

# 'Let the feminine plebiscite be consulted': English Feminists' Campaign Journalism, Foreign Policy and the Crisis in France of 1870-71

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ABSTRACT: Feminist campaign journalism of the 1860s and 1870s both promoted women's campaigns and expressed opinions on spheres outside those usually ascribed to women, including foreign events. English feminists' activist and journalistic responses to the French crisis of 1870-71, from the commencement of the Franco-Prussian War through to the defeat of the Paris Commune, contextualise key events in the women's campaigns of the same period. I argue that feminist writings of this period were influenced not only by feminist campaigning but also by the campaigners' political ideologies. The feminist press challenged the notion of an 'imagined community' with regard to English attitudes to European affairs.<sup>1</sup> Such attitudes were embedded in English masculine notions of self-identity that defined itself against a 'foreign other'.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the feminist press created their own 'imagined community'. However, this may itself be challenged, as it emerged from English feminists' experiences which were themselves grounded in their own class privileges and political ideologies.<sup>3</sup>

KEYWORDS: Franco-Prussian War; Paris Commune; Victorian Feminists; Contagious Diseases Acts; Suffrage; Nineteenth Century Press

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Martin has contextualised Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' in her study of the coverage of the Franco-Prussian War in the Victorian illustrated press. See, Michele Martin, 'Conflictual Imaginaries: Victorian Illustrated Periodicals and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71)', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 36 (2003) pp.41-58. Similarly, Matthew Beaumont has claimed that English anti-communism in the last decades of the nineteenth century is rooted in an imaginary arising from the reactions of the British middle-classes to the Paris Commune. Matthew Beaumont, 'Cacotopianism, The Paris Commune, and England's Anti-Communist Imaginary, 1870-1900', *ELH*, 73.2 (2006) pp.465-487.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The Germans' Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.41-64; Michael Pratt, 'A Fallen Idol: The Impact of the Franco-Prussian War on the Perception of Germany by British Intellectuals', *The International History Review*, 7 (1985) pp.543-75.

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Tusan has described a nineteenth-century 'imagined community' between the women's press—which was used by English feminists in the period as a means of campaigning—and its readership. Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, *Women Making News: Gender and Journalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005) p.3.



DORA NEILL RAYMOND, in her *British Policy and Opinion During the Franco-Prussian War*, described London in 1870 as being 'agog with war'.<sup>4</sup> Raymond outlined the vast array of articles and notices published in the British papers concerning the conflict between France and Germany: 'John Bull' she remarked, 'read them all'. Although there was no full consensus in Britain—officially neutral—on the events in France and Germany, some historians have attempted to define a generalised view of English opinion on the war.<sup>5</sup> This generalised overview suggests firstly that initial English (although specifically not Irish) sympathy lay with—the perceived liberal—Prussia.<sup>6</sup> Following the Battle of Sedan, the fall of the Second Empire in September 1870, and Bismarck's demands on Alsace Lorraine in 1871, this sympathy was eroded and some sympathy emerged towards France (or at least the French people, if not Louis Napoleon). As the Siege of Paris (19<sup>th</sup> September 1870 to 28<sup>th</sup> January 1871) took hold, anti-Prussian views and a revision of the Prussian national character ensued, with the English now being 'appalled by the bombardment of civilians in Paris'.<sup>7</sup> English views on the war, particularly in their abhorrence of the perceived weakness and degeneracy of the French national character, were influenced by the late-nineteenth century English concept of 'manliness', based upon 'physical courage, chivalric ideals, virtuous fortitude [and] patriotic virtue'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The range of articles cited included leading articles on the War, musings on the British Military Systems, subscriptions for aid, and adverts from French refugees seeking work. Dora Neill Raymond, *British Policy and Opinion During the Franco-Prussian War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921) pp.194–95.

<sup>5</sup> For historiography relating to British views of the events of 1870-71 see Raymond; Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); E. De Groot, 'Great Britain and France: July 1870', *Durham University Journal*, 44 (1951) pp.10–21.

<sup>6</sup> 'Most thinking Englishmen - including George Eliot', Pratt has asserted, 'felt bound to support Prussia.' (Pratt, p.546). A position of formal neutrality was adopted by the government, but support for Prussia was evident. Raymond has claimed that: '[i]t was because England was essentially not neutral in her feelings that it made such a grandiose parade of her neutrality.' (Raymond, p.70). Irish Catholics tended to support their fellow Catholics in France, (Ibid., pp.76-78).

<sup>7</sup> Pratt, pp.563, 568.

<sup>8</sup> Wawro, pp.41-64.

Of the revolutionary Paris Commune following the war, Frank Jellinek remarked that it 'passed in flame and fury over the scene of European politics and vanished'.<sup>9</sup> For a brief time in the spring of 1871, during the fleeting life of the Commune, coverage of its events in the English press was comprehensive; reports and comments were set out in papers and periodicals as diverse as *The Times*, *Telegraph*, the *Illustrated London News* and *Punch*.<sup>10</sup> 'Most Englishmen', Jellinek proclaimed, 'thought the Commune meant that the French, driven to desperation by the war, had quite simply gone mad'.<sup>11</sup> Among many in Britain, the response to the Paris Commune revealed a fear of republicanism. The opinion abounded that France had 'veered from one political extreme to another' and that the 'inhumanity and immaturity of French politics' were exposed by its revolutionary events.<sup>12</sup> However, Mark Higgins intimates that there were a diverse range of opinions, and that as the war progressed, these opinions did not remain static.<sup>13</sup>

Rachel Holmes, biographer of Eleanor Marx, claims that 'the Commune was a great gender event'. She contends that: '[t]he "dominance" of women in the Commune was one of the reasons for its perceived "awfulness, bloodthirstiness and failure" and that anti-Communard responses were full of misogyny'.<sup>14</sup> In her revisionist history of the women of the Paris Commune, Gay Gullickson has cited Marina Warner's concept of a 'lexicon of female types' to describe nineteenth-century and modern historians' characterisations of the women of Paris – including as either 'good housewives' or 'bad prostitutes'.<sup>15</sup> While Gullickson identifies a number of 'typologies', an analysis of the responses of English feminists relating to the Commune and the Communards reveals

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<sup>9</sup> Frank Jellinek, *The Paris Commune of 1871* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937) p.411.

<sup>10</sup> Jellinek, p.423. A search conducted in the database of the British Newspaper Archive revealed also over 8,000 articles from newspapers across the country referring to the Commune in April 1871.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.411.

<sup>12</sup> Parry, pp.295, 296.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Higgins, *The British and the Paris Commune* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Keele, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: A Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) pp.105-06

<sup>15</sup> Other typologies Gullickson identifies are 'grieving widows and mothers [...] amazon warriors, horrific furies, scandalous orators, and angels of mercy'. Gullickson further notes that the 'appeal of these female types lay in their ability to convey moral and political judgments about women and the Commune'. Gay L. Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) pp.118-9, p.55.

that a reliance on such a 'lexicon' of types over-simplifies the gender implications of the Commune and contemporary responses to it.

