable as any man facing the enemy out in the trenches'. [Author's own translation]. Dr. Karl Helfferich on 26th November 1916. Cited in Barbara Guttmann, *Weibliche Heimarmee: Frauen in Deutschland 1914-1918* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1989), p. 15.

[2] Extract from a lecture by Elisabeth Altmann-Gottheiner in January 1916, cited in translation in Susanne Rouette, 'Mothers and Citizens: Gender and Social Policy in Germany after the First World War', *Central European History*, 30:1 (1997), pp. 48-66 (p. 51).

indicate contemporary assumptions about the temporary nature of these increased opportunities for women's employment. In reality, this socio-economic transformation would prove extremely difficult to reverse. In the years following the Armistice, the German authorities encountered great difficulty in pushing women back into the domestic sphere as the figure of the young, 'financially independent New Woman' came to dominate the era of the Weimar Republic.[3] Indeed, the shift was so profoundly troubling to notions of traditional gender order that a misogynistic backlash ensued, manifesting itself in the aggressive reassertion of binary gender norms under National Socialist ideology.[4]

The unprecedented scale of industrial warfare in 1914 necessitated a total mobilisation of the civilian population and the entry of female workers into heavy industry and other exclusively male sectors. Despite such a clear transgression of gendered space, bourgeois traditionalist gender dualism – the ideology of complementary rather than equal sexes organised in a strictly binary 'male breadwinner / female carer duality' – was extended to accommodate for this need.[5] By dichotomising and re-gendering a range of wartime spaces, the norms of gender role division could be maintained: where husbands traditionally left the domestic sphere to enter the masculine-coded workplace, they now left their communities to fight on the masculine-coded military frontline.[6] The feminine-coded *home* thus came to be extended to psychologically encompass the entire nation: the *homeland*. Within this feminized space of the 'homefront' women's roles could be broadened, and wartime transgressions could be made into previously masculine-coded areas, without provoking a complete rupture of the gender binary.

While the destabilising impact of the First World War on gender relations in Germany has been widely accepted in public discourse for many years, historians of gender and society disagree as to the exact nature of developments in this period. Ute Daniel has challenged the view that war was a catalyst for real change, arguing that the advances in women's economic and social power was little more than a temporary shift, a form of 'emancipation on loan', just

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[3] Kate Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (New York : Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 4.

[4] Nancy Reagin, *Sweeping the Nation: Domesticity & National Identity in Germany 1870-1945.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[5] Birgit Pfau-Effinger, 'Gender cultures and the gender arrangement—a theoretical framework for cross-national gender research', *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 11:2 (1998), pp. 147-166 (p. 160).

[6] Birthe Kundrus, 'Gender Wars: The First World War and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Weimar Republic' in Hagemann & Schüler-Springorum (eds) *Home / Front : The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth Century Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2002) p. 161.

as the BDF leaders had argued in 1916.[7] Conversely, Renate Bridenthal has claimed that the war caused such conflict between the genders that in many ways it represented a regression, rather than an advance, in the women's cause.[8] Further contributors to historiography of the period have shown that the war simply accelerated social trends and developments in gender roles which were already underway well before the outbreak of war. Ute Frevert's work has been most influential in this regard, as she argues that the defining change was not an increase in the *proportion* of women at work but a heightened *visibility* of female workers in the public sphere, as they took up jobs in workplaces formerly dominated by men.[9] Joanna Bourke has extended this reasoning, emphasising the importance of social *perception* of gender roles in this period, and arguing that male resentment over reduced employment opportunities and damaged masculine identity in the aftermath of military defeat fuelled a paranoia which wrongly inflated the scale of change in the minds of many.[10]

Bourke's psychological angle is key to many of the changes in gender relations, although the androcentrism of the existing scholarship fails to acknowledge a wider societal shift in attitudes. A focus on male resentment and fear over a perceived loss of power fails to acknowledge the concurrent and equally influential positive shift in female workers' self-worth. If instead *women's experiences* are placed at the centre of the analysis, as this article will demonstrate, it becomes clear that women's belief of their own right to earn a regular wage and capacity to keep the national economy running smoothly was a highly significant stage in progress towards socio-economic gender parity. Whether in the home, at the factory, or on the farm, ordinary women's capabilities as workers were re-evaluated as young women were made aware of their own earning potential within the wage-form labour market. Women unused to receiving an independent income had now seen proof of the value of their labour: some wartime sectors even enabled them to earn significantly more than working men. Once this shift in female perceptions had occurred on a mass scale, it became extremely difficult to force many young women back into the unpaid or underpaid domestic work to which they had been confined before the war.

