



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### 'Poor Little Belgium'. Food aid and the image of Belgian victimhood in the United States

Brolsma, M.; Kruizinga, S.

**DOI**

[10.5040/9781350168916.ch-004](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350168916.ch-004)

**Publication date**

2022

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

The Politics of Smallness in Modern Europe

**License**

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Brolsma, M., & Kruizinga, S. (2022). 'Poor Little Belgium'. Food aid and the image of Belgian victimhood in the United States. In S. Kruizinga (Ed.), *The Politics of Smallness in Modern Europe: Size, Identity and International Relations since 1800* (pp. 73-96). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350168916.ch-004>

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

*UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)*

# ‘Poor Little Belgium’. Food aid and the image of Belgian victimhood in the United States

Marjet Brolsma and Samuël Kruizinga

## Introduction

In early 1916, more than a year and a half after the outbreak of the Great War, the Belgian Finance Minister Aloys van de Vyvere returned to Le Havre in France, seat of his government-in-exile, from a diplomatic visit to the United States. His account of what Americans thought about Belgium revealed that two very different hetero-images of his country existed side by side in the United States. One was that of ‘brave little Belgium’, which, despite being almost completely overrun by German forces, continued fighting alongside its allies Britain and France. The other image, reported the minister, was much more pervasive. The country had assumed the role of ‘poor little Belgium’, the war’s prime victim, inspiring pity and acts of charity.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, we investigate how the second of the two hetero-images of ‘small Belgium’ came to dominate American views of the country – and thereby heavily influenced American interpretations of the First World War. In its first section, we will highlight Belgium’s important role in both Allied and German war propaganda and its impact on attitudes in the United States. The second section details the creation and evolution of war-specific hetero-images of Belgium and the ways that Belgium’s smallness was instrumentalized and propagated by the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), a charitable organization set up in October 1914 by future president Herbert Hoover to provide food aid to the Belgians – and, from 1915 onwards, the French – in German-occupied territory. The third section focuses on the complex relationship between ‘great’ America and ‘small’ Belgium that emerges from the CRB’s unending campaign for funds and goods to keep its relief operations running – along with others’ efforts supporting, in one way or another, the ‘sufferers’ of Belgium. The fourth section, finally, analyses the connection between hetero-images of Belgium and Allied propaganda, as well as the development of the hetero-image of Germany that developed, to a very large degree, in tandem with Belgium’s. This section also highlights continuities in the CRB’s and others’ depiction of Belgium (and Germany) after the United States joined the Allies as ‘co-belligerent’ in their war against the Central Powers in April 1917. By way of conclusion, we will highlight the importance

of the CRB's use of the image of 'poor little Belgium' in the cultural mobilization of the United States as first a neutral party and then a belligerent in the Great War, as well as the connections between 'smallness' and gender.

The chapter is nearly exclusively based on works published during the First World War in the United States about Belgium and/or the work of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. These sources include materials printed by or for the CRB (books, pamphlets, posters) and by or about its members (interviews, transcripts of meetings, books), materials used by other organizations engaged in some way in Belgian relief – not all of them formally or even informally associated with the CRB – propaganda materials printed in the United States both by or for the Allies and the Central Powers, and American newspaper clippings on the CRB and on occupied Belgium more generally. This chapter's authors had hoped to supplement this material with an analysis of archival materials related to the CRB, but the Covid-19 pandemic made trips to archives in the United States impossible. Despite having thus a more exploratory nature than originally envisioned, this chapter, its authors hope, will provide an impetus to debates about both Belgium and the United States during the First World War, the history of humanitarian aid and, most importantly, the political uses of 'smallness' therein.

### 'If the war has a hero, it is Belgium'

'I was reading the *New York Times*,' wrote Leon van der Essen, a Belgian professor of history in 1916 from his British exile, 'when my eye was suddenly caught by one word, "Belgium," printed at the top of a column of recent book reviews':

It was not without profound emotion and patriotic pride that I read the following passage: 'Why Belgium finds so scant a space in the war bibliographies is a question difficult to answer. Certainly, no country has aroused the popular sympathy and enthusiasm of the world to a like degree with this little kingdom, occupying a geographical area of about one-fourth the State of Pennsylvania, yet performing deeds of valour and enduring martyrdom that places it beyond all comparison in greatness. If the war has a hero, it is Belgium.'<sup>2</sup>

If Belgium was indeed the war's tragic hero, this was primarily because Allied propaganda made it so. After the German ultimatum of 2 August 1914, demanding free passage of its forces through Belgium into France, its refusal by the Belgian government and the German invasion of the country, the UK declared war on Germany, thereby turning a European conflict into a global war. As the British government cited Germany's violation of Belgium's neutrality, guaranteed by both Britain and Prussia in the 1839 Treaty of London, as its *casus belli*, Belgium quickly became a focal point in war propaganda designed to shore up support for belligerency at home and for Britain's cause abroad – in Allied and, crucially, in neutral countries.<sup>3</sup> At first, the propaganda campaign focussed on Britain as a protector of international treaty law, of order and stability, on behalf of a small state victimized by a much more powerful neighbour,

and called upon its citizens and (potential) allies to share in their moral indignation on behalf of the victims of Germany's war of aggression.<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the novelist Coulson Kernahan's stirring poem to Britain's defence of the small state which was guilty only of the crime of upholding its treaty obligations:

*Yet rather than our England cease to be  
What England is Honour's own diadem  
Rather than fail one single sword to them  
(Our word, God's arm, their surest guarantee)  
That "little," loyal race whom, near and far  
A world acclaim for glorious, deathless deed  
Rather than fail GREAT Belgium in her need  
Rather than this, in God's own name, be war!*<sup>5</sup>

To the narrative articulated here, which also handily explained how a duplicitous Germany had forced Britain into war, new layers were soon added, as Allied propaganda seized upon news both of the resistance of the Belgian fortresses of Liège to German attack and of the invaders' atrocities. Belgian resistance to German might continued to be lionized long after the Liège fortresses had fallen, the Belgian army had been driven from the bulk of its soil, and the war's western front had stabilized into two opposed systems of trenches. By slowing down the German war machine, argued Charles Saroléa, another Belgian professor-in-exile in the employ of his government, Belgium had bought the Allies time to mobilize and to stage the counterattack at the Marne in September 1914 that prevented Paris, and France, from falling: '[i]n literal fact it is Belgium which saved Europe' from the spectre of German domination.<sup>6</sup> Even more importantly, the sufferings of the Belgian population during the invasion – the execution of civilians and the burning of the university town of Louvain as retribution for the real or imagined acts of *franc-tireurs* (irregular Belgian forces), looting, murder and rape – tinged the Belgian resistance to Germans as something forged with the heroism of self-sacrifice, made all the more tragic by 'small' Belgium having never stood a chance against 'great' Germany. In *King Albert's Book*, which collected essays in praise of Belgium and its king by 'representative men and women throughout the world' (and was printed in London and New York), celebrities such as the author Robert Hitchens provide ample evidence of the enormous propagandistic benefits of 'brave little Belgium':

When war began and the German army appeared before the forts of Liège, the world said, 'This will be the end of little Belgium.' There was deep pity in all hearts, but with it was mingled a certain sense of the impotence of the tiny nation confronted by the brutal might of Germany. I heard two men in a London street discussing the question of the opening war and the tragic situation of the Belgians. One of them, with a twist of his shoulders, said, 'What on earth can they do?' The other man replied, 'The right thing, and that's what they're going to do.' The little nation had decided. The guns of Liège opened fire. "The martyrdom of Belgium," as it has been called, began. Men, women, and even children were slain. Villages and

cities were burned. Thousands were wounded; tens of thousands were rendered homeless. [...] When the first shot was fired from the forts of Liege a little nation died, but a nation that is great was born.<sup>7</sup>