This article will demonstrate that depictions of the women of Paris and France provided by the nineteenth-century feminist press defy Gullickson and Warner's typologies of women. Indeed, this lexicon was explicitly challenged by an, albeit small, group of English feminists. In this paper, I explore the extent to which the views of Victorian feminists challenged a prevailing, national 'imagined community' and established their own in relation to the events in France.<sup>16</sup> I analyse their opinions and assertions on the war and Commune in the context of the 'hidden internationalisms' of women campaigners, previously identified by Anne Summers.<sup>17</sup>

The sources examined are two feminist periodicals published at this time, the *Englishwoman's Review* (under the proprietorship and early editorship of Jessie Boucherett from its launch in 1870, and later editorship of Caroline Ashurst Biggs) and the *Women's Suffrage Journal* (edited throughout its publication by Lydia Becker).<sup>18</sup> I also discuss the *Shield*, the paper of the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts which was a key issue for many feminist campaigners during the period, and in which Josephine Butler was significantly influential. Barbara Caine has defined feminist women in the nineteenth century as those 'most closely involved in the English women's movement'.<sup>19</sup> This definition is applied herein and I use the term 'feminist press' to describe the three publications cited—which concerned themselves primarily with

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<sup>16</sup> Martin, pp.36, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Summers, 'Gaps in the Record: Hidden Internationalisms', *History Workshop Journal*, 52 (Autumn 2001) pp.217-27; Summers refers specifically to her work on Josephine Butler in the context of 'hidden internationalisms', p.226.

<sup>18</sup> In her obituary of Caroline Ashurst Biggs, Boucherett noted the start of her [Biggs'] editorship of the *Englishwoman's Review* as either from 'the end of 1870 or the beginning of 1871'. *Englishwoman's Review*, 14 September 1889, p.388.

<sup>19</sup> Caine, in her work on Victorian feminism has noted that 'the difficulty faced by anyone attempting to write the history of feminism is the fact that the word 'feminism' itself was not conceived until the end of the nineteenth century'. She noted that some historians have accepted a broad definition while others have 'attempted to assert the feminist consciousness of those most closely involved in the English women's movement'. The women considered here were explicitly and closely linked to the women's movement of the 1860s and 1870s and fit within the narrower definition of 'feminist' in the Victorian context; the term 'feminist' as applied herein, is used with that meaning. Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.4-5.

aspects of the nineteenth-century women's movement, including suffrage and the abolition of the Contagious Diseases Acts—thereby distinguishing them from a wider collection of contemporary publications aimed at or written by women. Lydia Becker, with financial support from Boucherett, launched the *Women's Suffrage Journal* in March 1870 with the specific aim of promoting the campaign for women's suffrage.<sup>20</sup> The *Englishwoman's Review* had a similar focus on women's campaigns, but also a wider aspiration to 'express the yearning of young Englishwomen for more active and extended interests'.<sup>21</sup> The *Englishwoman's Review* included articles under such headings as 'Record of Events', 'Parliamentary Intelligence', 'Colonial and Foreign News', and 'University and Educational Intelligence', in addition to those directly related to the women's suffrage campaign.<sup>22</sup> Josephine Butler had attempted to establish a specifically internationalist women's paper, *Kettledrum*, in 1869, which was later subsumed into the international pages of the *Englishwoman's Review*, and she argued for a 'natural' role for women in international affairs.<sup>23</sup> This is evident in coverage of the war, and later the Commune, in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* and the *Englishwoman's Review*. These editors and campaigners were exceptional for women of their class at that time, in terms of both their involvement in erstwhile masculine occupations, and their full support of the women's equality movement. It is impossible to claim that their views and opinions were representative of women generally, however, in challenging the perceived (masculine) 'imagined community' of English identity in response to the war and the Commune, I will show that English feminists created their own women's 'imagined community', grounded in their own experience and ideological positions.

John Tosh has discussed the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' prevalent in Britain in the nineteenth century, wherein: '[t]he political order can be seen as a reflection of the gender order in society as a whole, in which case political virtues are

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<sup>20</sup> Jessie Boucherett was an independently wealthy woman of the upper classes, who remained unmarried, and dedicated her life and her fortune to women's causes throughout her life—including proprietorship of the *Englishwoman's Review*—as well as support of causes relating to the employment of women. See Ellen Jordan and Anne Bridger, 'An unexpected recruit to feminism: Jessie Boucherett's "feminist life" and the importance of being wealthy', *Women's History Review*, 15 (1986) pp.385-412.

<sup>21</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 January 1890, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Horowitz Murray and Anna K Clark, *The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions: An Index* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985) p.ix.

<sup>23</sup> Tusan, p.38.

best understood as the prescribed masculine virtues writ large'.<sup>24</sup> However, English Victorian feminists challenged this 'hegemony' by advancing the cause of women, using their voice to pursue their right to speak and campaign in a public sphere.<sup>25</sup> In respect to the political upheavals occurring in France in 1870–1871, these feminists also challenged this 'hegemony' by claiming the war as an area of discourse for women, by defying gender representations associated with the war, and by questioning the disparaging and misogynistic depictions of the Parisian women associated with the Commune. Evidence that English women were discussing the war and the Commune at all is significant, but through these actions feminist campaigners also further widened the assumptions of what was an appropriate 'sphere' for women's discourse. In focussing on women in the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris Commune, the *Englishwoman's Review* and *Women's Suffrage Journal* challenged and attempted to overturn the gendered view of the conduct of women and men in the war. They sought to focus on women's experiences, associating their reports with the cause of women's suffrage and other women's campaigns both in Britain and internationally.

Boucherett claimed that the *Englishwoman's Review* was politically neutral, but coverage of some aspects of the war demonstrate that the responses printed here did have an ideological basis.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, English feminists' experiences as women campaigners shaped their opinions and statements relating to war and the Commune, as much as did other aspects of their identity, such as their class, national identity, or political ideology, and their responses were formed by a complex interaction of these factors. Articles published in the *Englishwoman's Review*, *Women's Suffrage Journal* and the *Shield*, similarly demonstrate that some opinions these feminist journalists expressed respecting the war were aligned to the writers' general political ideologies, whether liberal or conservative. That these views were comprised of and rendered

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<sup>24</sup> John Tosh, 'Hegemonic masculinity and the history of gender', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudnick, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) pp.41-58 (p.41).

<sup>25</sup> J.E. Parker, 'Lydia Becker: pioneer orator of the women's movement', *Manchester Region History Review*, 5 (1991) p.13-20; T. Fisher, 'Josephine Butler: Feminism's Neglected Pioneer', *History Today*, 46 (June 1996) pp.32-38.