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[7] Ute Daniel *The War from Within: German Working-Class Women in the First World War* (Oxford: Berg: 1997), p. 283.

[8] Renate Bridenthal & Claudia Kloonz *Becoming visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

[9] Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: Berg 1989).

[10] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Women in Industry

The nineteenth-century industrialisation of Europe brought rapid social change as the urban economy grew and wage-form factory labour began to account for an ever increasing proportion of the population's income. The impact on gender experience was twofold. Initial urbanisation prompted a lifestyle shift in which the urban family came to rely solely upon the wage-earnings of the father, rather than subsisting through the collective work of the rural family unit, and expectations of women's confinement to the private sphere became firmly established.[11] By the late nineteenth century, however, this picture of family life was challenged once again as urban women began to take up gender-specific employment in industry and commerce, prompting concerned authorities across the industrialised West to bemoan the 'Women's Question'. Already at the turn of the century in Germany, journalists such as Lily Braun were decrying the 'degeneration of women' due to their 'compulsion to work'.[12] These opportunities for paid work in the public sphere prior to 1914 remained heavily gendered, however, as women were limited to feminine-coded sectors, accounting for the major labour force in laundries, the textile trade, service roles in public houses and some basic administrative tasks in the growing white-collar job market.[13]

Contrary to the assertion of historians such as Karin Hausen that the combination of family responsibilities and employment was an unprecedented burden to women during wartime, working wives were far from new in 1914.[14] Particularly in working class and rural areas, the phenomenon of women at work was a daily reality. In 1907, 34.9 percent of the German Empire's female population was categorised as 'working' (8 243 498 women), and one third of all female blue collar workers were married, undermining the idea that working wives were a new and unnatural development of the wartime economy.[15] Though bourgeois wives and daughters had always been supported by landowning or professional male relatives, working class women had been engaged in agricultural labour and domestic service

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[11] R.W. Connell, 'The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History', in *Theory and Society*, 22:5 (October 1993), 597-623 (p. 611).

[12] Lily Braun, *Die Frauenfrage: ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung und ihre wirtschaftliche Seite* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1901), p. 555.

[13] Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, Berufs- und Betriebszählung vom 12. Juni 1907* (Berlin: Verlag von Puttkammer & Mühlbrecht, 1909).

[14] Karin Hausen, ‚Die Sorge der Nation für ihre "Kriegsopfer". Ein Bereich der Geschlechterpolitik während der Weimarer Republik' in *Von der Arbeiterbewegung zum Modernen Sozialstaat*, ed. by Jürgen Kocka, Han-Jürgen Puhle and Klaus Tenfelde (Munich K.G. Sauer, 1994), pp. 719-739 (p. 723).

[15] Eda Sagarra, *Social History of Germany 1848-1914* (London: Methuen & co ltd, 1977), p. 420.

work long before the outbreak of war. Indeed, the economic difficulties of the pre-war years were already forcing many young women to delay marriage in order to continue contributing to family income.[16] The significant change brought by the war was therefore to the *type* of work in which these women were engaged and, as a result, the type of income they could expect to receive.

War exacerbated the financial difficulties of the working class and tripled the cost of living, making the comparatively well-paid positions in war industry extremely appealing to many women.[17] The loss of male family members' incomes also forced women into the labour market who had previously been confined to the private sphere: in December 1916, seventy percent of married women working in the Bavarian armaments industry were soldiers' wives.[18] This trend was exacerbated by the fact that a soldier's pay was often far lower than his civilian income had been. In the last months of the war the *Feldwebel* (company sergeant major) received a daily income of 5 Reichsmarks (RM), while the lowest ranking private, a *Gemeiner*, could expect to earn just seventy Pfennigs a day in the field.[19] At this time, women working in heavy industry could earn around 6 RM a day (Table 3), allowing them to become primary bread-winners for the first time.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, two thirds of female employment had been in agriculture and domestic service, sectors in which women typically received very low pay – justified by the provision of bed and board at the expense of the employer.[20] By 1914, however, the continuing developments in German industry, the growth of cities and the general increase in wage-form labour (Table 2) had already prompted a shift in the distribution of female labour towards urban industry and commercial service positions. The impact of war, therefore, was not so much a quantitative change to female employment, as an accelerated relocation of that workforce to urban wartime industry. Even for those women already employed in the factories of the tobacco and textile industries, demand for munitions and higher pay encouraged them to relocate to factories producing metals for armaments, processing dangerous chemicals, constructing aircraft, or working in mines.[21] As Richard Bessel has shown, the war's greatest

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[16] Ibid

[17] Frevert, p. 154 .