The sufferings of little Belgium added the final elements to the hetero-image of Belgium that became the Allies' propagandistic trump card. Whereas the violation of Belgian neutrality was an affront to international treaty law, the violation of *Belgians*, and especially of Belgian women and children, allowed Allied propagandists to connect the intellectual case for war against Germany with a much more visceral argument. As Nicoletta Gullace has shown, images and tales of German crimes against the family, especially sexual violence against women, began to permeate the Allied public sphere. These accounts ranged from graphic images and sensationalistic stories in the British gutter press to the official *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, headed by Lord James Bryce, the former British ambassador to the United States. The Germans were invariably lumbering brutes, shown by their crimes to be beyond the pale of morality; the Allies were defenders of the small and defenceless, the weak and womanly.<sup>8</sup> In short, for the Allies, 'Belgium' was key in creating a narrative of the Great War as a conflict of good versus evil.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, German propagandists could not ignore the good use Allied propagandists made of 'poor little Belgium', as Sophie de Schaepdrijver has shown. At first, German officials highlighted how they had been driven by military necessity to attack France through Belgium; Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg even apologized for the infraction of international law during the Reichstag session of 4 August 1914, and Emperor William II sent a telegram to Woodrow Wilson that told the American president that his 'heart bleeds' for the Belgian civilians injured or killed during the invasion.<sup>10</sup> However, as the Allied propaganda machine gathered steam, the Central Powers were forced to change tack. Their propagandists disputed whether Belgium had 'really' been neutral, blamed any violence against civilians squarely on the Belgians themselves,<sup>11</sup> and even disputed Belgium's right to exist in the first place: as a state brought into being by legalities and treaties, it was nothing more than an outdated artificial construct and Germany had therefore been well within its natural rights to bring its existence to an end.<sup>12</sup>

The Allied and Central Powers voices alike reached – and were often even directed at – neutral America. But were they heard? Historians have long argued that, by and large, Americans wholeheartedly heeded Wilson's call for 'impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned' by ignoring propaganda, that their primary reaction to the war was horror and revulsion, and that the political and business case to stay out of the war was generally accepted until early 1917, when the American leadership came to the conclusion that German policies made impossible the prospect of a general peace settlement acceptable to, ideally even mediated by, the United States. More recently, historians have been more sensitive to the enormous efforts undertaken by both Allied and German agents to bombard the American population with a wide variety of opinions on the war during the period of US neutrality, but as to the effects of these campaigns, much remains unclear. In particular, significant debate still rages over whether the American government needed to cajole an essentially unwilling

'neutral' population into war in 1917 or, conversely, whether government elites had to do their utmost to calm a population excited by Allied and German war propaganda from 1914 through the US entry into the conflict in 1917.<sup>13</sup>

Historians studying the (humanitarian) aid provided by US-based or -led organizations, such as the American Red Cross and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, are to be found in the first of these two camps. These organizations and the people supporting them are nearly universally portrayed as essentially neutral – at least up to the American declaration of war on Germany on 2 April 1917 – and their response has been cast as regarding the war as akin to a natural disaster, enabling them to make sense of the scale of the destruction without sympathizing with one belligerent side over another.<sup>14</sup> These historians also suggest that neutrality magnified the American sense of exceptionalism, which spurred Americans to give freely of their resources. In doing so, American largesse in support of Europe's victimized population could be contrasted to the wastefulness of Europe's degenerate and backward kings, counts and generals engaging overseas in a self-destructive orgy of violence.<sup>15</sup>

All of this inevitably raises the question of which images of Belgium spurred Americans to support the CRB, which, from 1 November 1914 to the summer of 1919 distributed over \$927 million – equivalent in purchasing power to \$13.8 billion in 2020! – worth of foodstuffs and clothing, including 120 million bushels of breadstuffs, nearly 550 million pounds of pork, 715 million pounds of rice and 113 million pounds of dairy products.<sup>16</sup> Was American generosity from 1914 to 1917 inspired by hetero-images of Belgium influenced by Allied propaganda? If so, was America's eventual armed participation in the conflict in 1917–18 also made on behalf of 'brave little Belgium', symbol of resistance against German oppression and brutality? We will attempt to answer these questions by analysing propaganda made by or on behalf of the CRB to find out whether it echoed that of the Allies and whether its direction shifted after the United States turned from neutral to belligerent in April 1917.

### Small Belgium, great America

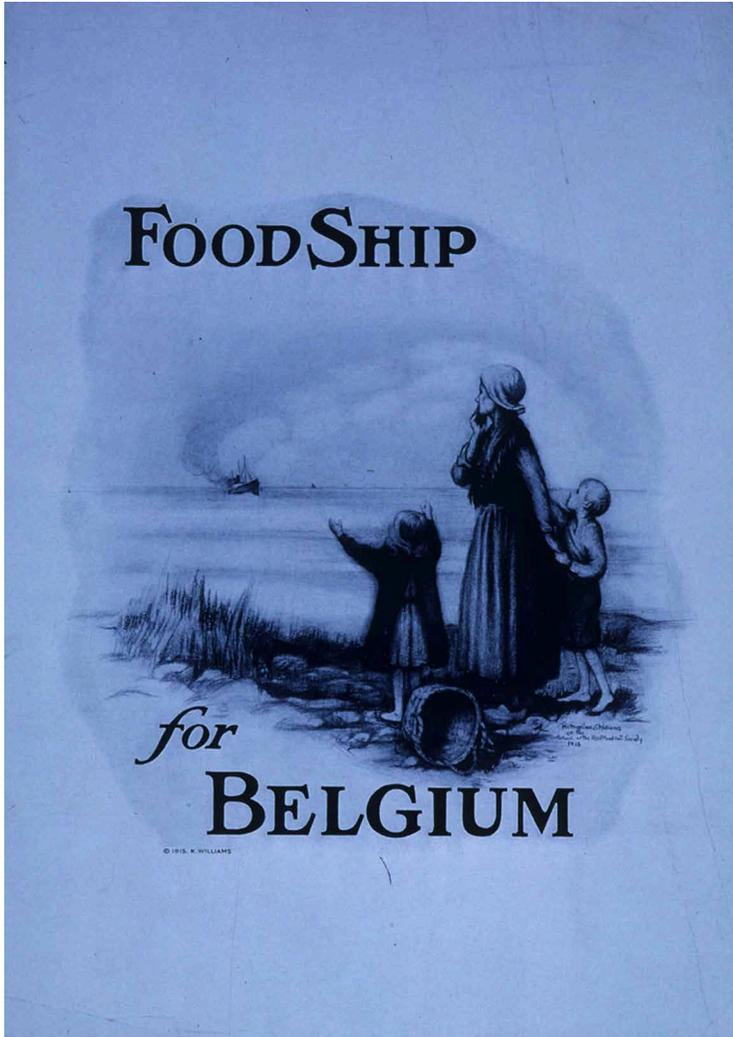
To mobilize American hearts, minds and pocketbooks, and to court business and political interests, it was of pivotal importance to the CRB to generate as much publicity as possible about poor little Belgium. The organization's press department in New York emphatically strove to keep the destitute Belgians at the forefront of the American public's mind by issuing daily press releases, organizing lecture tours and charity events, distributing posters, publishing first-hand accounts of American volunteers in occupied Belgium as well as advertisements, and producing and disseminating films – a novelty at the time.<sup>17</sup> The CRB believed that newspaper reports on its activities and the often emotionally charged advertisements placed by it or on its behalf were the most useful tools in its propagandistic arsenal, supposedly accounting for over three-quarters of the private donations made to the CBR's coffers.<sup>18</sup> Belgium's smallness, bearing affective connotations such as innocence, ingenuousness, youthfulness and noble-mindedness, was central to the CRB's publicity campaign.<sup>19</sup> Crucially, however, Belgium's smallness was also imagined in other ways and for other purposes.

First, the invocation of Belgium's smallness was instrumental in convincing Americans that the beleaguered country could be saved. It had to be crystal clear that Belgium was not a lost cause and that the money of the American donors was being well spent. Along these lines, the CRB continuously stressed that Belgium's need was grave but also localized: confined to a relatively small space and population, the dire problem could therefore be effectively addressed, provided Americans kept giving. The call for sustained expenditure was all the more important as the conflict continued past its opening phase since, in fact, the nature of Belgian relief changed quite early on in the war. In its opening stages, the CRB stressed the imminent peril of 'universal'<sup>20</sup> famine if Belgium, unable to feed itself, was not immediately supplied with emergency food aid. But after successful distribution of the first relief shipments, the spectre of immediate famine receded. Now, the organization engaged in what one might call pre-emptive relief: aid was provided to prevent Belgians from starving. The investment banker and philanthropist Frederick C. Walcott, for example, warned that 'even a momentary suspension of its activities would lead to terrible distress and misery within thirty days.'<sup>21</sup> And his colleague Alexander J. Hemphill, who had visited Belgium on behalf of the CRB, highlighted how the country had not devolved into 'chaos and unthinkable suffering' only because the CRB, in effect, had ensured its survival.