<sup>26</sup> Writing in the *Englishwoman's Review* following Caroline Ashurst Biggs's death, Jessie Boucherett stated that despite their different political positions, 'the REVIEW was conducted on strictly neutral lines' *Englishwoman's Review*, 14 September 1889, p.388.

heterogeneous by a variety of factors can be seen to be at odds with feminists' other campaigns for the treatment of women as a class and the development of a female 'imagined community' within the feminist press in the period.<sup>27</sup>

Michelle Tusan has observed that the women's press in the 1850s and 1860s (including feminist publications such as the *Englishwoman's Journal*, which was the predecessor to the *Englishwoman's Review* and *Women's Suffrage Journal*) established women's interest in contemporary events and provided a 'gendered perspective' when reporting on them.<sup>28</sup> According to Tusan, at this time 'the women's press constructed women as public citizens as distinguished from other periodicals targeted at women, which tended to focus on the domestic, and presented an apolitical stance'.<sup>29</sup> Tusan describes the women's periodicals of the period as providing their own form of 'imagined community' that used women's traditional modes of sociability, to engage with other politically minded women'.<sup>30</sup> She claims that the feminist press 'imagined the emergence of a 'cross-class "sisterhood" meant to appeal to women from a wide range of experiences'.<sup>31</sup> In what follows, I will use Tusan's model of the women's press and its readership to argue for an 'imagined community' in the feminist press's framing of international affairs in 1870-71. This imagined community was internationalist in nature and focussed on the women's movement. Developing Tusan's work, however, I will also expose the limitations of this community's attempt to speak for women as a constituency.<sup>32</sup> In her exploration of the responses to the Franco-Prussian war in illustrated periodicals, Michelle Martin has challenged the view that there was a collective 'imagined community' in English interpretations of the war, and the notion that these formed the foundation of a 'national memory'.<sup>33</sup> There are, she argues, a number of 'imaginaries' aligning with the different politics of the periodicals in her study, and the various audiences to which they were addressed.<sup>34</sup> I argue that one such 'separate imaginary' is identifiable within the feminist press. In her work on women's

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<sup>27</sup> See for example 'Women as a Class', in the *Englishwoman's Review*, 13 May 1876, pp.199-203.

<sup>28</sup> Tusan, p.38.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3-4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>33</sup> Martin, p.53.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.44-45.

journalism in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Tusan has also depicted a 'gender identified community of female activists' who reconfigured acceptable boundaries for public activism for women. Through the suffrage movement, they 'both drew upon and contributed to an institutional culture that asked women to make sacrifices for issues that placed women squarely in the centre of debates about social reports, parliamentary politics and even foreign policy'.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE JOURNAL'S RESPONSE TO THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

In 1870, 'Jane Bull' was as consumed by the Franco-Prussian War as her male contemporaries. As George Eliot wrote to her friend Sara Hennell from Shotter Mill, '[w]e are excited even among the still woods and fields by the vicissitudes of the War, and chiefly concerned because we cannot succeed in getting the days' "Times"<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Garrett wrote to James Anderson: 'It is sadly difficult even to pretend to do anything but read the papers and look at the map'.<sup>37</sup> Feminist women were as keen observers and as interested in the events of the war and the Commune as their male counterparts; this is reflected in coverage of the Franco-Prussian war within the feminist press. In the leading article in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* of September 1870, its editor, Lydia Becker, considered the likely long-term consequences of the war, insightfully declaring: '[w]ho can tell when the bitterness of this hour will have passed away? It will be felt by unborn generations'.<sup>38</sup> This authoritative statement, loaded with gravity, established for the periodical's readership the legitimacy of the *Women's Suffrage Journal*—and its woman editor—to comment on the subject of the war. Feminist responses focussed on the effects of the war and the Commune on women,

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<sup>35</sup> Tusan, pp.3, 5.

<sup>36</sup> 'Letter to Sara Hennell, 12 August 1870', *The George Eliot letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haigh, 9 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1954–1978), v, p.56.

<sup>37</sup> Louisa Garrett Anderson, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson: 1836–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939) p.137. Garrett herself travelled with her younger brother and sister through Belgium to the war front at Sedan in September 1870. She wrote three letters home to her father, her friend Jane Crow and to her future husband James Skelton Anderson describing her experiences. These are held in the Women's Library Archive at the London School of Economics.

<sup>38</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, September 1870, p.69.

and for this reason their discourse challenged the notion of 'separate spheres'.<sup>39</sup> English feminists such as Lydia Becker, Josephine Butler and others were already challenging this idea in other areas including education; campaigning and oratory; journalism and politics; and science and medicine. However, by the 1870s, they were also attempting to extend this challenge to broader political affairs including war and international events.<sup>40</sup> They directed their discourse on the war and Commune across class and international boundaries. Indeed, the *Women's Suffrage Journal* claimed that women as a group were uniquely affected by, and had the right to a collective view on, the war. Such views were directly connected to other areas of feminist campaigning, including women's suffrage and the campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts (and the equivalent laws in France) to which discourse about the war and later the Commune gave rise. This in turn helped to construct an alternative 'imagined community' of international women brought together by shared topics of discussion.

The *Women's Suffrage Journal* aimed to promote women's causes, most specifically the suffrage campaign. Leading articles for its June, July and August issues focused on domestic legislation including the Women's Disabilities Bill and the Married Women's Property Bill which had recently been debated in Parliament.<sup>41</sup> The next edition was published on 1 September, the date of the battle of Sedan — at which time the defeat of France by Prussia was likely but not yet certain. In this edition, Becker focussed the leading article solely on the war. In line with other Liberal thinkers—

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<sup>39</sup> Anne Summers has defined and discussed the concept of 'separate spheres' in relation to women's activism in the nineteenth century, including that of Josephine Butler. See the introduction to Anne Summers, *Female lives, moral states: women, religion and public life in Britain 1800-1930* (Newbury: Threshold Press, 2000), pp.i-ix.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example: Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). Articles relating to feminists in the mid-Victorian period include: Susan David Bernstein, "'Supposed Differences": Lydia Becker and Victorian Women's Participation in the BAAS', in *Repositioning Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-Century Scientific Thinking*, ed. by David Clifford et al (London: Anthem Press, 2006), pp.85-106; J.W.E. Parker, 'Lydia Becker's 'school for science': a challenge to domesticity', *Women's History Review*, 10 (2001) pp.629-50; Tina Gianquitto, 'Botanical Smuts and Hermaphrodites: Lydia Becker, Darwin's Botany and Education Reform', *Isis*, 104 (June 2013) pp.250-77; Fisher, pp.32-38; Joy Harvey, 'Darwin's "Angels": The Women Correspondents of Charles Darwin', *Intellectual History Review*, 19 (2009) pp.197-210.

