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“ROAST SEAGULL AND OTHER QUAIN T BIRD DISHES”

The development of features and “lifestyle” journalism in British newspapers during the First World War

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The accepted narrative of British press conduct during the First World War is highly negative. Commentators overwhelmingly agree that newspapers downplayed the horror of life in the trenches and afterwards were found to have published fabricated atrocity stories to encourage hatred of “the Hun” on a grand scale. Scholarly assessment of news coverage of women’s involvement in war work is also predominantly negative, highlighting patronising and unrealistic portrayals of munitions workers and others. These narratives, however compelling, ignore sections of newspapers and other current affairs journals devoted to helping readers trying to feed families on restricted budgets with scant food, who were grieving for or caring for sons and husbands and who were adjusting to bewildering disruptions to family life. The dominant historical narratives ignore the development of a previously unexamined form of “lifestyle” journalism and a genre of vivid features journalism focussing on lives on the “Home Front” and which helped undermine traditional boundaries between the domestic and public realms. This article asks whether “soft” genres of journalism actually better reflected the realities of Wartime readers’ lives, and better satisfied their need for information than propaganda-driven news pages. Assessing readers’ responses to these different genres of journalism helps explain why readers can simultaneously mistrust and also enjoy their news media.

Key Words British press; First World War; Home Front; lifestyle journalism; newspapers

Introduction

There is a high degree of agreement between scholars over the conduct of the British press during the First World War. With few exceptions analysis concludes that war correspondents downplayed terrible losses and dreadful conditions in the trenches and that newspapers accepted and published unquestioningly Government propaganda, such as stories of German atrocities to encourage hatred of “the Hun”. From the more opinionated commentators, such as Phillip Knightley and Martin Farrar we have for example: “they [the war correspondents] protected the high command from criticism, wrote jauntily about life in the trenches, kept an inspired silence about the slaughter and allowed themselves to be absorbed by the propaganda machine” (Knightley 2005, 85). From the more nuanced scholar Paul Fussell, we have a no less critical assessment of newspaper coverage, for example, of the Battle of the Somme: “It is no surprise to find Northcliffe’s *Times* on July 3 1916, reporting the first day’s attack on the Somme with an airy confidence which could not help but deepen the division between those on the spot and those at home” (Fussell 1975, 88). Colin Lovelace argues that the low number of prosecutions under the Defence of the Realm Act suggests the threat of imprisonment or fines was not a sanction for editors and they therefore engaged in enthusiastic self-censorship (Lovelace 1978, 313).

War correspondents, soon after the cessation of hostilities, admitted to having been over-zealous in their desire both to downplay defeats, and to encourage negative perceptions of the enemy. War correspondent Philip Gibbs, in his 1923 memoir admits:

A vast amount of lying was done by newspapermen...a journalist proud of his profession must blush for shame at its degradation and insanity (Gibbs 1923, 233).

It was another journalist C E Montague of the *Manchester Guardian*, who had worked as a press censor during the War, whose finely argued critique of wartime press and propaganda, *Disenchantment*, set the tone for two decades of press criticism between the wars:

So it comes that each of several million ex-soldiers now reads every solemn appeal of a Government, each beautiful speech of a Premier or earnest assurance of a body of employers with that maxim on guard in his mind – ‘*You can’t believe a word you read.*’ (Montague 1922 (1939), 103; emphasis added)

Montague’s essay was accompanied by an intense period of criticism of the popular press in so-called highbrow journals such as the *Adelphi*, the *Criterion*, *Fortnightly Review* and *English Review* as inter-war intellectuals turned on what they saw as Northcliffe’s dubious legacy. For writers contributing to these journals, Northcliffe’s and other papers’ willing absorption into the propaganda effort and their conspiracy in writing an unreal account of the War resulted in the worst of all possible crimes, the loss of confidence in “the authority of the written word” (Buitenhuis 1989, 20). Distrust and disillusionment at the war coverage is echoed in contemporary diaries and letters. Soldiers, intellectuals, nurses and “ordinary” people appeared to share the view that the news pages of national newspapers were not to be trusted and that news correspondents were operating in some bizarre parallel dimension. To offer just a small selection of contemporary opinion gives a flavour of a widely held view. Author Arnold Bennett followed the progress of the War closely in his journals, regularly commenting on press over-optimism. In one entry he writes of headlines proclaiming a “Great German Retreat”: “Lying placards on evening papers” (Bennett 1932, 109). The writer Max Plowman, who later became an outspoken pacifist, wrote this to his sister while with the British Expeditionary Force in 1916:

The newspapers on the war are nauseating... it’s all *unreal* – the horror and terror and misery are all ‘written down’ or covered with *sham* heroics by cheap journalism... the journalistic blather is like a grinning mask on the face of death (Plowman 1944, 47, emphasis added)

The war diary of “ordinary” middle class housewife Ethel Bilborough is perhaps more devastating in its casual acceptance of newspaper mendacity: “The papers said 58 were killed and about 200 injured, but they keep things back and all the raid news is now suppressed.” She adds she got more reliable accounts of air raids from eye witnesses: “makes one realise things far more than reading it from some newspaper’s account, which are *rarely reliable*” (Bilborough 2014, 209 & 211, emphasis added).