It is only after being in Brussels for a little time, and after visiting Charleroi, Malines, Antwerp. Liege and other places that one realizes how misleading are first impressions of life in Belgium as it is today. The outward appearance of normality is sustained only by the fact that relief to the value of over \$6,000,000 is, so to speak, injected into the country every month. The external calm is an amazing tribute to the efficiency of the system whereby the Relief organization provides and distributes to this whole nation the supplies without which there would be chaos and unthinkable suffering.<sup>22</sup>

Relief, then, was necessary, but why should Americans be the saviours of faraway Belgium? To answer that question, the CBR firstly emphasized that the Belgians were a people worth saving. The Woman's Section of the CRB suggested in a 1914 pamphlet that '[t]he highest aspirations and the finest achievements of the race are symbolized in this little country', which 'must be saved to the human family'.<sup>23</sup> Second, and even more importantly, the CRB sought to create an emotional connection between American (potential) donors and the Belgians under occupation by suggesting that Belgium and the United States were alike in certain important ways. This assertion of kinship lent a sense of familiarity, even of intimacy, to appeals for aid on behalf of a country a world away, on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean. In an early 1917 lecture on his experiences as a CRB 'delegate' overseeing the distribution of imported foodstuffs in the Belgian provinces of Antwerp and Limbourg, Robert Withington, for example, pointed out that America and Belgium were both youthful, modern states, suggesting that Belgium was more like the United States than like other European states, which were often portrayed as aged – venerable, yes, but old-fashioned.<sup>24</sup> And *The New York Times*, for instance, emphasized the innocence of the poor little Belgians, who 'like our own people, have sought to conquer only by the ways of peace, industry, and intellect'.<sup>25</sup>

But though related to the United States, Belgium was rarely its equal. Will Irwin, who had been one of the first American journalists in German-occupied Belgium and upon his return home had become the CRB's 'publicity manager in America,'<sup>26</sup> for example, habitually referred to Belgium as the 'stricken little sister of the world.'<sup>27</sup> That Belgium's smallness was also, and often, explicitly gendered helped cast America in the role of a big 'brother' to the 'stricken little sister', entailing a noble duty that he come to her aid and shelter her from the horrors of war.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 4.1** 'Food ship for Belgium.' CRB poster by Catharine Williams (Hoover Institution Library & Archives, XX343.26651), depicting a Belgian mother and her two children awaiting American aid. © Out of copyright.

But in CBR propaganda and the attendant newspaper coverage of the Commission's operations, a *second* hetero-image of small Belgium – one at odds with that of an advanced, modern people who were almost Americans-writ-small – came to the fore as well. This emergent hetero-image was constructed mostly to contrast the smallness of Belgium with an American auto-image of modernity, rationality and dynamism, exemplified by the CRB.<sup>29</sup> This auto-image, in turn, was created as a by-product of conscious efforts on behalf of the Commission to portray itself as no ordinary charity. Alexander Hemphill, the organization's treasurer, stressed that unlike most charitable institutions, the CRB was 'a marvel of efficiency and devotion', while CRB director Vernon Kellogg highlighted that the Commission used 'brains and heart in no less measure than commercial acumen and efficiency'.<sup>30</sup> The notion that the CRB was an endeavour halfway between a charity and a business was also exemplified, per Herbert Hoover, by its being 'perhaps the only philanthropic organization in the world which issues weekly balance sheets'.<sup>31</sup> The CRB, moreover, did everything in its power to suggest to American donors that it was not simply dumping food and other relief goods on Belgium but instead was engaged in a highly professional, targeted and scientific aid operation. It regularly issued press releases to update the media with an accounting of exactly how much money and how many shiploads of food had been sent to Belgium and how many daily meals had been provided to needy Belgians.<sup>32</sup> The New York head office heavily publicized the 'food boxes' created by its Woman's Department with the help of the chief chemist at the Department of Agriculture, Harvey Wiley, to ensure that they were tailored to the exact nutritional needs of various categories of Belgian 'destitutes' such as infants and the elderly.<sup>33</sup> Vernon Kellogg's wife Charlotte, who had toured Belgium in 1916 on behalf of the CRB, also stressed the CRB's 'ingenuity', and in her book *Women in Belgium* (1917) enthusiastically explained how the weekly menus distributed by the CRB in occupied Belgium were 'all based on scientific analysis of food values, and follow strictly physicians' instructions'.<sup>34</sup>

The CRB's depiction of itself as a uniquely rational, scientific and businesslike operation found favour with broad swathes of the American press. *The Sacramento Union*, for instance, praised the organization's 'expedition and thoroughness', while *The New York Times* celebrated its relief work as a 'giant business enterprise'.<sup>35</sup> Other newspapers, too, painted a picture of the CRB as an endeavour of experts and businessmen who, treating their highly complex relief operations like a business rather than a charity, had thereby kept administrative costs exceptionally low, were purchasing food supplies for the lowest obtainable price, and had cleverly negotiated reduced rates for ocean transportation, railroad tariffs and milling fees with American companies. *The New York Times* raved about the CRB's 'elaborate financial machinery' which ensured that bread was cheaper in Brussels than in London.<sup>36</sup> In sum, argued William C. Edgar, who had travelled through occupied Belgium, in the *Morning Press*, because of the 'efficiency, thoroughness and wisdom' of the relief operation, every penny donated to the CRB was well spent.<sup>37</sup>

These representations of the CRB as a highly effective, rationally organized, businesslike charity were often connected, by the Commission itself and by others, to the notion that it exemplified all the best qualities of America. *The Marin Journal* claimed that the great work of the CRB could never have been accomplished 'by

any, but an American commission', as those reared in 'European universities, where rigid discipline is maintained and men are taught to do what they are told could not have met with the success attained by Mr. Hoover and his associates.'<sup>38</sup> In *The Need of Belgium*, the British novelist and playwright Anthony Hope sang the praises of America's admirable qualities, manifested, he believed, in its relief efforts. The Americans were 'emphatically a business people as well as a generous people' who, when Belgium needed help, had offered their assistance with their 'characteristically national clearness, promptitude, and confidence'. The CRB's relief operation was, according to Hope, a 'national work' destined to succeed, since America, 'with her splendid power of organization controlling and directing the impulse of her charity [...] will see that no failure attends on the enterprise which has had so magnificent an inception under the auspices of the Commission for Relief in Belgium.'<sup>39</sup> Herbert Hoover, the CRB's founder, was often presented as the incarnation of these admirable national characteristics.<sup>40</sup> Hemphill praised his 'genius for organization', while Irwin described Hoover as 'the Reliever of Belgium', 'the Friend of the Hungry' and 'the biggest human phenomenon brought out of America by this war'.<sup>41</sup> This image of Hoover as the epitome of America's greatest gifts also featured prominently in the press. In early 1917, *The New York Times*, for example, classified Hoover's coordination of Belgian relief as 'perhaps the most splendid American achievement of the last two years'.<sup>42</sup> And the socialite Aimee Ernesta Drinker, a keen reader of newspapers and periodicals and wife of a journalist, noted in her diary that her countrymen considered Hoover 'the greatest American alive to-day, and they fully expect him to go home and move to the White House when the war is over'.<sup>43</sup>