<sup>41</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 June 1870, p.29; *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 July 1870, p.45; *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 August 1870, p.57.

including John Stuart Mill—Becker blamed Louis Napoleon for the war, but her leader focussed primarily on the impact of the war on women.<sup>42</sup> She wrote:

But if our sympathies are aroused on behalf of the masses of Frenchmen plunged into war [...] what must they be for the nations of French and German women on whom the burden and the misery of war falls in an equal or even greater measure than on man, and who are denied the right to a voice in deciding whether it shall or shall not be laid upon them. Men have charged themselves with care for the welfare of women; yet they have brought this woe on those whom they profess to protect – this desolation on the homes they were sworn to defend. [...] Let there be universal suffrage among the women of these desolated lands – let the question of peace and war be debated in these lonely homesteads, in sight of the rotting crops which should have furnished their children's bread, - let the feminine plebiscite be appealed to as having a right to be heard, and who can doubt that the unanimous vote from the Pyrenees to the Baltic, from princess to peasant, would be given for peace between peoples and re-union in homes.<sup>43</sup>

Becker's words invoke an 'imagined community' of women across classes and nations, which opposes war and has a legitimate claim to political representation.

The leader of the 1 May 1871 edition again returned to the theme of the effect of the war on women, arguing that the cost of Britain's arming for a potential conflict in the wake of the war in France fell disproportionately on working women, and connecting this claim directly to Becker's campaign against the British government's proposed tax on matches:

But the government stamp, and the extravagantly enhanced price of an article which has hitherto cost next to nothing, will reveal to every housekeeper the fact that the government is dipping its hand into her pocket, and giving her nothing in return. If she wants to know why the government cannot go on as heretofore, paying its way without taxing a poor woman's match-box, and hears that it is in order to make huge military

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from J.S. Mill to Henry Fawcett, 26 July 1870: 'The English public should know [...] that this war has been brought on wholly by Napoleon; that the Prussians are fighting for their own liberty and for that of Europe'. 'The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill', *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by Francis E. Mineka and Dwight N. Lindley, 32 vols (London: Routledge, 1972) xvii, p.1754; Becker's father was German, so this too is likely to have influenced her opinion.

<sup>43</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 September 1870, p.69.

preparations just when the state of Europe seems almost to forbid the possibility of the occurrence of international war, she may be tempted to ask whether the disputes between peoples are always going to be settled by that bloody and murderous strife which the masculine mind regards as the ultimate and natural issue of vexed questions, and to which they are terribly prone to resort.<sup>44</sup>

For Becker, international affairs, the campaign for women's suffrage and the perceived realities of women's lives during conflict were inseparable matters. Becker interrogates the idea that the 'masculine' concern with war is 'natural' and argues for an alternative view of international war that is, or will become, self-evident to all women. Joyce Berkman has noted the connection between feminism and the pacifist movement in Europe, which is clear in the above example, which supports Berkman's claim by showing the coverage and opinions of the war in the feminist press to be aligned with a generally anti-war stance.<sup>45</sup> This alignment is also evident in an article printed by the *Women's Suffrage Journal* on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1870 which presented the following eloquent claim against an unnecessary war through the lens of women's suffrage:

We affirm that the governments of France and Germany have no right to ignore the nations of women – to reject the feminine plebiscite. We maintain that the suppression of this element in the national councils destroys the only sufficient safeguard against causeless war [...] Put no longer asunder thou whom God hath joined together; let the feminine plebiscite be consulted as well as the masculine; and the spirit which prompts men to deeds of violence and blood will pale under the humanising influence of woman and be finally laid forever.<sup>46</sup>

Becker's article puts forward an alternative, feminist, argument for women's influence in politics, public and international affairs, and the associated claim for political representation, through the notion that women were a 'humanising' influence on men, at a time when women's 'natural' state (as 'inferior' to men) was a considered a

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<sup>44</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 May 1871, p.43.

<sup>45</sup> Joyce Berkman, 'Feminism, War and Peace Politics: The case of World War I', in *Women, Militarism and War: Essays in history, politics and social theory*, ed. by Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias (Savage MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988) pp.141-160.

<sup>46</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 September 1870, p.69.

legitimate subject for scientific discourse.<sup>47</sup> Becker's statement makes a further bold claim, that women (as a nation) not only have a right to be consulted on military and political matters but, as a constituency, that their voice would lead to peace – because Becker's community of women is evidently opposed to war and could, if allowed, sufficiently influence men in this respect.

The same edition of the *Women's Suffrage Journal* published a statement from the International Association of Women and notification of a petition it had organised against the war.<sup>48</sup> Notably, Josephine Butler was listed as a member of the organising committee of the International Association of Women, along with its founder Marie Goegg.<sup>49</sup> The address, which was published in its original French and in English,

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<sup>47</sup> John Stuart Mill had published *The Subjection of Women*, arguing for the intellectual equality of women, in 1868. Charles Darwin published *The Descent of Man* in 1871, which made the claim for the natural inferiority of women. See Fiona Erskine, 'The Origin of Species and the Science of Female Inferiority', in *Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species: New interdisciplinary essays*, ed by David Amigoni, and Jeff Wallace, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p.104. Becker herself had been a correspondent of Darwin on the subject of botany and Joy Harvey has claimed that Becker was drawn to the Victorian women's movement as a consequence of her being 'excluded from the all-male scientific societies'. Joy Harvey, 'Darwin's "Angels": The Women Correspondents of Charles Darwin', *Intellectual History Review*, 19:2, p.202.

<sup>48</sup> The *Women's Suffrage Journal* explained that the International Association of Women had been founded in 1868 with the aim 'to protest publicly against some of the laws of all countries in respect of women; to point out the miseries and abuses which such laws occasions; to labour to get them changed; to claim for women an equal share in all the rights which men enjoy in the State and in Society'. *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1, September 1870, p.71.

<sup>49</sup> The *Women's Suffrage Journal* provided details of the central committee of the International Women's Association. In addition to Goegg from Switzerland and Butler, it included representatives from France, Germany, America, Italy, Portugal and Sweden. Anne Summers has provided details of Butler's continuing collaboration with Goegg and others in the context of the International Abolitionist Federation. Summers, 'Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation', *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (2006), p.217. For details of the founding of the International Women's Association see Berkman. Berkman claims that the establishment of the International Association of Women was influenced by the two most significant wars preceding the Franco-Prussian War: the Crimean and American Civil wars. Berkman indicates that the work of the International Association of Women was interrupted by the war, while Sandi Cooper describes how Marie Goegg's focus 'turned to work on women's emancipation after 1870-1871'. Berkman, p.145. Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging war on war in Europe 1815-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.51.

categorically opposed the war as 'an act of barbarism, vandalism and destruction – a bloody cut which is a shame and a dishonour for all nations, even those who are only lookers on'.<sup>50</sup> The Association called for an end to the war, in an emphatic statement:

We come saying, Down with your arms, you soldiers who have no quarrel one against another, and for whom your families watch in moral anguish. Down with your arms, you Kings, who give yourselves out for representatives of the peoples, and who, betraying your oaths, bring destruction, ruin, and death where you had promised peace plenty and life.

The whole world has eyes upon you. History, severely just in its decision will separate the good grain from the chaff. She will show in their nothingness the puerile questions of self-love set up as an excuse; what is good and right alone will satisfy her.