Historians of the role of women during the War, particularly of their involvement in the workforce are also critical of newspaper coverage. While news articles did cover widely the novelty of women workers from their becoming grooms to bus conductors, scholars argue that news items tended to treat the phenomenon as a temporary, almost amusing oddity, and accepted that once the war was over women would return to the domestic domain (Grayzel 2002, 13 & 28). While acknowledging that for the first time, the lives of working class women were portrayed positively in mass daily newspapers, critics see portrayals of plucky “100,000 Joans of Arc” and “brave, pretty munitions girls” as little more than patronising and “unrealistic” propaganda that did little to help further the cause of equality (Pyecroft 1994, 705; Braybon 1981, 158).

Both these narratives, however compelling, ignore sections of newspapers and other current affairs journals which offered readers a wide range of helpful advice on how to cope in the extraordinary circumstances that Britain found herself in, particularly after 1916, when food

became scarce and eventually rationing was introduced. Scholars have so far tended to focus their analysis on news reporting of battles, zeppelin raids, women workers and political turmoil. But newspapers have never been monolithic entities with every contributor and every section singing the same tune. Freelancers in particular work independently from a newsroom culture and women journalists in the early years of the twentieth century were far more likely to be freelance than staff (Lonsdale, 2013; Hall, 1978). We must question for several reasons the dominant historical narratives of the wartime press. Firstly because they ignore the development of helpful “service” and an unusual form of “lifestyle” journalism and the development of vivid, long-form features portraying the lives of working women during this period; secondly because even conservative papers like the *Daily Mail* reflected and promoted in their features pages the changing status of women in a more subtle and thoughtful way than the breezy upbeat news pages.

“Lifestyle” or “Service” Journalism?

As lifestyle journalism scholars Hanusch and Hanitzsch acknowledge, despite its importance in modern culture, “defining lifestyle journalism can be a challenging task” (2013, 944). Despite recent scholarly focus on lifestyle journalism (Hanusch et al., 2013; Bell and Hollows (eds) 2005 & 2006; Brunsdon et al., 2001) there is still disagreement over definitions, subject matter, history and its role *vis a vis* “service” journalism. Hanusch and Hanitzsch suggest that “service journalism”, or “news-you-can-use” is a sub-field of the broader field of “lifestyle journalism” and that lifestyle journalism refers to “journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life” (2013, 947). Bell and Hollows offer a broader definition of “lifestyle” journalism and assert it is not “wholly tied to consumerism...lifestyle media offer the opportunity to ‘makeover’ our life and ourselves, demonstrating how we can both morally and aesthetically improve ourselves” (2006, 4). Bell and Hollows offer the example of some forms of education as a lifestyle choice not tied to traditional ideas of consumerism and contend that lifestyle media “create recognisable lifestyle practices [which] might also offer grounds for legitimisation” (2006, 5). They also contend that despite scholarly focus on lifestyle journalism as a relatively new (post-Second World War) phenomenon, there is evidence for a much longer history of “lifestyle” journalism going back to women’s magazines of the turn of the Eighteenth Century and even beyond (2006, 13). Eide and Knight’s argument for the social value of “service” journalism refers to “everyday concerns” of a late twentieth century audience grappling with “the relentless complexity, novelty and reflexivity” of modern living. However the problems associated with national survival in the First World War make the period one well worth studying in this context, revealing early examples of “service” and “lifestyle” journalism in national daily newspapers. Features found in First World War newspapers certainly address “lifestyle” topics. These can be categorised both as “service” journalism, such as articles offering advice on how to refresh the black of Victorian funereal silks with “a decoction of fig leaves” (*Manchester Guardian* January 25 1915) and as more lifestyle-oriented journalism such as how to make fashionable clothes out of remnants from department store sales (*Daily Telegraph* January 6 1917). It will be seen however that while these features are undeniably lifestyle-oriented, they do not promote consumption as we understand it today. Rather, they offer affluent middle class readers the opportunity to “makeover” their lives as thrifty, careful citizens patriotically doing without for the sake of the War effort. Similarly articles addressing the new status of women as workers help construct and legitimise their new identity as professionals earning a living and not looking their best nor smelling particularly fragrant, as the extracts below will show.

Lifestyle Journalism and the Public Sphere

Lifestyle journalism has often been dismissed both by scholars and journalists as a “soft” or “unserious” journalism, uncomfortably close to advertising, encouraging readers to see themselves as consumers and contributing to the erosion of the ideal public sphere (Franklin 2013, xii; Hanusch 2013, 6; Habermas 1989, 172). Feminist critics of Habermas however argue that his concept of the public sphere, rooted in the Greek city state ideal and eighteenth century “coffee house culture” is profoundly male and excludes equal sexual access to traditional sites of political discourse (Fraser, 1987; Elliott, 2009). The domestic sphere is as much about labour (albeit unpaid), politics and money as the public sphere, argues Fraser. During the later phase of the First World War when shortages of basic resources became severe, domestic tasks such as the procurement and preparation of food and the use of oil, wood and coal in the home became serious topics for debate in newspaper features and leader pages. It therefore follows that for women, the erosion of public sphere boundaries – which could also be seen as barriers – through the promotion in newspapers of traditionally domestic topics such as cooking as worthy of serious discussion may actually help facilitate their access to areas of public debate. Before December 1918, when women were prevented from exercising their full rights as citizens, this inclusion of “domestic” topics in newspaper leader and features pages would demonstrate that these boundaries, or barriers, were permeable to some extent. Drawing on Irene Costera Meijer’s concept of “public quality” in non-news formats of journalism, Fursich (2013) argues for a move away from a binary approach to the analysis of non-news journalism. In this way, “researchers can help challenge problematic binaries such as public/private, altruistic/hedonistic, rational/irrational or civic/personal that tend to inform discussions on the public sphere” (Costera Meijer 2001; Fursich 2013, 18).