The CRB's efforts to present itself as the pinnacle of American efficiency, along with its overall business ethos – in sync with an American auto-image as an eminently modern country – left little space for Belgian agency. With increasing frequency, a particular sort of hetero-image of Belgium came to serve as the CRB's counter-image: Belgium emerged as an essentially un-modern country, peopled by simple agrarians who could do little but look on in awe and gratitude as their benefactors performed near-magical feats of logistical and financial ingenuity.<sup>44</sup> This hetero-image of a small, despondent and grateful Belgium, the counterpart to great, ingenious and generous America, was at odds with reality. Far from an agricultural society, Belgium, by the early twentieth century, was a thoroughly modern, heavily urbanized and industrialized country. And during the Great War, more than one hundred thousand Belgians worked as agents for the *Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation* (National Relief and Food Committee), an aid organization founded and operated by Belgians which closely cooperated with the CRB to distribute aid.<sup>45</sup> But for the CRB, and for the American newspaper-reading public, they remained invisible. The one Belgian occasionally mentioned by name as playing an active role in the relief efforts in his country was Émile Francqui, the Comité National's director. A CRB official in Antwerp, Edward Eyre Hunt, recalled in his memoir *War Bread* (1916) that Francqui was 'a type familiar to Americans: a big-business man in the prime of life, self-made, brusque, bourgeois, sometimes intolerably rude, but always efficient'. In effect, Francqui was not *Belgian*, in the sense that he did not conform to the hetero-image of Belgians as dependent and grateful.<sup>46</sup> The other Belgians who were not simply (potential) victims

were, interestingly enough, women. Charlotte Kellogg, writing about her experiences working for the CRB in her *Women of Belgium: Turning Tragedy to Triumph* (1917), describes how the business of relief was a strictly gendered affair. Business, diplomacy and finance may have collectively been, according to Herbert Hoover's foreword, 'a man's job' – specifically an *American* man's job – but the practical business of relief – running canteens for expectant mothers, babies and orphans, distributing clothes to the poor, holding workshops to provide employment – was 'woman's work'.<sup>47</sup> *The New York Times* also highlighted how American men had 'a great white army of women' working for them in Belgium.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from the contributions of Francqui and the CRB's 'army' of anonymous Belgian women, the Belgians' chief role in CRB propaganda was increasingly to be thankful. The CRB regularly updated the American public with messages sent via post by Belgians, preferably in simple French – 'Vive la bonne Amerique,' 'Je prie Jesus pour vous'.<sup>49</sup> And American newspapers eagerly reported on the empty flour sacks that were embroidered with messages for the Belgians' American saviours that were sent back from the occupied land.<sup>50</sup> CRB official Hunt recalled in 1916:

No one knows who first planned these gifts. They seemed to spring up spontaneously in all parts of Belgium as the simplest expression of the feelings of the people. To take the sacks, emptied of their precious flour, and turn them into souvenirs for the American donors was an inspiration, and some of the results have been very beautiful. Most of them are embroidered with designs in finest needlework, and lettered "Homage to America," "Thanks to America," "Out of Gratitude to America," "Grateful Belgium to Kind America," "To the Saviour of Belgium," or in simplest Flemish or French, "Thanks." One of them shows Lady Columbia with a Belgian baby in her lap and is inscribed, "The Protecting Mother of Belgium."<sup>51</sup>

Other newspapers lapped up the story of how Belgian peasants, caps in hand, had saluted CRB automobiles driving around their occupied country flying the Stars and Stripes, as '[t]o the Belgians the American flag is the outward symbol of their relief from possible starvation and they revere it accordingly'.<sup>52</sup> In *War Bread* Hunt emphasized how being thankful and looking up to America went hand in hand. He cited the Belgians' 'marvellous vision of America', which they 'believe in as they believe in God'. Their image of America 'was a vision of a new Atlantis, rich, kind, secure from the dangers of war; a land where there is no oppression, [...] a mighty land which can afford to be generous to its neighbours, near and far'.<sup>53</sup>

As the image of Belgians as a kindred people was increasingly replaced by a conception of passive recipients at once at the mercy of America and in awe of its faraway benefactor, another aspect of the CRB's efforts on behalf of a small country increasingly came to the fore: its vision of America as a new type of Great Power. America came to Belgium's aid not only because it could but also because it *should* do so. In the words of a 1915 CRB brochure:

Who is to help, then? Neighborly Holland is doing all and more than could be asked of her; herself a small country, she can do no more. Germany,

Austria-Hungary, France, and Great Britain are all belligerent Powers; that fact sternly limits both their means and their opportunities. [...] The answer came with all the characteristically national clearness, promptitude, and confidence—"Why, America, of course!"<sup>54</sup>

America was offering its help because it was not only a great but also a *humane* power.<sup>55</sup> In fact, argued CRB officials, America was a great power *because* it was humane, and through its aid to Belgium could become even more so and in this way lead the world, not through might but by example. Hoover, in early 1917, admonished his countrymen that 'Europe is looking at us';<sup>56</sup> and in one CRB brochure potential donors were told that '[t]he Belgian relief work has greatly influenced all thinking people of Europe in our favor' and would 'have a permanent value as an advertisement of the best sort, in winning us the respect and friendship of Europe.'<sup>57</sup> American newspapers, too, reported on how the CRB relief's work had given rise to 'a devotion and admiration for this country at large which many years will not be able to wipe out.'<sup>58</sup> British propagandists also extolled America's contributions through the CRB and praised the effects it surely would have on the country's reputation and 'soft power' – no doubt keen to ensure that the CRB kept supplying Belgium, preventing its government-in-exile from having to seek a separate peace with the Central Powers. American newspapers quoted the statement of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Robert Cecil, that Hoover and his colleagues 'would leave behind them in Europe a reputation which the United States could count on as a national possession in future years', and the novelist Alfred Mason added that 'no history of this great world war can ever be written which will not add a shining laurel to the fame of the United States.'<sup>59</sup>

But precisely because the aid to Belgium was so crucial to the ascendancy of the United States as a new, moral type of Great Power, it was doubly necessary that donations kept coming in. A curious shift in strategy thus emerged in the middle of 1915. Having effusively praised the American public for its generous giving, the ongoing fundraising efforts took on a decidedly darker tone after a year of war, probably to counter growing donor fatigue. The lynchpin of this negative campaign was the notion that Americans were uniquely responsible both for the Belgians' health and for America's reputation in Europe. Were Americans to stop giving, CRB delegate Robert Withington warned, Belgians would starve and America's reputation would suffer: 'Do we want the gratitude of the Belgians to fade? Do we want them to feel that they were mistaken in the meaning of the word America?'<sup>60</sup> In one campaign the CRB juxtaposed the amount of food consumed per day by the average inhabitant of greater New York City (42 ounces) with the amount available to the destitute Belgians (only 10 ounces).<sup>61</sup> Another made explicit comparisons between donations made by Allied countries to the CRB and those by Americans – often neglecting to mention that Allied contributions often took the form of government loans rather than private donations.<sup>62</sup> And in late 1915, the Committee asked shops selling boxed lunches to include the not-so-subtle message 'You are about to eat, and the Belgians are without food'. This admonitory reminder was in keeping with the CRB's instructions to its thousands of local chapters to ask potential donors to give at the 'psychological moment when the horrors of starvation are borne in upon them'.<sup>63</sup>



**Figure 4.2** ‘Have you done your bit for Belgium?’, this CRB poster (Hoover Institution Library & Archives, XX343.26691) asks of its audience. © Out of copyright.