This good is peace - and this is what we demand.<sup>51</sup>

This statement further cements an anti-war stance as a characteristic of the 'imagined community' of feminist women created by feminist campaign journalists, and its promotion in the *Women's Suffrage Journal* further seeks to build this community of pacifist women. Butler was an internationalist and focussed on the women's peace movement as an international rather than a national movement. The International Association of Women condemned not only the belligerent countries in the war, but all other nations (including neutral Britain) for their failure to condemn the action. Marie Goegg and her organisation were concerned both with women's equality and with pacifism, and the Association's statement also addressed the close connection between the women's equality and peace movements. The address described the war as 'a fatal consequence of the seclusion of women from all the interests of the state, as well as the rivalry of two dynasties'.<sup>52</sup> The Association's statement and accompanying petition – which a subsequent edition of the *Women's Suffrage Journal* went on to note was 'signed by fifteen thousand Englishwomen of all classes of society', reinforces Becker's authority in speaking to and for a community of women about the war and the concerns for women's political representation she associated with her journalism.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, September 1870, p.71.

<sup>51</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, September 1870, p.71.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 November 1870, p.90.

The *Women's Suffrage Journal* also provided some of its own commentary on the International Association of Women and its objectives stating that:

To claim for women an equal share in all the rights which men enjoy in the state and in society [...] it also aims at seconding all enlightened men to secure to the nation's liberty, instruction, morality, economy, well being and peace, based on fraternal union.<sup>54</sup>

The *Women's Suffrage Journal's* position on the war *vis-a-vis* the International Association of Women's pacifist purpose, coalesced with its objectives regarding the equality of women, while its aims also hinted at the liberal ideals of peace, economic stability, fraternal union, and national liberty.

As Geoffrey Wawro notes, however, it must be remembered that there also existed patriotic support for the war. Wawro particularly quotes one German mother's parting words to her soldier son: '[i]t is not necessary that you return from the war, only that you do your duty'.<sup>55</sup> This statement challenges the opinion presented by Becker that women across Europe would be opposed to the war, given the plebiscite. Coverage of the International Association of Women and the printing of its petition within the *Women's Suffrage Journal* represents an internationalist approach at odds with other such opinions on the war, which were rooted in national identity, patriotism and the English concept of 'manliness', against which the French army in particular, was unfavourably compared.<sup>56</sup>

#### THE WAR, THE COMMUNE AND THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS: BUTLER'S CAMPAIGN

The Contagious Diseases Acts were introduced from 1864 with the aim of reducing the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases in the military. They were in force in garrison and naval towns. The Acts gave the police the ability to arrest and subject any woman suspected of prostitution to a medical examination. If the woman were found to have a sexually transmitted disease, the police were able to detain them in a hospital. Josephine Butler led the campaign for the abolition of the Acts in England.<sup>57</sup> Members

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Wawro, p.88.

<sup>56</sup> Parry, p.20; J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and morality: middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) p.1; Wawro, p.41-64.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example Margaret Hamilton, 'Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*,

of her international network—including International Women's Association founder Marie Goegg, and Marie Troubnikoff, a Russian woman resident in Paris—also worked for the abolition of similar laws in France, as evidenced by their correspondence with Butler and with the *Shield*, which I will explore in this section. Butler and her interlocutors formed an international imagined community that observed and commented on events in France during the turmoil of 1870 and 1871, primarily through the perspective of the anti-CDA campaign.

Anne Summers' research has uncovered the extent of Butler's international networks and the degree to which she corresponded with them regarding her campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.<sup>58</sup> Since Summers' work reveals an international network of women in Switzerland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy, it is likely that Butler was (or quickly became) aware of the political situation in countries across Europe in the 1870s, and how it pertained to her anti-CDA campaign and those of her colleagues abroad.<sup>59</sup> The International Association of Women's address, discussed in the previous section, had a clear anti-war and pro-suffrage message, and was critical of both German and French governments. However, journalism and correspondence responding to the war and relating to the anti-CDA campaign complicates our sense of the imagined community the feminist press had created.

The influence of the repeal campaign on journalistic discourse about the war can be seen in the pages of the *Shield*. For this publication's community, the CDAs were a response to the spread of venereal disease amongst members of the military, and this arguably led to the *Shield's* anti-standing army, and generally anti-war stance. In addition, in the context of the Franco-Prussian war, up to the Siege of Paris in December 1870, the pacifist stance set out in the International Women's Association address published in the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, was complicated by a tendency to support

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10 (1978) pp.14-27. The use of such laws originated in Napoleonic France, as noted by Anne Summers. Anne Summers, 'Which Women? What Europe?', pp.215-216.

<sup>58</sup> Summers, 'Gaps'. The term Contagious Diseases Acts usually refers to the English laws. However, here as in many of the primary sources (see for example the 'Letter from Paris' in the *Shield* dated December 1870) the reference to the 'Contagious Diseases Acts' relates to other nations' equivalent or similar legislation.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Summers, "'The Constitution Violated': The Female Body and the Female Subject in the Campaigns of Josephine Butler", *History Workshop Journal*, 48 (1990) pp.1-15.

the Prussian military system over that of the French army, which can be seen in the *Shield*. A letter from Marie Goegg, published in the *Shield* in December 1870, discussed the respective armies, and the status of prostitution and moral conduct during the war between the French and Prussians. She condemned the French system of conscription and the ban on marriage for soldiers, comparing it unfavourably with the Prussian army's system of short-term conscription for young men, and their freedom to marry and to have families. Goegg outlined each army's resulting positions regarding prostitution. For the French army 'it naturally follows in such state of things, that a man will seek to gratify his nature, and give but little heed of the laws of morality', while legalised prostitution was 'unknown in Germany. (It exists in Berlin, but not ostensibly for the army)'.<sup>60</sup> Goegg ended her letter on a pacifist note, more akin to the International Association of Women's address, and expressed sympathy for French refugees: '[e]nough of this subject, it is sickening. Our city is full of voluntary French exiles – of families who fly the horrors of a siege'.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, despite her internationalism and pacifism, Goegg did not have an equally critical view of the French and the Prussians in their conduct of the war. Instead, in relating the anti-CDA campaign to military structures, prostitution laws, and by extension the character of German and French men, her opinion showed a pro-Prussian and anti-French stance.

This stance was expanded by another correspondent in the same edition of the *Shield*, written in an anti-French (and particularly anti-Parisian) tone, which associated the character, and military failings, of the French, with perceived Parisian degeneracy and with the legalisation of prostitution. The correspondent cited a message from the Paris Correspondent of the *Manchester Examiner and Times* which purported to have come via balloon mail from besieged Paris. It described the lack of national guard recruits and their resulting inability to defend the city:

The enemy is at the gates, yet the needful qualities of heroism and patriotism seemed altogether wanting [...] the source from which this apathy springs is the twenty years' moral degradation [...] I can't help warning the English people against the Contagious

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Diseases Acts [...] It is these Acts which have rendered the immorality which reigns here supreme a part of the country's institution.<sup>62</sup>

This community, corresponding through the *Shield*, and focussed as it was on the fight against the Contagious Diseases Acts, led to commentary loaded with moral judgements on French character, which was then associated with the defeat of France and the eventual fall of Paris in January 1871, combining anti-CDA, anti-war and anti-French feeling. The journalists and correspondents to the *Shield* constructed a picture of the war and Commune that was informed by and promoted the anti-CDA campaign, and in this context, opinions previously expressed on France in particular proved to be changeable.