[18] Richard Bessel, *Germany After the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 20.

[19] *The German Army Handbook, April 1918* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1977).

[20] Helen Boak, Women in the Weimar Republic, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Frevert, p.177; Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, *Gendering European History* (New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), p. 44.

[21] Guttmann, p. 18.

short-term impact on the labour market was the change in the key sectors of industry (Table 1).

Change in the Size of German Industrial Sectors, 1918 (1913 = 100)	
Textiles	17
Iron and steel	53
Alcohol, tobacco	63
Mining	83
Non-ferrous metals	234

Table 1: *Sector size changes during the war*[23].

National Income, before and after the First World War [22] (in million Reichsmarks)		
	1913	1925
Capital Assets	7.6	1.4
Agriculture	7.8	3.2
Trade & Business	14.6	11.7
Wage Labour	28.9	34.9

Table 2: *Most common sources of income in Germany*[24].

Over the course of the war, the metal industry association of Berlin reported an exponential increase in the number of female workers, from an even split of 60 000 men and 60 000 women in April 1916, to 102 000 men and 123 000 women just eighteen months later.[25] This incredibly rapid increase in women in heavy industry is the basis for the visibility arguments proposed by scholars such as Bridenthal and Frevert – the latter citing the six-fold increase in female employment in steelworks, engineering, and chemical production as a catalyst for conflict over gender order in the labour market.[26]

While Bridenthal focuses upon the spectacle of women at work in the factories, there is a further crucial dimension to this reallocation of labour which is often overlooked: wage earning. These sectors, which experienced the greatest increase in female labour force, were

[22] Figures for the German national area after 1918 (i.e. excluding Alsace-Lorraine and Polish regions).

[23] Bessel, *Germany After the First World War,* p. 92.

[24] Adolf Günther, ‚Die Folgen des Krieges für Einkommen und Lebenshaltung der mittleren Volksschichten Deutschland', *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des Weltkrieges: Die Einwirkung des Krieges auf Bevölkerungsbewegung, Einkommen und Lebenshaltung in Deutschland*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1932), p. 193.

[25] Waldemar Zimmermann, ‚Die Veränderung der Einkommens- und Lebensverhältnisse der deutschen Arbeiter durch den Krieg', in *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des Weltkrieges: Die Einwirkung des Krieges auf Bevölkerungsbewegung, Einkommen und Lebenshaltung in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1932), p. 373.

[26] Frevert, p. 156.

the very same industries which offered the greatest increase in daily salaries. Although in the later years of the war, inflation caused pay across all sectors to rise significantly, the rate of increase was far from uniform. While salaries for employees of the textile and food industries increased by as little as fifty percent from the beginning to the end of the conflict period, demand for metal working, chemicals and electrical work saw a threefold rise in pay for both genders. The greatest change can be seen in the pay rates for female employees in metal working. In early 1914, the average salary for women across all industrial sectors was 2.25 RM, with three quarters of a million women earning within ten Pfennigs of this daily sum.[27] By September 1918, women's salaries in the metal industry had increased by 320 percent to 6.65 RM a day, while male salaries in this key wartime industry increased by only 230 percent in the same period (Table 3).

The significant improvement in some women's wages has been overlooked perhaps because the gender pay gap within each sector remained stable throughout the period, with women consistently earning around half the salary of their male co-workers. At a superficial level this fairly constant ratio indicates a continuation in the gendered hierarchy of the workplace. A comparison between sectors, however, reveals that as women's wages in certain industries increased, they began to exceed that of male workers in other sectors. The average