These peremptory, even aggressive attempts to keep up donations and thereby bolster American prestige were picked up by others, often by tapping into feelings of guilt or shame. An op-ed in *The New York Times*, for instance, asked its readers: ‘You surely don’t want it on your conscience that for lack of a few dollars’ worth of aid [...] an old man or a young girl [will] perish from want?’<sup>64</sup> And *The Auburn Daily* complained in May 1916 that the American populace had given just seven cents per capita to the CRB: ‘That, surely, is nothing to brag of. [...] Certainly our prosperity would justify our giving more than that.’<sup>65</sup> Former president Theodore Roosevelt was even harsher, using a public rally to ask his countrymen: ‘Are our souls rotten? Can we see only the dollar sign in the sky?’<sup>66</sup>

### The road to belligerency

In their studies of American humanitarian relief during the First World War, Elisabeth Piller and Brandon Little have already pointed to the CRB’s struggles to reconcile its identity as a neutral humanitarian organization with its advocacy for the cause of belligerent Belgium. Presenting itself as impartial was of pivotal importance since the CRB depended on the cooperation of the Allies and the Central Powers alike to carry out its overseas relief operation.<sup>67</sup> But while Hoover – who had to deal with German and British politicians and military leaders on a day-to-day basis – repeatedly emphasized the organization’s neutrality, many Americans engaged in local CRB-related fundraising were much less careful not to combine their support for the Belgian civilian population with the expression of pro-Allied (and anti-German) sentiments. In 1916, for example, several Los Angeles-based women’s organizations

decided to raise money for the CRB by celebrating 'Belgian Flag Day' on the birthday of King Albert, the commander-in-chief of the Belgian army.<sup>68</sup> And even the CRB's New York headquarters occasionally skirted the line between neutral relief for civilians and partisanship on behalf of Belgium's wartime allies. Its Women's Section stood under the patronage of Belgium's Queen Elisabeth, whose foreword to an official history of its activities published in 1915 took the form of a message from Belgian Army headquarters: 'The food which your Country is daily providing to our women and children comes like a ray of sunshine in the darkest hour of Belgium's history. The Belgian women have fought a brave fight for the common cause of human liberty, so dear to every American woman's heart.'<sup>69</sup> And the CRB's collaboration with various organizations collecting money for wounded Russian, French, Italian and British soldiers in organizing 'Allied Bazaars' further muddled the notion that the CRB was strictly neutral.<sup>70</sup>

Although it was never the official line, it seems that the CRB even capitalized on pro-Allied feeling by portraying its activities as being in the interests of the Allies and its relief operations as analogous to active intervention on their side in the Great War.<sup>71</sup> 'We, as Americans', a pamphlet stated in 1915, 'are enlisted for the war to save seven million men, women and children.'<sup>72</sup> *The New York Times* even described the Commission's activities in Belgium in decidedly bellicose terms as 'the first really decisive victory of the war.'<sup>73</sup> This type of language also served to contrast negative views of American neutrality as a stance not befitting a great power – associated as it was with passivity and selfishness – with a much more positive interpretation of its role with regard to the war.<sup>74</sup>

As the conflict dragged on, the notion that America had intervened on the side of the Belgian population became increasingly entangled with the reality that it was not Americans alone working tirelessly in the cause of Belgian relief. The CRB frequently noted the large financial contributions made to its coffers by Allied governments, and even Hoover himself felt it no breach of neutrality to single out 'the English people' for their donations.<sup>75</sup> Unsurprisingly, the notion that Britain and the United States were 'Allies in relief' was also articulated by British voices, who recognized that highlighting the shared burdens shouldered by America and Britain was a boon to pro-Allied propaganda. The novelist May Sinclair, for example, wrote that the United States was saving Belgium 'more surely than the armies of the Allies.'<sup>76</sup>

In addition to creating a connection between relief and a type of pro-Allied, humanitarian intervention, official CRB publications and newspaper reports on its activities increasingly began to echo Allied propaganda. In the war's opening months, American newspapers picked up the British narrative of a 'brave little Belgium' saving civilization by delaying, at horrific cost, the German advance – a testament to the efficacy of Britain's War Propaganda Bureau, colloquially known as Wellington House. Reports on the German invasion of Belgium came to be painted as a face-off between 'might' and 'right', with the Belgians depicted as a noble people whose courageous struggle had a moral significance for Europe or even human civilization as a whole. The defence of Liège, in particular, was linked to the Battle of Thermopylae, with the Belgians cast as the heroic 'Western' Greeks waging a desperate fight against a vastly superior 'Eastern' force of Persians/Prussians.<sup>77</sup> Another frequent comparison set the Belgians against America's own belligerent past; the lawyer James M. Beck, for one,

likened the courageous Belgian army to ‘the Minute Men of the American Revolution who made their stand at Lexington’ in *The New York Times*.<sup>78</sup> Such tropes were not confined merely to a section of the press. Even the CRB relief worker Frederic R. Coudert, at a March 1915 event at New York’s Carnegie Hall, assured his audience that little Belgium fought for the same principles ‘that lay at the very foundation of the [...] American Constitution’. Unsurprisingly, British propagandists attempted to play up this alleged kinship. The contribution of May Sinclair, for example, to *The Need of Belgium*, a 1915 CBR pamphlet, drew parallels connecting Belgium’s bravery, America’s vigour during its War of Independence and the ‘splendor’ of the CRB’s relief operations.<sup>79</sup>

As the hetero-image of ‘brave little Belgium’ increasingly gave way to that of ‘poor little Belgium’, American news outlets and the CRB began echoing Allied propaganda equating the violation of Belgian neutrality and sovereignty with a literal violation of the sanctity of the home, and even more specifically of Belgian women and children. The CRB used imagery of women and (occasionally weeping) children to generate a sense of emotional proximity with the occupation and to elicit empathy from its potential donors.<sup>80</sup> It did so, partly, to appeal to the members of its large Woman’s Division; by December 1914 six million American women were involved in relief work.<sup>81</sup>

The Committee also issued special brochures aimed at informing the American public about Belgian children in desperate need and organized campaigns – such as the introduction of subsidized school lunches for Belgian schoolchildren – specifically targeted to help them. Its advertisements indefatigably reminded Americans of these youngsters’ destitution.<sup>82</sup> In *The Need of Belgium*, Will Irwin describes the misery of the Belgian children in such ‘disaster-pornographic’ detail that one can almost hear the incessant crying of toddlers in dirty, worn-out clothes and of babies in desperate need of milk. Similarly, the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote that in Flanders the only sound not drowned out by the ‘thundering explosions’ emanating from the Western Front was ‘that curious, magical cry that penetrates everything – the cry of a hungry child’.<sup>83</sup>

The CRB also connected the dire situation of Belgian children and the country’s decreasing birth rate to more general fears about the future health of the Belgian nation – as opposed to that of individual Belgians. CRB official William L. Honnold, for example, argued that without American food aid, young Belgians would not be able to grow to ‘healthy maturity’.<sup>84</sup> Alexander Hemphill added that, even were they to survive the war without the CRB’s support, the sorrows they endured would have tried ‘the soul of any nation’, while Edward Eyre Hunt argued that in order to save Belgium, ‘a free and united people’ had to rise from its ‘crucified, dead, and buried’ land.<sup>85</sup> Similar ideas about the inseparable connection between the survival of the Belgian children and the survival of the Belgian nation circulated in the American press. As the Santa Barbara, California, newspaper *The Morning Press* put it: ‘The health of her children is being sapped; the future of her race imperilled.’<sup>86</sup>

Mothers, of course, also played a key role in the struggle for the survival of the Belgian ‘race’. CRB officials drew public attention time and again to either the real or the potential threat of Belgian mothers not being able to nurse their children. In an effort to get the American public to donate more, Irwin expressed indignation at the meagre food ration the CRB could supply: ‘One bun and one bowl of cabbage soup a day – for a nursing mother!’ One of his most harrowing experiences in occupied Belgium, he continues,

was the sight of Belgian women, all carrying their malnourished babies, scraping the rims of cans of condensed milk found on a trash heap behind a German camp, until they 'looked as bright as a new coin.'<sup>87</sup> In his introduction to Charlotte Kellogg's *Women of Belgium*, Herbert Hoover expressed the hope that thanks to the CRB, Belgian women would lead 'this stricken nation to greater strength and greater life.'<sup>88</sup>

Given the increasing attention paid to the miseries endured by Belgium's population and the cries of its mothers and children, it is unsurprising that these proved instrumental in conveying – implicitly and explicitly, intentionally and unintentionally – hetero-images of Germany to the American populace. Early in the war, there emerged a hetero-image of Germany as powerful but brutish, almost a counterpoint to the hetero-image of the country it had invaded. Here, once again, large sections of the American press echoed Allied propaganda casting the Germans as morally corrupt 'Huns' who, despite their impressive 'outward civilization' – evident in German advances in industry and science, along with their military strength and discipline – lacked true 'inner civilization', and therefore essentially human qualities such as humility, decency and love of others. But even though, within the CRB, neutrality and partisanship on behalf of the Allies were sometimes rather uncomfortably intertwined, the organization's officials were, at first, careful not to openly identify Germany as the culprit behind poor little Belgium's misery.<sup>89</sup> In an April 1915 *New York Times* interview, Herbert Hoover emphasized that the CRB was merely engaged in assisting the suffering Belgians and was not 'questioning the cause or the causes of this calamity.'<sup>90</sup> The CRB repeatedly stressed that although it worked for the Belgian civilian population, it maintained a friendly footing with their occupiers and occasionally even defended them in the court of public opinion, as in its public contradictions of the apparently persistent rumours that the German military had confiscated food shipments.<sup>91</sup>