Prevailing narratives also fail to explain why newspapers were so hugely successful in the inter-war period despite their perceived shortcomings in covering the War. Bingham (2004) has begun to analyse the “appealing” nature of the interwar Woman’s Page which was far more than a mere receptacle for fashion and gossip. Bingham suggests the pleasure and interest Woman’s Page articles gave readers as one reason why papers enjoyed such high interwar circulations. While we do not have the Mass Observation surveys of newspaper reading for the First World War period, it is possible, through reading wartime letters, diaries and fiction to assess, to some extent at least, the reception of non-news journalism and compare the contrasting impact of the two genres news and features. Vera Brittain, in her famous memoir *Testament of Youth* for example expresses typical exasperation at news coverage of the battles in France:

As usual the press had given no hint of that tragedy’s dimensions, and it was only through the long casualty lists, and the persistent demoralising rumours that owing to a miscalculation in time thousands of our men had been shot down by our own guns that the world was gradually coming to realise something of what the engagement had been (Brittain (1933) 1997, 136)

However in a letter to her brother Edward about the death of her fiancé she describes how articles in newspapers about coping with loss helped prepare her for coming face to face with his personal effects (Bishop and Bostridge 2012, 211). She also reveals in her memoirs that she regularly read the *Times* “Agony Aunt”. An article in that newspaper about Oxford triggers in her the memory of a “cool, sweet ride through Marston just after Dawn” the year before, so much so that she is inspired to write the poem “May Morning” because of it (Brittain (1933) 1997, 195 & 268). Brittain is here displaying a contradictory, or “love-hate”

attitude towards her wartime newspaper: mistrust and frustration at news coverage on the one hand, and gratitude for advice, as well as pure pleasure in reading on the other. This attitude, revealed in other contemporary documents helps explain why readers maintain long-lasting and loyal relationships with their newspapers, even when they also distrust their coverage of news.

Based on this literature review, this essay asks how non-news genres of journalism in First World War newspapers reflect and legitimise debate about the harsh realities of wartime life ignored or glossed over in the news pages. In answering this question, it will be argued that changes in newspaper content, particularly in the non-news pages reveal dynamic activity at the boundaries of the domestic and public realms which may have helped women challenging for a stake in public discourse. The accepted “back in your box” narrative – that during the War women were allowed limited participation in public life, only for their roles to be re-inscribed firmly within the domestic sphere after the War does not offer the whole picture. A better description would acknowledge that activities traditionally ascribed to the domestic realm, such as gardening and food procurement and preparation achieved major significance during the War. Articles on these and other topics such as the changing status of women thus helped readers negotiate an intense period of social change and resource scarcity. Articles of this type remained in prominent positions after the War because readers of both genders, judging by contemporary diaries, fiction and enthusiastic letters, enjoyed learning about, and debating these issues. In addressing these questions, this article seeks to contribute to contemporary debates on lifestyle media and supports the concept that at certain times “lifestyle” journalism can help create and legitimise lifestyle practices which are not based on affluence and consumption, but rather, their opposite. The feature article from which this essay takes its title, “Roast Seagull and other Quaint Bird Dishes” which appeared in the *Daily Mail* in February 1917 as shortages began to bite is an example. The author Frank Finn writes:

People look very much askance at fish-eating waterfowl, which were, nevertheless much esteemed by our ancestors, who would pay as much for a seagull as a pheasant...coots and moorhens, however, are abundant, and I have eaten both; the latter many times; they are quite worth cooking and I wonder they are not more used; but it is just as well to skin them as the skin is rather rank and greasy (*Daily Mail*, February 16, 1917)

The article proceeds to offer readers advice on preparation and cooking to avoid the “rank, fishy” taste these birds can have. A similarly-themed article in the *Manchester Guardian*, “River Fish for the Table” attempts to encourage readers who may have suffered from an “ill-cooked pike” in the past, to look again at river fish. The un-named author earnestly claims “the bream from clear waters are far from insipid” (*Manchester Guardian*, July 5, 1915) and again offers tips for preparation and cooking. Analysis here also offers an alternative history of the development of food journalism, the accepted history of which locates writing about food and cooking within the pages of women’s magazines until the late twentieth century (Jones and Taylor 2013, 99). Astute wartime newspaper editors and proprietors however clearly grasped the pleasures associated with reading about food at a time of rationing and scarcity. The broadening of newspaper content during this time, and the relocation of domestic, or “lifestyle” features from the Woman’s Page and into fledgling general features section on the leader page may also help explain the post-war boom in newspaper sales which led in 1936 to British readers being the largest consumers of newsprint in the world despite the failures of news reporting during the War (PEP 1938, 5 & 35).