		1914		1915		1916		1917		1918	
		Mar.	Sept.	Mar.	Sept.	Mar.	Sept.	Mar.	Sept.	Mar.	Sept.
Metals	m	5.54	5.67	6.29	6.93	7.47	8.02	9.88	11.81	12.01	12.94
	f	2.05	1.66	2.22	3.02	3.46	4.11	4.68	5.67	5.88	6.65
Electricals	m	4.52	4.02	4.99	5.31	5.76	7.44	9.25	10.93	12.06	13.46
	f	2.75	2.09	3.01	3.40	3.91	4.80	5.24	6.18	6.58	7.35
Textiles	m	3.64	3.19	3.67	4.05	4.00	4.17	4.45	5.18	5.79	6.47
	f	2.30	2.05	2.22	2.32	2.41	2.33	2.57	3.31	3.92	4.29

daily wages recorded in Table 3 show that for the first time in the Winter of 1916-17, the salary of an average female metal or electrical worker (4.68 and 5.24 RM respectively) exceeded the daily income of a male textile worker (4.45 RM). Although the gender pay gap was maintained within each individual sector, the disparity between sectors created a labour market in which it was possible for women in industry to earn more than male factory workers elsewhere. Such possibilities cannot have gone unnoticed by women employed in these sectors and would have contributed significantly to changing perceptions of the value of female labour.

[27] Zimmermann, 1932, p. 310.

Table 3: *Average daily wage per sector in Reichsmarks, disaggregated by gender*[28]*. Women's averages shown in red, men's averages shown in black.*

Although, as a whole, women's economic situations did not improve drastically in the 1920s, there was a widespread belief that they had benefitted most from the wartime upheaval – an attitude that can only have been bolstered by unprecedented instances of women earning the same or even more than men of their own social class. Disparities within individual factories aside, the idea that a working wife could theoretically earn more than a working husband was shocking and is likely to have contributed to paranoia over the collapse of traditional gender roles in the wake of the war.

Agriculture

The census records of 1907 and 1925 reveal a decline in the economic dominance of the agricultural sector, and significantly, a reduction in women's participation. The percentage of the German population employed in farming had been falling rapidly since the end of the nineteenth century (Table 4) and there was a marked decrease in the contribution of agriculture to the economy during and immediately after the war. The agricultural sector is particularly significant in the story of women's transition to paid employment because farming historically accounted for a large proportion of female labour in Germany, although the labour contribution of farmers' wives and daughters to the rural economy remained unremunerated.

	Total Number of People	Percentage of the Total Population
1882	15 938 761	40.0
1895	15 442 059	33.6
1907	14 918 098	27.1
1925	14 373 256	23.0

Table 4: *Population dependent upon agriculture.*

[28] Zimmermann, p. 367-368.

Women and children were crucial in the gendered division of farm labour: men took care of the heaviest field labour and enjoyed the most prestigious tasks, such as care of the horses, whilst women and girls typically reared the pigs and poultry, operated the dairy, and cultivated the kitchen garden, in addition to taking sole responsibility for all the housework.[29] On smaller land holdings women also laboured in the fields, especially to bring in the harvest (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Family harvesting rye in Voßwinkel, near Dortmund, 1930. Courtesy of the LWL-Medienzentrum für Westfalen, Münster.

As part of the collective working family, these women received no salary, though it would be incorrect to assume that their contribution to the rural economy was not recognised. Contemporary records in the *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* do in fact include the labour of these unpaid family members within data for the agricultural labour force under the label of 'helpers' ('*Mithelfende Familienmitglieder'*). Prior to the war, in 1907, almost three quarters of this unpaid workforce on small farms was female (Table 5).

These women and girls were therefore included in the statistical record of working women before the war, yet they were not employed and did not earn wages. The significant development during this period was therefore not that these women in engaged in work for the first time, but that the type of work altered in both spatial and financial terms. As many rural women 'helpers' migrated to become urban employees, they not only became more visible in urban industry but also became waged labourers earning independent incomes for the first time in their lives. This defining development was an irreversible transition. Once women had left their roles as unpaid agricultural labourers and begun to be financially remunerated for their work, it was highly unlikely that they would be willing to return to the farms.

[29] Sabine Heise, ‚Frauen-Arbeiten - Zwischen Beruf und Berufung' in *Internet-Portal Westfälische Geschichte*. <https://www.lwl.org/westfaelische-geschichte/portal/Internet/input_felder/langDatensatz_ebene4.php?urlID=405&url_tabelle=tab_websegmente>.