The sinking of the ocean liner *Lusitania* by German submarines (U-boats) on 7 May 1915, resulting in 128 American deaths, and the (carefully timed) publication a few days later of the official British government report on German atrocities committed during their invasion of Belgium appear to have exerted a defining influence on public opinion, as Allied propaganda claiming that Germans cared little for civilian life or international law seemed to have been confirmed.<sup>92</sup> Along these lines, minor CRB officials began to openly critique Germany. In his memoirs, published in 1916, former CRB delegate Hunt suggested that Germans cared only 'for Deutschland über alles, over neutral ships and neutral nations, neutral thoughts and neutral silence.'<sup>93</sup> That same year, in the summer, CRB treasurer Hemphill warned that an 'influential German section' in occupied Belgium sought to steal the country's food supplies for its own uses.<sup>94</sup> This split between a 'good' and a 'bad' Germany – the latter comprising the governing elite – echoed, once again, Allied propaganda designed to make it easier for neutrals to denounce Germany's government or its army's practices out of supposed friendship with a hypothetical silent German majority who opposed the war.<sup>95</sup>

Anti-German sentiments within the CRB really came to the fore after the German occupational authorities decided, in October 1916, to deport Belgian civilians to work in German factories.<sup>96</sup> Hoover himself steadfastly refused to speak out against the German government – although in private he was livid<sup>97</sup> – and, when questioned by the press, simply replied that the deportations were 'too dangerous a subject to

talk about'. CRB director Vernon Kellogg, however, did just that, highlighting that Belgians working for the CRB were amongst those detained, and warned Berlin in no uncertain terms of the 'resentment and antagonism' against Germany this policy had created. In wider circles, too, the deportations seem to have galvanized Americans into demanding that their government take decisive action against Germany. A Philadelphia Committee, which included the city's mayor, for example, urged President Wilson to strongly rebuke the Germans and even to threaten them with war if the measures were not rescinded. The main argument was that a people who through food aid and other relief measures had maintained the health of the small Belgian nation – even though it was the German occupier's duty to tend to those now under their control – could not stand by and watch that nation be destroyed through forcible deportation.<sup>98</sup> American public opinion was further enraged by the German decision to resume unrestricted U-boat warfare in February 1917 – which had been paused after the destruction of American ships in 1916 – leading soon to the sinking of eight CRB relief ships and the revelation of the 'Zimmermann Telegram' in March 1917 by British intelligence, which revealed to the American public the ill-thought-out German plans to incite a war between the United States and Mexico.<sup>99</sup>

Wilson gained congressional approval for war against Germany in April 1917, having painted an American entrance into the war in idealistic terms and Berlin as an enemy to American interests and the causes of international law and peace. Afterwards, the CRB continued to supply the Belgians with food and other much-needed supplies, and although American nationals in Belgium had to be replaced by neutral Spanish and Dutch personnel, Florence Wardwell of the CRB's New York chapter estimated that 'seven-eighths' of relief work was still being performed by Americans, including 'raising the money, planning expenditures, buying food and shipping it to Rotterdam'.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, Hoover, who in August 1917 would be named 'United States Food Administrator' and given absolute authority over the production, pricing and distribution of American food, managed to convince President Wilson to supply the CRB with monthly \$12.5 million loans to buy food and other relief goods for occupied Belgium and northern France. These infusions diminished – but did not totally abolish – the CRB's need to publicly campaign for private funding.<sup>101</sup>

But as CRB officials lost their vocation as spokespersons for the commission, they gained a new calling as expert witnesses, employed in a campaign to further convince the American public of the need to go to war against the ruthless oppressors of 'poor little Belgium'. Hoover himself spoke up in early April, arguing that CRB officials, having kept their mouths shut to protect Belgian food supplies, could now freely express their opinions on Germany, 'born of our intimate experience and contact'.<sup>102</sup> Quickly thereafter, Will Irwin found employment at the Committee on Public Information (CPI), the war propaganda agency of the US government, which soon after the American entry into the war published *German War Practices*, a collection of German atrocity stories with prominent contributions from Kellogg and Hoover. Their reports of German misconduct and Belgian sufferings, which according to Hoover 'have heated my blood through the two and a half years that I have spent in work for the relief',<sup>103</sup> were presented as the reliable 'testimony of neutrals' that was 'based wholly on observations made before the United States entered the war'.<sup>104</sup>



Figure 4.3 Poster advertising the American Show Print Co. 'photo play' *Belgium: The Kingdom of Grief*, an assemblage of stills from the Western Front and occupied Belgium (Hoover Institution Library & Archives, XX343.33095). Photos and films lent additional weight to the statements of the CRB women and men who had witnessed the German occupation of Belgium first-hand. © Out of copyright.

Those CRB officials who had spent time in Europe eagerly sought to lend their first-hand observations of the sufferings of Belgian civilians and the conduct of German military and civilian authorities in Belgium in support of America's new cause. They were expert witnesses, telling the American public exactly why their country had been forced to declare war. Irwin made the case for the privileged role of the 'straight, coolheaded, reliable' American CRB delegates in his *A Reporter at Armageddon* (1918): they 'have been to the hospitals and talked with the victims; and they know'.<sup>105</sup> Next to Irwin, Vernon Kellogg might have been the most prodigious of the CRB-men-turned-war-propagandists. He went on speaking tours and published two books, *Headquarters Night* (1917) – an account of his experiences at the German army headquarters as the CRB's chief representative in Belgium – and *Fighting Starvation* (1918).<sup>106</sup> Like Irwin, he assured his readers that CRB men, after 'months of personal contact', knew 'what the German kind is'. What is more, he argued that the Commission officials who travelled to occupied Belgium did so intending to uphold the strictest impartiality, but 'came out no neutral'.<sup>107</sup> CRB delegate Arthur B. Maurice's *Bottled Up in Belgium* (1917) claimed that 'no American delegate of my time ever came out of Belgium pro-German'.<sup>108</sup> Critically, Maurice and the others who spoke, wrote or published memoirs of their time in Belgium after America entered the war cite the deportations of Belgians to German work camps ('a slavery of far more terrifying aspects than was ever imposed upon the American negro', per a hyperbolic Charlotte Kellogg)<sup>109</sup> as the straw that broke the camel's back. It provided the definitive, irrefutable proof that America's fight to save poor little Belgium, begun by the CRB in 1914, would now have to be waged on the battlefield.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

'How fortunate it was,' remarked British Foreign Secretary A. J. Balfour after the war had ended, 'for the sake of our relations with America, that we had the outrage of Belgium'.<sup>111</sup> He was right. Hetero-images of 'poor little Belgium' were instrumental in galvanizing American support first for the provision of food aid to Belgium, and ultimately for a military campaign against its occupiers. In fact, 'poor little Belgium' not only played a crucial role in the cultural mobilization of America in support of war against the Central Powers but even inspired specific war aims, in particular those of Wilson's famous 'Fourteen Points' programme for peace related to Belgium's full restoration ('No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another') and the rights of small states to 'mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity' more generally.<sup>112</sup>

This essay, however, adds three important elements to this analysis of the significance of 'Belgium' to American understandings of and engagements with the Great War. First, it highlights how the Commission for Relief in Belgium was instrumental in keeping 'Belgium' at the forefront of American consciousness from the organization's inception in late October 1914 onwards. Its relentless publicity campaign, and the enormous amount of coverage of the CRB's activities and of Belgium in general in the

American press, drove home a variety of narratives on how Americans were supposed to feel and act towards Belgium. These narratives, true, were inconsistent, sometimes even contradictory. At first, they painted Belgians as brave Americans-writ-small and Belgium an island of modernity in an archaic and violent Europe, unfairly victimized by war. But this hetero-image of Belgium was soon mostly if not wholly supplanted by a conception casting defenceless and grateful 'poor little Belgium' as reliant on a new type of moral and modern great power: the United States. Second, this chapter has shown how hetero-image of Belgium also created its Other: that of Germany as a ruthless militaristic power waging war on mothers and children. The CRB, quite contrary to its stated mission to maintain strictly impartiality, was a critical agent in disseminating the notions that America was engaged in the war on the Belgians' side assisted by the Allies and that Germany did not share the values that had inspired great America to come to small Belgium's aid. Moreover, the CRB, and influential American news outlets along with it, increasingly echoed the tropes and images first introduced in Allied propaganda.<sup>113</sup> Finally, CRB delegates' roles as expert witnesses attesting to both the misery of poor little Belgium and the brutish perfidiousness of Germany were crucial in the portrayal of America's entry into the war not as a sudden break with its neutral past but as a continuation by other means of the fight for Belgium.