The nature of the opinions held by this alternative imagined community created by the *Shield*—and especially its views on the character of Parisian men—altered radically with the advent of the Commune. Far from perceiving the Commune, as did much of the press in Britain, as representing the worst of degeneracy, language concerning the Commune itself was relatively tempered in the *Shield*—as it would be in representations of the Commune in other feminist publications—and in one instance was significantly praised.

In a letter of April 1871 to Marie Troubnikoff in Paris, Butler questioned her about the apparent abolition of the Contagious Diseases Acts in Paris by the Commune government.<sup>63</sup> Butler noted that the Commune had 'taken a step towards the equality of the sexes', by the abolition of legal prostitution, and asked Troubnikoff if she knew whether any in the national government (the Republican Government at Versailles) supported this change in the law.<sup>64</sup> The Josephine Butler archive at the Women's Library includes an annotated transcript of this letter by her secretary Rose Bruker, on behalf of the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. In her annotations, Bruker outlined details of the war and Siege of Paris, before discussing the Commune. She described it as comprising socialist and left-wing republicans, as being the first socialist government, and outlined the Commune's end wherein the Versailles

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<sup>62</sup> *Shield*, December 1870, p.61.

<sup>63</sup> Troubnikoff and Butler started correspondence in April 1869 and found that they had a shared cause. Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (John Murray: London, 2001) p.102.

<sup>64</sup> University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives, reference: JB 1/1 1871/04/00(I).

government 'captured Paris and massacred at least 20,000 people'.<sup>65</sup> Bruker's account contended that the abolition of the '*Police de Koers* in Paris was one of their [the Communards'] acts, an act approved of [by Butler]' as it freed 'prostitutes from the slavery of total police control'.<sup>66</sup> This brief statement indicates opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts both in themselves and as an act of police control — thereby supporting Butler's liberal values, alongside her abhorrence of the massacre of Communards and Parisians by Versailles at the Commune's violent end. On the other hand, the note was neutral in its view of the Commune itself, only approving their action in abolishing the Contagious Diseases Acts.

What must certainly have been Marie Troubnikoff's reply to Butler's letter was published in the *Shield* in an anonymous 'A Letter from Paris' in May 1871:

The Commune, you are aware, has suppressed the Bureau of Prostitution, of which M. Le Cour was the head. I hope with all my heart, that these horrors will not be reestablished in Paris, as part of the restoration of order; but I know little of what is going on just now. Beyond Paris, our towns and villages are infected with the horrible pest of legalised prostitution, which could only be effectively opposed by a strong association, such as you have in England'.<sup>67</sup>

A report from a correspondent in Versailles reproduced in the *Shield* in April 1871, warned that: '[l]adies travelling or walking by themselves, are exposed to worse indignities than imprisonment, especially if they are foolish enough to express concern for the possible fate of Paris'.<sup>68</sup> It also set out the case of one such young woman who had been taken by the police under their Contagious Diseases Acts, having been heard to declare 'Ces Pauvre Parisienes! Que Dieu protège!'<sup>69</sup> Thus the *Shield* attempted to demonstrate that the Acts were being used for nefarious political purposes by the Versailles government, despite its claim of being concerned only for public health. The *Shield* and its community of readers and activists thus interpreted events and constructed their own reality which was inflected by their feminist agenda, and particularly the anti-CDA campaign.

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<sup>65</sup> Women's Library Archive, London School of Economics, reference: 3JBL/03.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Shield*, May 1871, p.541.

<sup>68</sup> *Shield*, April 1871, p.477.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* (Translated by the author as: 'You Poor Parisians! May God protect you!')

On 27 May 1871 (five days after the Commune's brutal destruction) an article appeared in the *Shield* entitled 'A Lesson from the Commune', declaring that:

The Communists of Paris, with all their faults and follies, have at least proclaimed their logical perception of the relation of slavery, prostitution and celibate armies and have thus shown a profounder knowledge than some who bear the name of statesmen. The Communal delegation [...] have issued a proclamation in which [...] it is decreed that all houses of ill-fame in their quarter shall be immediately closed.<sup>70</sup>

The Commune's abolition of prostitution (or at least legal prostitution) vindicated the anti-CDA community's views and required a modification of previously expressed views on the men of Paris, as subject to 'twenty years' moral degradation'. the *Shield* claimed: '[i]t is the effect that the working men who know how their sisters are treated in the French brothels [...] see no difference between their condition and that of the slaves of the southern states of America before the war'.<sup>71</sup> Although much anti-CDA campaigning was, as with Butler and Goegg, led by women, according to this article, within the Paris Commune, Communard men were active participants in ending prostitution and the Parisian CDAs, where working-class Communard women are not seen as having played an active role. In this *Shield* article, they even take on a passivity akin to the perceived passivity of slaves. Although Gullickson and others have noted the active participation of women within the Commune, in this article, all action in abolishing prostitution and repealing the Parisian CDAs is attributed to the leaders and working-class men of the Commune, excluding the opinions, voices and activity of Commune women in relation to actions that most directly impacted their lives. It is in this example that the limitations of the alternative imagined community created by feminists in these publications begins to become evident.

Gullickson has observed the dichotomous depictions of Parisian women in March 1871 as either 'good housewives' or 'bad prostitutes'.<sup>72</sup> Butler and her allies, however, focussed on the institution of prostitution and the associated Acts, nuancing their representation by avoiding such judgments on women themselves. Their responses to the war and to the Commune were a complex interaction of issues of

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<sup>70</sup> *Shield*, 27 May 1871, p.506.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Gullickson, p.55.

women's equality, peace, and moralism; they argued that the Contagious Diseases Acts related to questions of the military, liberalism, and class. Opinions on the war and the Commune expressed in the *Shield* differed from the supposed general view prevailing in Britain but they diverged most notably in their opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, which was the *Shield's*, and Butler's, dominant purpose in this period, even while this excluded the voices of those women most directly affected by the Contagious Diseases Acts.