Methodology

While scholars have analysed the content of historical women's magazines (such as White 1970), the features pages of historical newspapers have until recently been overlooked in favour of their news coverage. For the purposes of this essay I have conducted a qualitative content analysis of features articles published in the *Daily Mail*, the most popular daily halfpenny newspaper during the War, and which was read by a wide range of classes. These are non-news articles which appeared either in the "Woman's Page" or on the leader page. I have conducted a page-by-page search of complete newspapers rather than a keyword search, so as to avoid missing any articles in such a varied amount of content. I have analysed these pages for a two-month period every year for six years from 1914 – 1919. I selected the months of January and February as this provided the war-free months of January and February 1914 as well as January and February 1919. They are also the harshest months in terms of food scarcity and climate. To these will be added a random selection of articles and letters from other Wartime newspapers found either with a keyword search of "recipe" (*Times*, *Manchester Guardian*) or with a page-by-page search (*Daily Telegraph*). These articles, as well as providing texture and interest, provide contrast in being "quality" newspapers. For further historical context, and for clues to the reception of these articles, the diaries, letters and fiction from a wide range of writers and "ordinary" people have been examined.

"Literary" Non-fiction on the Home Front

We find during this period lengthy, considered features on life on the Home Front for working class women, the realities of getting up before dawn to hurry through "city streets in shadows as grey ghosts seem to stalk along the pavements, when a hundred dutiful clocks are clanging out the hour of three" – this article in the *Daily Mail* leader page on the life of a woman bus conductor (*Daily Mail*, January 11, 1917). Previous scholarly analysis of newspapers' portrayal of working women in the War either highlights the patronising depiction of "the dainty little khaki-class miss, curls peeping from beneath her spongebag hat" (Braybon 1981, 160) or the disapproval of "foul-mouthed" young women earning more than was good for them (Grayzel 2002, 129). Wartime features pages also contain well-crafted female-authored pieces which prefigure the more celebrated outputs of journalists like Martha Gellhorn and Nell McCafferty in later conflicts, who sought to foreground the lives of civilians affected by war, rather than focus on battles and troop movements. This article, which appeared in the *Daily Mail* on January 1 1917 is one of many examples:

It was at the end of the night shift in a munitions factory. Through the open door of the workshop I could see the meagre grey light of a winter's morning, and the rain falling like threads of steel – the cold raw wind driving in cut like a knife across the vitiated air, tainted with the smell of stale food, sweat and fumes from the braziers we had breathed all night...the smell of fruit, the smell of cough lozenges, the musty smell of damp clothes steaming in the warmth of the gas overhead, cheap scent and cigarette smoke...an icy draught playing around our swollen feet...

Granted, it is not quite Virginia Woolf, but this is vivid non-fiction writing appearing in a halfpenny daily newspaper, read by millions who, just a few years earlier would not have read a daily paper at all. The article, written by an unnamed female factory supervisor, displays literary qualities. The repetition of "the smell of...the smell of...the musty smell of" contributes to dramatic effect and the simile "rain falling like threads of steel" conjures a

delightful image. In addition, describing the women workers, virtually absent from portrayals in the press, despite their working in large numbers before the War (Braybon 1981, 26 – 32), in such sensory terms with their stale sweat, cheap scent and breath heavy with cough lozenge vapour is ground-breaking. Here we have on the leader page of a daily newspaper, working woman emerging from the shadows and stepping into the public realm complete with body odour and feet ruined from work, revealing this type of attractively-written feature as an important text where audiences can learn about aspects of life very different from their own. It is this attempt to convey the reality of civilian life in the stress of war that journalist Martha Gellhorn took up in the Spanish Civil War twenty years later, and which then became a respected genre of war journalism throughout the twentieth century:

But how could I write about war, what did I know and for whom would I write? What made a story, to begin with? Didn't something gigantic and conclusive have to happen before one could write an article? My journalist friend suggested I write about Madrid. Why would that interest anyone, I asked. It was daily life. He pointed out that it was not everybody's daily life (Gellhorn (1959) 1998, 16)

Gellhorn goes on to suggest that “what was new and prophetic about the war in Spain was the life of the civilians, who stayed at home and had war brought to them”. However during the First World War, long-form journalism about civilian life was a regular feature of daily newspapers. This leader page feature by Monica Cosens, “Light's Out!” about a Zeppelin raid in a munitions factory, captures the suffocating fear of waiting for the bombs to drop:

On the quiet air of a dark, moonless night comes the shriek of the hooter. Some of the hammers cease to clank. Some of the workers have heard that ominous sound. They stop to listen...Somebody in a corner faints. But there is no panic. She is attended to by the trained nurse who is always in attendance. Perhaps some others are feeling faint, for the room is hot and there are 300 people in it. A canteen worker brings round some newspaper screwed up in the shape of fans and hands them to the girls. One or two begin to cry (*Daily Mail* February 9, 1916)

The “shriek” of the hooter represents the fear and suppressed panic the women feel, with danger coming, unannounced on a “dark, moonless night”. The order of the munitions factory routine: the visit of the nurse, the delivery of makeshift fans contrasts with the chaos and disorder the Zeppelin is threatening. Yet the women are not immune automatons: one faints, others cry; the heat is suffocating and “overhead these girls knew neither how near nor how far a fleet of Zeppelins was, making its way to deal with them”. Of course we don't know whether this portrayal is an accurate account of Cosens' visit but it is a very different representation of factory life from this typical news account of women engineers: “7vercalled, leather-aproned...displaying nevertheless woman's genius for making herself attractive in whatsoever working guise” (*Daily Mail* March 30 1916). In their overlooked features sections then, wartime newspapers presented women workers more realistically than in the news pages, facilitating their participation in the wider political arena and legitimising their new-found role in the workplace.