Smallness was key to all of this. This chapter has shown, however, that it was not merely smallness per se that inspired admiration for a small state that did great things, elicited pity in the way a great power treated a small people or prompted Americans to think about how their greatness related to Belgium's smallness. The smallness in play here was explicitly gendered. To highlight the hetero-image of 'poor little Belgium', the CRB highlighted the plight of desperate mothers and defenceless children. In an even more explicit gendering, it portrayed Belgians increasingly as a 'female' people without agency, in need of men (the CRB representing 'big brother' America) to come to its aid. Furthermore, images of violence against weak, 'female' Belgium by a brutish, male Germany slowly turned sympathy into outrage. Gendering small Belgium was therefore instrumental in mobilizing Americans, first for humanitarian assistance and then for military intervention.

## Notes

- 1 Amara, 'La Propaganda Belge', 177–8.
- 2 Van der Essen, 'L'Opinion Publique', 126.
- 3 Bondallaz, 'Entre propagande et action humanitaire', 14.
- 4 On whether the violation of Belgian neutrality per se was the most important reason for Britain's declaration of war there is still a large measure of controversy. Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War*, 197; Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, 33–41.
- 5 Markland, *The Glory of Belgium*, 26.
- 6 Saroléa, *How Belgium Saved Europe*, 5.
- 7 Caine, *King Albert's Book*, 105–6.
- 8 Gullace, 'Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War', 714, 724–5. See also Green, 'Advertising War', 316–17.

- 9 Kunczik, 'Forgotten Roots of International Public Relations: Attempts of Germany, Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to Influence the United States during World War I', 95.
- 10 De Schaepdrijver, *De Groote Oorlog. Het Koninkrijk België Tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, 96, 136.
- 11 *The Belgian People's War*, 6–8.
- 12 De Schaepdrijver, 'Champion or Stillbirth?' 65–8; De Schaepdrijver, 'Occupation', 267–9.
- 13 For an overview of debates, see O'Brien, 'The American Press, Public, and the Reaction to the Outbreak of the First World War', 449–51.
- 14 Little, 'Humanitarian Relief'; Irwin, 'The Disaster of War: American Understandings of Catastrophe, Conflict and Relief'; Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover. The Humanitarian, 1914–1917*, 362–5.
- 15 Piller, 'American War Relief', 621–2; Keene, 'Americans Respond', 266–8.
- 16 Ellerman, 'Starvation Blockade', 62.
- 17 Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Documents, Vol. II*, 246; Little, 'Humanitarian Mobilization', 135; Little, 'Band of Crusaders', 338.
- 18 *Los Angeles Herald* 31 March 1915, 'Belgian Relief Fund Exceeds Million Mark'
- 19 See e.g. Archer, *Belgian Relief Cook Book*, 10.
- 20 Bennett, 'Prodigious Problem', 9.
- 21 *New York Times* 22 January 1916, 'Belgian Food Shortage'.
- 22 Hemphill, *Belgium under the Surface*.
- 23 *New York Times* 13 November 1914, 'The Women's Section of the American Commission for Relief in Belgium'.
- 24 Withington, *That These May Eat*, 3.
- 25 *New York Times* 19 December 1914, 'Starving Rioters Killed in Belgium'.
- 26 Wagner, *America and the Great War*, 51.
- 27 *Colusa Sun* 13 January 1915, 'Uncle Sam Offers All Americans a Chance to Feed Starving Belgium'; *New York Times* 5 December 1914, 'Say Only America Can Save Belgians'.
- 28 Herbert Hoover used a related metaphor and proclaimed that the Belgian people had to be preserved, as they had been made 'wards of the world through the exigency of warfare' and were completely dependent on the benevolence of their appointed guardians. In: *New York Times* 18 April 1915, 'How Belgians Get Bread'.
- 29 *Morning Press* 12 January 1915, 'We're Ishmael of Europe, Says Belgian'.
- 30 Hemphill, *Belgium under the Surface*; Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation*, 179.
- 31 *The Morning Post* 3 January 1915, 'Belgian Relief Work Described By H.C. Hoover'.
- 32 See for example: *Colusa Daily Sun* 2 February 1915, 'Belgium Relief Must Continue until Summer'; *New York Times* 12 September 1915, '\$80,000,000 Spent for Belgian Relief'; *New York Times* 18 September 1916, '\$1,000,000 a Month Asked for War Aid'; *New York Times* 7 November 1914, '400,000 Meals a Day Given to Brussels'.
- 33 *Sacramento Union* 1 December 1914, 'Million Belgian Babies to Be Fed with Wiley Food'; *Madera Mercury* 14 May 1915, 'Dr. Wiley Prepares an Ideal Food Box for Starving Belgium'.
- 34 Kellogg, *Women of Belgium*, 35.
- 35 *New York Times* 13 January 1915, 'Belgian Relief Line Now Runs 31 Ships'.
- 36 *New York Times* 17 May 1915, 'Aiding Belgians on Business Basis'.
- 37 *Morning Press* 9 May 1915, 'Relief Effort for Belgians Approved'.
- 38 *Marin Journal* 11 March 1916, 'Preparedness and the European War'.

- 39 Hope, 'The Fleet of Mercy', 19, 21–2.
- 40 Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover. The Humanitarian, 1914–1917*, 366–7.
- 41 Hemphill, *Belgium under the Surface*; Irwin, *A Reporter at Armageddon*, 4.
- 42 *New York Times* 31 January 1917, 'Why Mr. Hoover Was Ashamed'.
- 43 Drinker Bullit, *Uncensored Diary*, 120–1.
- 44 For example: *Morning Press* 12 January 1915, 'We're Ishmael of Europe, Says Belgian'; *Morning Press* 9 May 1916, 'Germany Blights Belgium'.
- 45 See Van Bosstraeten, *Bezets maar beschermd*, 47–49; De Schaepdrijver, *De Grootte Oorlog. Het Koninkrijk België Tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, 14, 115–18.
- 46 Eyre Hunt, *War Bread*, 272.
- 47 Kellogg, *Women of Belgium*, xiii. and xiv–xvi.
- 48 *New York Times* 14 January 1917, 'What the Women of Belgium Are Doing to Help'.
- 49 *New York Times* 28 March 1915, 'Belgian Children Cry Thanks, Thanks'.
- 50 For example: *New York Times* 17 October 1915, 'Belgians Decorate Empty Flour Bags'; *Stockton Independent* 5 August 1916, 'Flour Sack Sent As Gift'.
- 51 Eyre Hunt, *War Bread*, 229.
- 52 Cited in: *Sacramento Union* 28 February 1915, 'Belgian Peasants Glad to Salute Stars and Stripes'. See also *Los Angeles Herald* 27 February 1915, 'Belgians Moved to Cheers and Tears at American Philanthropy'.
- 53 Eyre Hunt, *War Bread*, 321.
- 54 Hope, 'The Fleet of Mercy', 19.
- 55 Galsworthy, 'To the Rescue - AMERICA!', 15.
- 56 *Morning Post* 14 March 1917, 'War or No War, America Must Feed Belgians, Says Hoover'.
- 57 *Belgium's Need*.
- 58 *New York Times* 8 April 1917, 'Last Man Out Tells of Belgian Relief'.
- 59 *Sacramento Union* 15 February 1917, 'Hoover Praised by Lord Cecil'; Mason, 'The Fleet of Mercy', 23.
- 60 *History of the Woman's Section*, 6.
- 61 Withington, *That These May Eat*, 7.
- 62 See for example: *The Children's Plight*; *Auburn Daily Journal* 8 January 1916, 'Embarrassing Gratitude'; *Belgium's Need*; Withington, *That These May Eat*, 3, 5; *Meeting to Protest against Deportation*, 23.
- 63 *History of the Woman's Section*, 16.
- 64 *New York Times* 17 January 1916, 'The Kingdom of Grief'; *New York Times* 30 July 1916, 'Is America Generous? A War Relief Analysis'.
- 65 *Auburn Daily Journal* 27 May 1916, 'Seven Cents for Belgium'. Other examples in: Withington, *That These May Eat*, 7; *New York Times* 10 September 1916, 'Belgium Needs More Funds'.
- 66 *New York Times* 15 March 1917, 'Roosevelt Appeals for the Hoover Fund'.
- 67 Piller, 'To Aid the Fatherland. German-Americans, Transatlantic Relief Work and American Neutrality, 1914–17', 198; Little, 'Band of Crusaders', 341.
- 68 *Sacramento Union* 4 April 1916, 'Next Saturday Is Belgian Flag Day'; *Los Angeles Herald* 7 April 1916, 'To Sell Flags for King'; *Los Angeles Herald* 8 April 1916, 'Sell Belgian Flags Despite Protest'.
- 69 *History of the Woman's Section*, 2.
- 70 *New York Times* 30 April 1916, 'Great Bazaar for Allies'; *New York Times* 31 May 1916, 'The Allied Bazaar'; *New York Times* 18 November 1916, 'Allied Bazaar Gave \$477,475 for Relief'.