#### THE WOMEN OF PARIS AND THE COMMUNE: REPRESENTATION IN THE *ENGLISHWOMAN'S REVIEW*

Troubnikoff's letter in the *Shield* concluded with a plea for support for law reforms relating to prostitution in France, declaring that: '[i]t is because they have neglected these [reforms], that France is torn by blind and powerless revolutions'.<sup>73</sup> Like Troubnikoff (who was from a minor Russian aristocratic family), Boucherett came from a landed upper-class background, and might well have been staunchly anti-revolutionary.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, her feminism was consistent with her conservatism. In 1868 Boucherett demonstrated her conservative feminist position in her pamphlet, *The Condition of Women in France*, in which she had argued that women's educational and professional opportunities had been significantly restricted in post-revolutionary France, as compared to under French monarchy.<sup>75</sup> In 1870, under Boucherett's editorship, the *Englishwoman's Review*, in addition to printing stories relating to the conduct of women in the war, republished extracts from articles that presented a moralistic response to the French army and to the citizens of Paris. It approvingly quoted members of the clergy, and also—in line with its conservative political perspective—cited commentary that was highly critical of 'Bismarckism'.<sup>76</sup>

Editorship of the journal transferred from the conservative Boucherett to the radical Ashurst Biggs in early 1871 owing to Boucherett's ill health, though it is not

<sup>73</sup> *Shield*, 27 May 1871, p.541.

<sup>74</sup> Marie Troubnikoff was from the Russian aristocracy. Although her father had been a Decembrist and she embraced women's and progressive causes in Russia, she was opposed to revolutionary activity and was firmly against her daughter's involvement in the revolutionary movement in Russia during in the 1870s. Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) pp.56-61, 201.

<sup>75</sup> Emilia Jessie Boucherett, *The Condition of Women in France* (London: Strahan & Co, 1868).

<sup>76</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, December 1870, p.61.

known how much influence she retained as sole proprietor of the paper.<sup>77</sup> Under Biggs, the editorial stance of the *Englishwoman's Review* was sympathetic to the women of Paris, in contrast to a generally very hostile press, particularly conservative publications such as *The Times*.<sup>78</sup> At the end of the Siege of Paris, the *Englishwoman's Review* provided a sympathetic description of the women defending Paris:

TEN BATTALIONS of women have been formed at Paris to serve on the ramparts. They will attend on the wounded, serve the ambulances, and, if necessary, fight. They wear a black blouse, black trousers with an orange stripe and a black cap with an orange band. If the ramparts are really attacked, we fully expect these women will show plenty of courage. They are working women of good character from twenty-five to forty years of age. They receive a rand and a half a day pay.<sup>79</sup>

These women, who would later be characterised as the notorious 'petroleuses' of the Commune by many commentators, are here instead alternatively described as of good character. In developing a feminist viewpoint associated with the last days of the Paris siege, they are portrayed with virtues such as courage, in contrast to the apparent weakness of character depicted in French men.<sup>80</sup>

Major histories of the Commune, including the first written by Eleanor Marx's fiancé Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray and translated by her, include negative references to the women of the Commune, which went on to be challenged in the *Englishwoman's Review*.<sup>81</sup> Lissagaray himself had described '[t]hose females who dedicated themselves to the Commune [who] had but a single ambition: to raise themselves above the level of man by exaggerating his vices'.<sup>82</sup> Higgins has cited contrasting examples of press commentary about anti-Communard women from *The Times*.<sup>83</sup> The *Dublin Evening Mail* also asserted that 'English opponents of women's claims [for suffrage] held up

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<sup>77</sup> Janet Horowitz Murray has described the ongoing relationship between proprietor and editor as a 'more than 20 year partnership'. It is likely that Boucherett continued to have some input into the journal following her departure as editor. Janet Horowitz Murray, 'Class vs. Gender Identification in the "Englishwoman's Review" of the 1880s', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 18 (1985) pp.138-142 (p.139).

<sup>78</sup> Higgins, pp.16-20.

<sup>79</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, January 1871, p.66.

<sup>80</sup> Wawro, pp.41-64

<sup>81</sup> Holmes, pp.106, 151.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Holmes, pp.105-06.

<sup>83</sup> Higgins, pp.25-27.

these imaginary furies as terrible examples of what women would become if they got the franchise, or any political rights whatever'.<sup>84</sup> These testimonies negatively associated the sensational stories about the Communard women, portrayed in the British press, with the women's suffrage campaign in England — which was, in fact, some years away from taking on a militant aspect. The *Englishwoman's Review*, constructing an imagined community that had at its centre the claim for women's suffrage, needed therefore to challenge this portrayal of the women of Paris. The description of the women of the Commune given in the *Englishwoman's Review* in late 1871 was thus sympathetic:

Many papers have commented, some harshly, a few generously, on the share which women have taken in the last terrible days of the siege of Paris. *The Daily News* does justice to the heroism the better class of women have shown through the whole desperate struggle.

The women of Paris earned the respect and sympathy of the male populace in quite another fashion. It was upon them the distresses of the blockade came heaviest. The poorer classes, whose husbands and bread-winners were employed upon the ramparts, sat out the weary hours at home, waiting with desperate anxiety for news of the battle, or stood at the doors of the offices where scanty food and fuel were distributed. In fact, they suffered and endured as, we believe, women have for the most part ever suffered and endured when subjected to conditions of feverish uncertainty and peril which would test the spirit of the strongest men. [...] We cannot follow with much patience the rhetorical denunciations of English writers, who do not hesitate to refer broadly to the women of Paris, and to the women of the Commune, as if they were monsters of revolting cruelty and vice.<sup>85</sup>

These assertions refute both the class-based fears of revolution engendered by the Commune and the misogynistic depiction of Communard women. They also, in describing Parisian women's endurance and strength—in comparison to men—provide an alternative imagery of women that opposed contemporary discourses on mid-Victorian womanhood.<sup>86</sup> As Gullickson has duly noted, the treatment of Communard

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<sup>84</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 11 October 1871, p.1.

<sup>85</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, July 1871, p.197.

<sup>86</sup> Women's inherent and fundamental 'weakness' was asserted by many the scientific and medical community, including Henry Maudsley. See Michael Collie, *Henry Maudsley Victorian Psychiatrist: A Bibliographical Study* (St Paul's Bibliographies: Winchester, 1988) p.51.

prisoners and the abuse that they received from the people of Versailles was justified by contemporary reporters because they were popularly depicted as '[f]uries of Greek myth, wild animals, witches, and madwomen'.<sup>87</sup>

The *Englishwoman's Review*, however, presented a nuanced picture of women prisoners and their trials at Versailles. In an article outlining those arrested and their trial, the *Englishwoman's Review* also noted that the 'ladies' of Versailles provided support to the women prisoners:

The women prepare their own food, and for this purpose small portable stoves are ranged along the court-yards of the prison. Some ladies of Versailles bring, daily, linen, books, and occasionally money. They also procure work for the women, who, if they please, may earn a franc and a half a day. The women belong to all classes of society. Of the total of 340, at least 150 are married, and their husbands are almost all among the prisoners.<sup>88</sup>

Again, this passage challenges the tendency in modern criticism to focus on women as a class, by representing the women of Paris as hardworking, respectable (and potentially educated). It also reveals support between the women of Versailles and Parisian Communards which contrasts with Gullickson's description of the abuse of prisoners by the people of Versailles.