Similarly after the Armistice when articles in the news pages called for a return to “home and duty” (Beddoe, 1989), “lifestyle” features offered a more nuanced look at women's often very conflicted response. The article “Citizen Women” by Margaret Bell, on the leader page of the *Daily Mail* argues that women have been changed by the War, that they don't enjoy Bridge parties anymore and are taking classes in French and listening to parliamentary debates and that it is dangerous to force them unwillingly back behind their front doors

(*Daily Mail* January 24, 1919). In early 1919, a feature by Rosalie Neish, “You’ve-Got-My-Job Girls” portrays the pressure some women were already feeling to give up their jobs in favour of men returning to the civilian labour force:

There are many girls who gave up service not only because they found it unattractive but also because they genuinely wanted to help to win the war by carrying on in place of the men. These are the girls who will make way for the men again now...they will give up jobs and go back either to service or dressmaking or home life, or some work that a man cannot do. *The men are bringing a silent but irresistible pressure to bear on them...*

In the article Neish interviews a female window cleaner who tells her: “The men look at me. They make me feel as if I am doing them out of a job” (*Daily Mail*, January 29, 1919). Similar features contradict news page articles. After the war for example newspaper news pages were highly critical of women who had lost their munitions factory jobs taking 25 shillings a week Government benefit, dubbed a paid “holiday”, instead of going back to domestic service (Braybon 1981, 187 – 188). The *Daily Mail* was no different with its “25s Slackers” news page article on January 3 1919. However a few weeks later on the leader page, G Ivy Sanders, a regular contributor to the paper, wrote a compelling feature: “25s-A-Week Woman. Her Chance”, arguing “who shall criticise her desire for the companionship and freedom of the factory in preference to the lonely confinement of the one-servant house”. Similarly, another *Daily Mail* contributor Peggy Scott wrote a feature, “Wives Who Want Wages”, suggesting that if husbands want their wives to give up their jobs then they must pay them what they were earning at work, to make it a fair: “Women who have been managers of aircraft works and other businesses during the war have different ideas of their value from those they had before. Nothing will induce them to be voluntary workers any more” (*Daily Mail* February 10 1919). Again this view is very much contrary to the prevailing current, even in more liberal newspapers that women, particularly married women ought now return home (Braybon 1981, 190).

The “Problems of Everyday Life”

While scholars have attributed, in part at least, the country’s acceptance of the female franchise to their hard work during the war, how this change occurred on a granular, day by day level in the press, particularly the features pages, has not yet been fully examined. For a start, we find articles written by women moving out of the confines of the Woman’s Page and into the more prestigious leader pages, the above-quoted features are examples. In the two-month period under survey in 1914, not one leader page article was female-authored. As the War progresses, the number of female by-lines increases with only one reverse in 1917: 8 in 1915, 22 in 1916, 15 in 1917 and 38 in 1918. In 1919, when a pessimistic view might suspect a reversal, the number increases further, to 52 female by-lines in the leader page. These numbers must be set against a context of decreased pagination during the War years. While in 1914 the usual number of pages was either 12 or 14, this dropped to 4 or 6 in 1918. By 1919 the number had increased to 6 or 8. While in 1917 and 1918 the Woman’s Page disappeared, it reappeared in 1919, yet still during that year women writers occupied large parts of the leader page. This finding shows how women were accepted by both readers and editors in their participation in contemporary social and political debates. But also because the majority of the female-authored articles are still about food, domestic economy, women workers and a more general “battle of the sexes”, they show how the so-called “problems of everyday life”

move from the confines of the Woman's Page to the more serious leader page over the period of the War. While "pigeonholing" of women journalists into covering domestic topics would be a lasting problem which persists to this day, it has perhaps been under-estimated how important advice on how to tackle the problems that daily life raises is to readers (Lonsdale, 2013).