While the exodus from the countryside to urban areas was a long-term trend throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the need for factory workers during the First World War placed an overt monetary value on women's labour. When, in the 1920s, the lack of farmhands caused the government to call on reluctant girls to return to agricultural labour, the idea that they would have accepted unpaid roles was unthinkable. Indeed, Elizabeth Jones argues that young German farm women during this period were increasingly willing to stand up to unfair and oppressive employment practices and even challenge their employers directly, demonstrating the increased confidence and self-worth that the wartime experience had inspired in them.[30] A fundamental shift had therefore occurred in women's expectations as a labour force, and this change would be borne out into the following decades when farm girls could expect to earn up to two thirds of a farm boys' wage, at a time when women's wages in other sectors were almost always half the male salary.[31]

Farm size (hectares)	**Year**	**Number of farms**	**Proportion of 'mithelfende Familienmitglieder' who were female (%)**
2-5	1907	886 500	74.4
	1925	894 400	71.8
5-20	1907	930 800	67
	1925	956 200	65.8
20-50	1907	197 700	62.5
	1925	174 200	61.8
50-100	1907	30 800	62.5
	1925	25 700	62.1

Table 5: *Family 'helpers' on farms in Germany (excluding Alsace-Lorraine) in 1907 and 1925*[32]*.*

[30] Elizabeth B. Jones, *Gender and Rural Modernity: Farm Women and the Politics of Labour in Germany 1871-1933* (Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, 2009).

[31] Heise, n.d.

[32] Günther, 1932, p. 263.

Small Business

The unusual circumstances of wartime society also created an opportunity to gain new skills which were formerly inaccessible to most women. These educational opportunities allowed women to enhance their qualifications and experience, broadening the range of paid employment opportunities which they could engage in after the war. With husbands and fathers fighting on the frontline, women took over the running of family businesses. In 1917 for example, wives and daughters of soldiers from Solingen, North Rhine-Westphalia, were invited to attend a weekly book-keeping course which promised two hours of instruction in accounting for businesses and craftspeople. Significantly, this course was open to all women who required it and was offered free of charge (Figure 2).[33]


Ohligs. Kurse für Kriegerfrauen. In der Fortbildungsschule beginnt am kommenden Dienstag ein Buchführungskursus für Kriegerfrauen, die das Geschäft ihres im Felde stehenden Mannes weiterführen. An dem Kursus können auch Handwerkerfrauen sowie Töchter von Handwerkern teilnehmen, die im Geschäfte ihres Mannes oder Vaters die Geschäftsbücher führen oder zu führen beabsichtigen. Weibliche Personen, die an dem Kursus teilzunehmen beabsichtigen, wollen sich am Dienstagnachmittag um 3 Uhr in dem Schulhause Fürk einfinden. Der Unterricht dauert jedesmal bis 5 Uhr. Die Teilnahme ist kostenlos.

Figure 2: *Advertisement in the Bergische Arbeiterstimme, 27th October 1917. Courtesy of Stadtarchiv Solingen.*

Financial education of a very basic nature had been available to a limited number of young women since the late nineteenth century, though many higher education facilities were fee-paying institutions, accessible only to the daughters of the upper middle classes.[34] The early women's movement made efforts to offer similar education to girls from poorer

[33] The advertisement reads: "**Ohligs. Course for War Wives.** A bookkeeping course at the adult education school will begin this coming Tuesday for war wives maintaining the businesses of their husbands serving out in the field. Craftsmen's wives and daughters can also take part in this course if they do the bookkeeping for their husband's or father's business, or intend to in the future. Female persons who intend to take part in this course should report to Fürk Schoolhouse at 3 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon. Each class lasts until 5 o'clock. Participation is free of charge."
Newspaper clipping from the *Bergische Arbeiterstimme*, 27th October 1917, Stadtarchiv Solingen, '1914-1918: Ein rheinisches Tagebuch: Quellen aus Archiven des Rheinlands' (Published online 27/10/2017) [Author's own translation].

[34] Margrit Twellmann, *Die deutsche Frauenbewegung: Ihre Anfänge und erste Entwicklung. Quellen 1843-1889* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hein, 1972), p. 124.

backgrounds, although the movement consistently prioritised housework as the primary female sphere of activity (‘*grundlegende weibliche Wirkungskreis’)*, ensuring that girls’ education combined practical home skills with the basic bookkeeping knowledge needed to run a home efficiently.[35] The provision of these emergency courses for all during the wartime era was therefore not without precedent, but the fact that these were offered without charge enabled a far wider proportion of the female population to gain business and accounting skills. Although undoubtedly intended as a short-term solution for the maintenance of the wartime economy in the absence of male business owners, these competencies represented the very skillset that gave women the confidence and ability to access the higher-paid, white-collar office work which would be taken up on mass scale by a new class of young female professional in the 1920s.

Gender Equality: A Herculean Task?