- 71 Piller, 'American War Relief', 621–2; Westerman, 'Rough and Ready Relief. American Identity, Humanitarian Experience, and the Commission for Relief in Belgium, 1914–1917', 4.
- 72 'An Appeal to Americans.'
- 73 *New York Times* 25 April 1915, 'America's Victory War's Greatest.'
- 74 Piller, 'American War Relief', 623.
- 75 *New York Times* 5 May 1916, 'Asquith Praises Our Belgian Relief.'
- 76 Sinclair, 'America's Part', 5.
- 77 De Schaepdrijver, 'Liège 1914 et l'opinion Publique Américaine.'
- 78 *New York Times* 18 March 1915, 'Restore Belgium, Choate Demands.'
- 79 Sinclair, 'America's Part', 5.
- 80 The same imagery was used by a number of other aid organizations focused primarily on Belgian children, such as the Belgian Baby Club, the Dollar Christmas Fund for Destitute Belgian Children and the Overseas Club to Aid Belgian Babies.
- 81 Little, *Band of Crusaders*, 332.
- 82 *The Children's Plight*; Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation*, 169. Madera Tribune 30 September 1916, 'Effort to Save Belgian Children'; Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation*, 169.
- 83 Irwin, 'Babes of Belgium', 10, 14; Shaw, 'The Case of Belgium', 27–8.
- 84 *The Children's Plight*. See also: San Diego Union and Daily Bee 25 September 1916, 'Belgian Children Must Have More Food, Ask Funds'.
- 85 Hemphill, *Belgium under the Surface*; Eyre Hunt, *War Bread*, 325.
- 86 *Morning Press* 23 December 1916, 'Christmas Offering of Overseas Club to Aid Belgian Babies'.
- 87 *The Children's Plight*; Kellogg, *Women of Belgium*, x–xi; Irwin, 'Babes of Belgium', 11–14.
- 88 Kellogg, *Women of Belgium*, xiv, 207.
- 89 Irwin, 'The Disaster of War: American Understandings of Catastrophe, Conflict and Relief', 22. Julia F. Irwin., 'The Disaster of War: American Understandings of Catastrophe, Conflict, and Relief', *First World War Studies* (2014), 22.
- 90 *New York Times* 18 April 1915, 'How Belgians Get Bread'.
- 91 *New York Times* 19 December 1914, 'Starving Rioters Killed in Belgium'; *The Morning Post* 3 January 1915, 'Belgian Relief Work Described By H.C. Hoover'; *Sacramento Union* 2 March 1915, 'Hoover Praises German Action'.
- 92 Piller, 'To Aid the Fatherland. German-Americans, Transatlantic Relief Work and American Neutrality, 1914–17', 203; Flemming, *The Illusion of Victory. America in World War I*, 53–6; Trommler, 'The Lusitania Effect: America's Mobilization against Germany in World War I', 243–4.
- 93 Eyre Hunt, *War Bread*, 4, see also 3 and 166. In the CRB publication *The Need of Belgium* (1915), the British author Anthony Hope openly blamed the Germans for the starvation in occupied Belgium: Hope, 'The Fleet of Mercy', 23–4.
- 94 *New York Times* 10 July 1915, 'Report That Germans Block Belgian Relief'; *Sacramento Union* 10 July 1915, 'Food Withheld from Belgians'; *New York Times* 14 May 1916, 'Belgians Forced to Eat Dogs, London Hears: Famine Reported after Loss of Relief Ship'; *New York Times* 22 July 1916, 'Germans Put Down Belgian Food Riots'.
- 95 *Sacramento Union* 24 July 1916, 'Relief Work in Belgium Viewed'; *San Diego Union and Daily Bee* 27 August 1916, 'Germans Differ Regarding Plans to Aid Belgians'.
- 96 Thiel, *Menschenbassin Belgien*, 124–6, 159.
- 97 Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover. The Humanitarian, 1914–1917*, 309.

- 98 *Meeting to Protest Against Deportation.*
- 99 Kruizinga, 'Neutrality', 549–52.
- 100 *New York Times* 27 March 1917, 'Appeal to Keep Up Aid for Belgians'.
- 101 Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover. Master of Emergencies, 1917–1918*, 27–44.
- 102 *San Diego Union and Daily Bee* 4 April 1917, 'Hoover Applauds Wilson's Address'.
- 103 Munro, Sellery, and Krey, *German War Practices*, 81, 91–4.
- 104 Munro, Sellery, and Krey, 26.
- 105 Irwin, *A Reporter at Armageddon*, 59.
- 106 Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation*, 8, 168; Kellogg, *Headquarters Nights*, 22, 40, 84–5, 97, 102. Cf. *New York Times* 6 May 1917, 'Belgium's Need Is Growing'.
- 107 Kellogg, *Fighting Starvation*, 8; Kellogg, *Headquarters Nights*, 55.
- 108 Maurice, *Bottled Up in Belgium*, 132–3.
- 109 *Sacramento Union* 16 October 1917, 'Belgium's Woes Are Told Again'.
- 110 *San Diego Union and Daily Bee* 22 April 1917, 'German Atrocities in Belgium Exposed by Whitlock'; *New York Times* 9 April 1917, 'Belgium "Terror" As Official Saw It'; *New York Times* 19 April 1917, 'Whitlock Made Germans Yield'; *New York Times* 8 July 1917, 'Belgium Unbeaten by Boche Brutality'; *Sacramento Union* 16 July 1917, 'Pluck of Bleeding Belgium Vividly Depicted by Gray'.
- 111 Cited in Amara, 'La Propaganda Belge', 176.
- 112 Piller, 'American War Relief', 623; Little, 'Band of Crusaders', 359. Citations from Woodrow Wilson, 'An Address to a Joint Session of Congress', 8 January 1918, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press / Rotunda, 2017), <https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/WILS-01-45-02-0508>. Last accessed 12 August 2020.
- 113 Obviously, not all American newspapers uniformly portrayed Belgium and the CRB in their press coverage, and certain sections of the American populace – German-Americans, for instance – were probably unmoved. See e.g. Wittke, *German-Americans and the World War*, 17–19; Horne and Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914*, 249–55; Piller, 'To Aid the Fatherland. German-Americans, Transatlantic Relief Work and American Neutrality, 1914–17', 205.