These "problems" ranged from the need for thrift and resourcefulness through to changing social structures during the War. Leader and Woman's Page features include articles on topics such as making and mending: "How to make a brocade wrap – making use of furniture brocade remnants" (*Daily Mail* January 4, 1916); the changing labour market and how it impacts on the domestic realm: "Servantless homes – housekeeping made easy in the USA" (*Daily Mail* January 24 1918); the expansion of female Higher Education: "To Girls: What University offers You" (*Daily Mail* January 28 1919); the demand for women to be able to go out without a male escort: "No More Chaperons" (*Daily Mail* February 14 1919); how to deal with shopkeepers who use rationing as a way of favouring some customers over others: "My Grocer Tyrant" (*Daily Mail* January 11 1918) and making fires without coal: "Fuel Economies now the Coal Prices are so High" (*Daily Mail* February 2 1915). "Lifestyle" and "service journalism" articles in other papers include advice on how to renovate "old and aging black silk" for wearing at funerals (*Manchester Guardian* January 25 1915); alternatives to coal including "vegetable garden refuse" and briquettes made from "cinders, sawdust, wood chips and cement" (*Times* September 4, 1918) and useful vegetables to grow in garden borders instead of flowers (*Telegraph* January 6 1916). These articles are neither "market-driven" nor, given the circumstances "unserious" as Hanusch characterises much "lifestyle" journalism (Hanusch 2013, 3 & 6). Rather than encouraging readers to see themselves as consumers, their "make do" attitude actually attempts to persuade readers to consume less and to become active participants in a national struggle for survival.

The Development of Food Journalism

The development of food journalism during the war years, and readers' enthusiastic responses to it, offers insights into relationships between newspapers and their publics as well as a redrawing of domestic-public boundaries. The recipes, from suggestions for feeding convalescents in the early part of the war, to increasingly bizarre and unusual ingredients as shortages began to bite, reveal much about the development of the genre in response to the changing social and economic conditions of readers. Two distinct types of food article develop: the practical one with recipes, which had been a feature of pre-War papers, albeit short, rare and confined to the Woman's Page, and a new genre of "food writing" written for its own sake and intrinsic value in providing pleasure and knowledge. The useful recipe includes one for "potato butter", adapted from Ministry of Food advice (involving adding margarine to boiled floury potatoes, then shaping the mixture into a block and keeping in a cool place (*Daily Mail* January 9 1918)). The article written for sheer interest or pleasure, with only a very vague practical element includes one on the culinary possibilities of bracken:

There is an almost unlimited supply of starch in the underground stems, or rhizomes, of bracken...the young fronds of the bracken, cooked and served like asparagus, make an excellent green vegetable course. In some parts of the country a dish of bracken is not uncommon. On a lesser scale there are other plants of the wilds and wastes which are good eating, but are rarely taken for food. There is the common weed called Good King Henry, with its large and succulent leaves, which are used by some country folk as a substitute for spinach (*Daily Mail*, February 22, 1917)

On a similar theme is an article on the nutritional benefits of gulls' eggs, written with a delayed introduction to encourage reader engagement and interest:

In parts of the country nature has been left calm and beautiful in its isolation. Seabirds nest securely on the rugged shores of our coast in lonely, secluded places and battle with the fierce gales or hover over the foam-flecked waves...the number of eggs these birds lay is very great and they are excellent eating (*Daily Mail*, January 25, 1918)

Another, "Untapped Food Supplies – Neglected Fowl and Fish" reveals quite how desperate people were, in January and February 1918 for meat: "The grey, or Norwegian crow, so common in our fields during the winter months, is, when nicely stewed, as good as partridge" (*Daily Mail*, February 1, 1918). In 1919, with the war over, food was still scarce, but writing is slightly more upbeat in tone such as "Miles of Rhubarb" (January 9, 1919), with the "fine red stalks" of fruit that have kept jam makers in business when other fruit was in too short supply.

Other papers and weekly and monthly magazines enthusiastically tailored articles to the stringencies of the time. *The Quiver's* "The possibilities of Potatoes" offers an impressive array of nine different potato recipes including curried potatoes, potato soup, potato "puff" and potato doughnuts (*The Quiver* September 1917, 957-959). "Class" newspapers, which had virtually ignored the issue of eating before the war, became more interested in food. The *Manchester Guardian*, from short three-sentence recipes before the War began to publish long, fascinating pieces of food writing such as the before-mentioned "River Fish for the Table" and another, "The Wood Pigeon". This article, published in April 1918 when access to meat was becoming a major source of concern reports how wood pigeons are very fat this year because of the bumper acorn crop the previous autumn. The article then proceeds to discuss, in a highly sensory way various methods of stuffing the birds with bacon, butter, garlic, eggs and parsley. "Half a pound of butter for six pigeons would make a big hole in the week's rations. But it is not necessary; these acorn-fed pigeons are good in or out of pie," the article concludes. *Guardian* readers took up the paper's emphasis on foraging, offering recipes for example on rowan berry, or mountain ash jelly (*Manchester Guardian* April 18 1915). The *Times* still disdained during the War, from publishing recipes, unless they were from an official source such as the Ministry of Food. However the newspaper's readers contributed a lively correspondence on all aspects of food preparation throughout the war, published in the letters page. The following letter on how to make a sweet syrup out of white beetroot to use in place of sugar, playfully references the famous cookery advice "first catch your hare":

First, grow, or, for more immediate use, get your beetroot...Cut off most of the green top, and wash without breaking the outer skin (*Times*, 27 December 1917)

When the *Times* did publish articles about food, they were firmly of the genre "food writing". This elegant piece on catching carp according to Izaak Walton's advice is typical. The description of the feast of stuffed carp in the "stone-floored, black-beamed" dining room offers readers a comfortable glimpse of Britain's past of country houses with their fish ponds and tradition at a time of uncertainty and change:

Nowadays, for economy in money, transport, coal, and fishermen's lives, it is again a duty as well as a pleasure, to catch and cook your carp. We could not rise to Izaak Walton's recipe as readily as the carp had risen to his paste. He mentions eggs as if they were silver in King Solomon's days, and wine, and butter and bewildering variety of herbs. But, stuffed and well-baked, one of the carp and the roe made a good wartime

meal for seven people; and as we ate it, the ghosts of our predecessors in the house seemed to smile on the sight of carp from their pond being once more eaten in their stone-floored, black-beamed dining room (*Times*, July 15, 1918)

Reception of Lifestyle Journalism

It is possible to gauge to some extent, the reception of these “soft” genres of journalism. Certainly food journalism appeared to be popular with readers. The *Daily Mail* published hundreds of letters about food from readers of both genders keen to engage in the national debate. These range from keeping poultry in London garden squares to how to make jam without sugar, to the art of keeping rabbits, to one titled “The Factory Pig” suggesting that every factory should have pig to eat the canteen leftovers. According to the memoirs of Mrs Charles Peel, *Daily Mail* woman’s page editor during the war, readers wrote in in their millions to the *Daily Mail* Food Bureau, established in spring 1918 in response to demand, asking for ration recipes:

Letters poured in, not only from people in England, but prisoners in the German War camps...It was evident that they received the *Daily Mail* with considerable regularity...They asked for help to cook their scanty rations in such ways as would make them palatable and nourishing...the best way of keeping up with this enormous correspondence was to write a short article suggesting ways of using war rations and saying recipes could be obtained on application...before I had done with the Food Bureau the number of letters replied to was in the millions (Peel 1933, 221–222)

Other wartime letters, diaries, contemporary fiction and memoirs reveal a complex, often contradictory relationship readers had with their papers, similar to Vera Brittain’s quoted above. Miss Ada McGuire who kept a prolonged correspondence with her sister in America during the war expostulates “that wretched *Daily Mail*” in a letter dated February 3 1915, referring to the famous lack of shells story. However she also cuts out and sends an amusing newspaper clipping describing a shopper complaining to his grocer about the lack of peas in his shop, as well as newspaper paper pattern designs for clothes. Mrs E Fernside who wrote many letters to her son, sergeant Fred Fernside, sent him several “service” journalism newspaper clippings, including advice on how to keep poultry, as well as referring fearfully to the newspaper casualty lists (Imperial War Museum Archives). Ethel Bilborough, who kept a diary throughout the war, refers to not believing newspaper reports of Zeppelin raids (quoted above) but her diary is full of clippings about home economy, the price of food as well as amusing cartoons on the subject of bread-eating and letter-writing to soldiers.

Wartime fiction of the genre often dismissed as “middlebrow” also discusses newspapers, women journalists and the domestic sphere. It is a literary legacy which has been overlooked in favour of the War Poets but it helps locate contemporary writers’ responses to changing attitudes on the Home Front. Rose Macaulay’s 1916 novel *Non-Combatants and Others* reveals the reading public’s distrust, scepticism and fear when it came to war news, but gratitude and comfort in helpful advice on how to cope:

“It’s not a bit of use being depressed by the news, because no one can ever tell if it’s true or not. It’s all from the Bureau and we all know what they are. Why, they said there weren’t any Russians in England, when everyone knew there were crowds, and they always said the Zepp raids don’t do any damage to factories and arsenals, and every one knows they do. They don’t seem to mind what they say” (Macaulay 1916 (2010), 66)

This passage is of course critical of the unthinking readers too, by making the speaker Mrs Vinney believe the common myth of the trains full of Russian soldiers passing through England to help the war effort. The blame for her inability to distinguish fact from fiction, however, is firmly placed at the door of newspapers. In contrast, Mrs Frampton, who loves her *Evening Thrill*, disregards all war news as unreliable, but finds the features section useful:

“Home Hints: Don’t throw away a favourite hat because you think its day is over. Wash it in a solution of water and gum and lay it flat on the kitchen dresser. Stuff the crown with soft paper and stand four flat-irons on the brim...Here’s a recipe for apple shortcake, Kate: I shall cut that out for Florence” (Macaulay 1916 (2010), 45)

The short story “Cupid Wields a Pen” published in *The Quiver* magazine is about how newspaper problem pages and letters pages allowed women jilted by their fiancés on their return from the Front to share in their bewilderment and loss. The theme of the short story, written by author and journalist Betty Maxwell is the psychological damage war does to wounded soldiers who cannot bear to face their former sweethearts with their disfigurements. The women use newspaper letters pages as a way of bringing out in the open a subject that was formerly taboo (Maxwell 1917, 492). Another *Quiver* short story “The Eleventh Hour” celebrates the economic freedom a female journalist has found through her writing during the War. Not only has her newspaper work enabled her to rent an apartment away from her family but it has given her the confidence to first rescue, and then collaborate with a suicidal male playwright even though he is initially suspicious of her for being a journalist (Bretherton 1917, 885-891).