The stylised propaganda of mass-produced postcards (such as Figure 3) epitomises the binary gender fiction that German elites were desperate to maintain during the war years. Such romanticised depictions belie a revolution in working women’s own attitudes towards gender and employment. German wives had stepped up and become primary breadwinners for their families, often earning more than the meagre contribution of a soldier’s wage and taking on multiple responsibilities as heads of households and family businesses in addition to the omnipresent burden of unpaid domestic carework.

Figure 3: *Postcard of 1917. "German Women. German Loyalty".*

After experiencing the wartime labour market first-hand, women had proof of their own capacity to perform skilled labour for higher wages. The resulting aspiration to better working conditions and higher pay is evident in the resistance encountered by the demobilisation

[35] Vera Klinger, ‘Frauenberuf und Frauenrolle. Zur Entstehung geschlechtsspezifischer Ausbildungs- und Arbeitsmarktstrukturen vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg’, *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 35:4 (July 1989), 515-534 (p. 519).

authorities in 1919, when they attempted to push female factory workers back into lower paid roles elsewhere. Writing in the following year, Kurt Königsberger reported that it was turning out to be 'a labour of Hercules' to force women back into domestic service roles following the end of the war.[36] Records from 1917 report an increased sense of self-worth to be found among many women, implying that many young Germans would have shared the sentiments of British factory girls of the same period who expressed positive memories of their employment, including feelings of new-found usefulness, independence, interest in their work, development of new skills, making friends and, significantly, earning their own wages.[37][38]

Such considerations of wartime influence on female attitudes to work remain rare in the scholarship. Historians of this period have tended to focus on male perspectives of gender order, often because these are the most widely reported: conservative commentators with bourgeois notions of feminine domesticity were horrified by the sight of female workers encroaching on male spheres, leading them to erroneously conclude that there had been an overall increase in total female work. When historians such as Frevert speak of the newly realised *possibility* of women at work, this is understood as a male perception of threat rather than a female perception of opportunity.[39] Given that the ability of women to hold down a job in industry, commerce, or office work, whilst also fulfilling domestic duties had been noted so anxiously by men, it is reasonable to suggest that this newfound wage-earning potential was evident not only to the working women themselves but also to their daughters. The necessity of war work highlighted the possibility and ability of a female workforce to earn an independent income and support a family in the absence of a traditional male breadwinner. This undoubtedly shaped the aspirations of young women eagerly entering the world of work in the 1920s.

Although the overall proportion of women engaged in work beyond domestic carework did not actually change as a result of the war, the number engaged in labour for an independent wage increased significantly. Gender order is a social hierarchy firmly based on power relations and, in an industrialised capitalist society, that power is wielded by those in financial control. The increasing number of women earning a personal income and instances of some women earning more than men of the same social class represented a clear threat to

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[36] Kurt Königsberger, 'Die wirtschaftliche Demobilmachung in Bayern während der Zeit vom November 1918 bis Mai 1919', *Zeitschrift des Bayerischen Statistischen Landesamtes*, 52 (Munich: IRO-Verlag 1920). pp. 193-226.

[37] Kundrus, p. 163.

[38] Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1981), p. 207.

[39] Frevert 1989.

traditional hierarchies of gendered power based on patriarchal ability to financially support (and thus control) the family. This troubling of socio-economic gender norms combined with further crises of masculinity in the wake of Germany's defeat, the return of physically crippled and psychologically scarred veterans, and the economic strife of the late 1920s. As resentment of working women grew, so did nostalgia for an idealised depiction of Wilhelmine Germany's gender order of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche.*[40] This in turn generated growing support for the fascist extremism of the National Socialists, who promised to return women to the home in a reinstatement of folkloric German traditionalism.[41]

Even today, over a century after the end of the First World War, Germany has failed to close its gender pay gap. Although the number of wage-earning women in modern Germany has increased significantly over the course of the last century, Eurostat reports that in 2019 German wage inequality was the fourth worst in the European Union, with women earning on average a fifth less per hour than men.[42] German society has made great strides towards gender equality, yet many of the social attitudes and gender-biases of the 1910s remain entrenched in contemporary society through workplace discrimination, the heteronormative allocation of all carework to women and continuing prejudice against working mothers.

[40] The three Ks slogan of a woman's place in the German Reich; literally translated as 'Children, Kitchen, Church'.

[41] Nancy Reagin, *Sweeping the Nation: Domesticity & National Identity in Germany 1870-1945.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[42] Eurostat, 'Gender Pay Gap: How much less do women earn than men?', 8th March 2021, Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostatnews/-/EDN-20210308-2> [accessed 16/05/21].

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Images

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