English feminists, with their emphasis on women's experiences across classes, may have claimed to speak for English working-class women in responding to the Commune, particularly in highlighting the sympathetic response to the working-class women of the Paris Commune. This sympathetic portrayal is connected to the internationalist approach of the *Englishwoman's Review*, a periodical that regularly included articles on international events and campaigns. However, it is at odds with other interpretations of the Commune in England that were influenced by anti-French feeling and the fear of working-class revolution. It must also be remembered, though, that it is not known what English working-class women themselves thought of the Commune.

We can glean some idea however, as Gareth Stedman Jones has suggested that irrespective of fears of revolution in Britain—fears stoked by the press in response to

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<sup>87</sup> Gullickson, pp.183-84.

<sup>88</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, October 1871, p.281.

the Commune—Friedrich Engels was correct in asserting that the British working-classes were indifferent to the Commune.<sup>89</sup> Engels argued that the working classes (or at least, working-class men) ‘behaved in a disgraceful manner, though the men of Paris had risked their lives, the working men of England made no effort to sympathise with them or assist them’.<sup>90</sup> If the *Dublin Evening Mail* was right to claim that depictions of ‘The Petroleuses of Paris’ were being used to make a case against women’s suffrage, then it was in the clear interest of the *Englishwoman’s Review* and the suffrage campaign to present a view that countered this claim, and thus to be sympathetic to the Commune women.

*The Englishwoman’s Review* returned to the subject of French women and the war in 1872. It considered the French reparations, which were supported by a ‘patriotic subscription,’ and reflected on the costs of the war to all the women of France:

Committees are being formed at Versailles and several other towns to receive subscriptions from the women of France for the purpose of paying the indemnity. Jewellery and objects of art will be accepted, and bazaars will subsequently be organised by French ladies residing in London, Vienna, Rome, New York and other capitals.

All classes of women in France are helping, poor workwomen are giving the earning of two or three days’ labour. It appears to be everywhere recognised as women’s privilege to pay for the expenses of war, though she must not be consulted as to its commencement.<sup>91</sup>

In commenting on the longer-term impact of the war, the *Englishwoman’s Review* continued to construct its imagined community, developing the same themes previously explored in the feminist press: its focus on internationalism, the categorisation of women as a class, its claims on behalf of working women, and, as Lydia Becker had established at the beginning of the war, a relationship between the impact of the war on women and the campaign for women’s suffrage.

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<sup>89</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p.521.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Englishwoman’s Review*, 1872, p.139.

'WE ARE JUSTIFIED IN TALKING OF WOMEN AS FORMING ONE CLASS': A FEMINIST 'IMAGINED COMMUNITY' AND ITS LIMITS

English feminists' responses to the war and to the Commune specifically considered the effect on women, and there is clear evidence of an intersection between liberal, pacifist and feminist ideas. Critically, in such a context, this constituted an attempt to portray women as a 'class' uniquely affected by war.<sup>92</sup> In their responses to the war and to the Commune, the group of women journalists examined in this paper were clearly influenced by feminist causes and their identification as activists: for Butler by her campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts and in the *Englishwoman's Review* and the *Women's Suffrage Journal* by the suffrage campaign. The inseparableness of their feminist campaigns from their worldview means that opinions expressed in the feminist press often differed widely from either the generalised nationalist English view claimed by some scholars, or the alternative multiplicity of views espoused by others.

Butler also focussed on the women's peace movement as an international and not a national concern, and her engagement with the International Association of Women—and the organisation's universal declaration against the war—reflected this, in comparison to other English opinions on the war that were tied to notions of a patriarchal English national identity. Karen Offen claims that the repression of the Paris Commune, which resulted in a suppression of women's rights activism in France, contributed to the centre of women's rights campaigning moving from France to the English-speaking world in the 1870s.<sup>93</sup> This assertion to some degree neglects the complexity of feminists' international networking, which presented ways of sharing

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<sup>92</sup> In its article of May 1876, 'Women as a Class', the *Englishwoman's Review* made the claim that there was '[a] sense in which we are justified in talking of women as forming one class, whether in "the highest, the middle or the humbler ranks of life;" a sense in which women [...] do form one common class [...] The fact remains that by the law all men in England are equal and all women are inferior to them'. *Englishwoman's Review*, 13 May 1876, p.203.

<sup>93</sup> Karen M. Offen, 'Internationalizing Feminism, 1870-1890', in *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) pp.144-81 (p.144). In her work on Hubertine Auclert, Carolyn Eichner describes the development of feminism in France in the years following the suppression of the Commune through the publication of *La Citoyenne* from 1881. This, as English feminism did in the 1870s, presented an international view with a focus on sisterhood, but also from a 'first world' perspective, with imperialist convictions. C. J. Eichner, 'La Citoyenne in the World: Hubertine Auclert and Feminist Imperialism', *French Historical Studies*, 32 (2009), pp.63-84.

views on women's equality issues across borders and classes. This is illustrated by the response of the *Englishwoman's Review* to the Paris Commune, with its international focus and presentation of Commune women in a sympathetic light.

The feminist press used the opportunity to comment on the French crisis and its perceived impact on women to construct an alternative 'imagined community' claiming comment on foreign affairs as a legitimate sphere for feminists, and emphasising the existence of an international coalition of women campaigners. This was constructed by focussing on the impact of war and the French crisis on women specifically; by a focus on women across classes of society and on the claim for women as a class; and by a sympathetic portrayal of women. For Becker this meant the hypothetical women impacted by the Franco Prussian war; for Butler and her fellow campaigners, the Parisian women who were victims of prostitution and contagious diseases laws; and for the *Englishwoman's Review* this meant challenging the negative portrayal of Parisian women during the Siege of Paris and Paris Commune.

Sheila Rowbotham, in her social history of women, explored 'both what has been specific to women as a sex and the manner in which class has cut across this oppression.' She stated that 'the consequences of [male control] for women of different classes were not the same'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, this examination of English feminists' responses to the war and the Commune, reveals the absence of alternative voices, including working-class French and English women. It is evident that middle- and upper-class English feminists could not speak for all women across nations and classes, despite their intention to do so.

While some English feminists sought to establish an 'imagined community' in their interpretation of the political upheaval in France in 1870-71, for women across both class and national boundaries, the degree to which their own 'imagined community' was more or less valid than the patriarchal English nationalist imaginary they had sought to disrupt, is uncertain. Indeed, the act of using the 'imagined community' as a framework for understanding the significance of feminist journalists' responses to the war demonstrates the limits of their discourse in claiming to speak for all women across all classes and nations. However, building on the concept of a feminist 'imagined community'—rooted in Mary Tusan's work on the women's press and developing Anne

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<sup>94</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from history: 300 years of women's oppression and the fight against it* (London: Pluto Press, 1973) p.ix.

Summers' concept of hidden internationalism—analysing the commentary of the feminist press on the French crisis establishes foreign affairs as a legitimate sphere for nineteenth-century feminist discourse.



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