The complex relationship readers had with their newspapers is still evident by the time Mass Observation began monitoring newspaper readership in January 1938. Readers again admit to being terrified of, or distrusting, news foretelling war but also express pleasure and delight in reading during quiet moments or on the train to work:

“When I got down to breakfast and opened the *Manchester Guardian* and read the headlines I felt utterly sick with apprehension. I couldn’t face my breakfast.”

“Sometimes I curtail my bus ride home and walk across the fields. Then I like nothing better than to sit in the middle of a hayfield reading [my newspaper].”

“My opinion of newspapers is not very good on the whole. They all have a bad tendency to exaggerate which often makes timid people needlessly afraid.”

“I look through a newspaper very much in the mood in which I go for a stroll or light a cigarette by the front door late on a summer evening.”

“I think newspapers are an advantage to the world, but unfortunately all that is printed is not always true.”

Conclusion

Like these reader reactions, newspapers are a mosaic of genres, viewpoints and subject matter, often contradictory. News pages were notorious during the War and afterwards for painting an unreal picture of the progress of the War, denying readers the information they wanted. While criticisms of “lifestyle” journalism may well be valid for some newspaper sections during some periods, it is dangerous to generalise. Wartime newspapers also offered a vast array of helpful advice, from recipes for convalescents to items on how to make fuel for the kitchen range. Findings in this essay call into question “traditional models that

position a rational public sphere (where democracy is enacted) *vis a vis* an irrational private sphere (without civic impact) (Fursich 2013, 14). Crucially, many of these articles were decoupled from companion advertising that had hitherto been the editorial driver behind newspaper women's pages, devoted almost exclusively to fashion (Bingham 2004, 18 & 30). These articles do not solely focus on the reader as passive consumer but as social actor whose minute decisions on how to tackle the problems that everyday life raises have political consequences (Eide and Knight 1999). The complete exclusion, prior to the War, of food and gardening articles from the *Daily Mail* leader page, to their being a regular item in 1917, 1918 and 1919 reveals this re-drawing of public/domestic boundaries in action. From none in January and February 1914, there were 56 articles on food and gardening on the leader page in January and February 1919, from the short regular "In the Food Garden" item to lengthy pieces such as "Piggy's Infinite Variety" about the myriad uses for a pig carcass.

We have seen here how features and lifestyle articles during the First World War offered genuinely helpful advice to readers under enormous strain, encouraging not consumption but its reverse. We also see here the genesis of a new genre of food writing offering readers a pleasurable and educative experience. Enthusiastic reader responses in the form of letters mimicking, and building on, newspaper advice, reveals a positive relationship between papers and their audience. "Lifestyle" journalism then, during the First World War helped readers cope during a difficult time, offering and sharing advice and presenting pleasure-giving texts at a time of national turmoil. Food particularly was an issue where people needed much help. Although there has not been any systematic study of civilian weight loss during the War, contemporary diaries reveal how difficult times were even for the middle classes. Lillie Scales who kept a diary writes for example on May 12 1918: "Most people are much thinner. I have lost two stone since the War began" (Scales 2014, 147). Ethel Bilborough comments in January 1918: "no meat, and precious little fish...and no cheese, nor bacon, nor butter, nor margarine, nor marmalade nor jam, nor sugar...lean people will turn into skeletons and fat people will get quite good figures" (Bilborough 2014, 207-8). Features pages offered more realistic portrayals of women compared to those in the news pages and legitimised middle class women's desire to work. The numbers of female-authored articles in the leader pages rose substantially, offering women both a voice in contemporary debate and for some women journalists, useful income. Their articles revealed important truths about life on the Home Front in the way reporting of battles, subject to censorship, could not do.

After the war, while in particular heavy industry reverted to only employing men, lighter trades such as pottery, printing, bookbinding, electrical goods manufacture and clerking all maintained women employees, albeit at reduced rates. Single middle class women enjoyed a wider range of career choices and increasing sexual and economic independence (Braybon 216 – 217). The number of *Daily Mail* reader letters depicting women as silly or as objects of physical admiration certainly reduced dramatically during the period of the war. Similarly, trivial articles on gardening for flowers and frivolous cookery articles for example on making table decorations out of ice, reduced from being a regular feature in 1914, to nothing over the years of War. However, as the following century would show, the goal of equality remained a long way off. Contemporary feminist criticism of inter-war newspapers focused on their emphasis on trivial subjects of fashion and beauty (Lonsdale, 2013). Bingham (2004) however asserts this type of content was far from the only content of the inter-war Woman's Page. Historical newspaper feature pages must be studied further for the light they throw on contemporary culture and society, and not be dismissed for apparently containing journalism which "runs counter to idealised notions of what journalism should be and do" (Hanusch 2013, 1). While "lifestyle" articles examined here fulfil the accepted role of lifestyle journalism in that they help readers "construct identities" (Bell and Hollows 2006, 5), these

identities are not constructed through consumption and leisure choices, but through thrift and the desire to work. We can see clear parallels between First World War lifestyle journalism and modern day so-called “Green Lifestyle Journalism” a new genre aimed, once more, at persuading readers to reduce consumption in the face of evidence of environmental degradation and climate change (Craig, 2014). The success of First World War newspapers in persuading people to “make do” and endure severe privations may well be a useful model if Governments are to meet stringent carbon dioxide emissions targets in the years to come.

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