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## Feminism: a useful category of historical analysis?

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Marc Calvini-Lefebvre. Feminism: a useful category of historical analysis?: A case study of the British Suffrage Movement's Responses to the Great War. Remembering Women's Suffrage Struggles in the Transatlantic World: Comparative Perspectives from Britain and the USA, Anne STEFANI; Rachel ROGERS VOUILLOUX, Dec 2022, Toulouse, France. hal-03940228

**HAL Id: hal-03940228**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03940228>**

Submitted on 16 Jan 2023

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"Britannia," October 15, 1915.

FOR KING · FOR COUNTRY · FOR FREEDOM

# Britannia

With which is incorporated  
"THE SUFFRAGETTE"

Official Organ of the Women's Society  
and Political

Edited by CHRISTABEL PANKHURST

No. 1. Vol. V.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1915

Price 1d.

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.

## The War Paper for Women

# VOTES FOR WOMEN

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE UNITED SUFFRAGISTS

(Third Ser. s), No. 356.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 1915.

Price 1d. Weekly (Post Free)

## HERALD OF THE NEW YEAR

Feminism: a useful  
category of historical  
analysis?

A case study of the British Suffrage  
Movement's Responses to the Great  
War





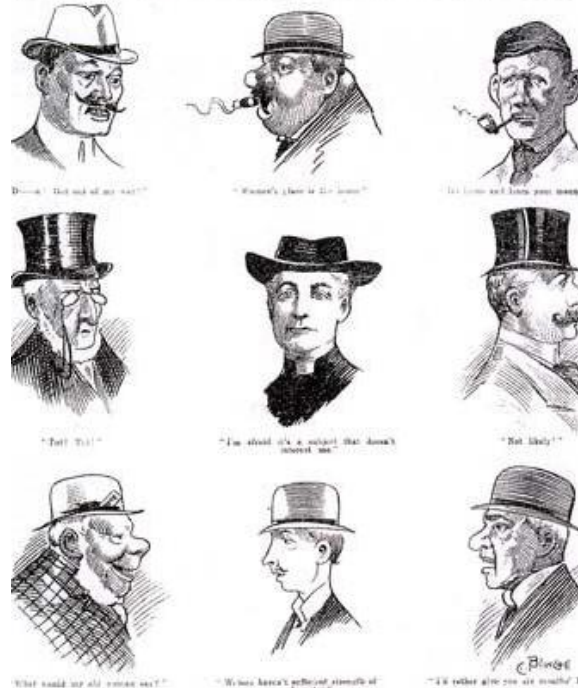
# NATIONAL UNION OF WOMENS SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES

THE NUWSS CONSISTS OF 449 SOCIETIES  
UNITED INTO 16 FEDERATIONS  
THE LONDON SOCIETY & UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S SOCIETIES.

## The Common Cause

The Organ of the Women's Movement for Reform.

Vol. I. No. 48. Registered at 2, Newman Street, London, W.1. FEBRUARY 8, 1910. ONE PENNY



Some types of Electors who did NOT sign the Petition, drawn from the description of a woman in charge of a Polling Station.

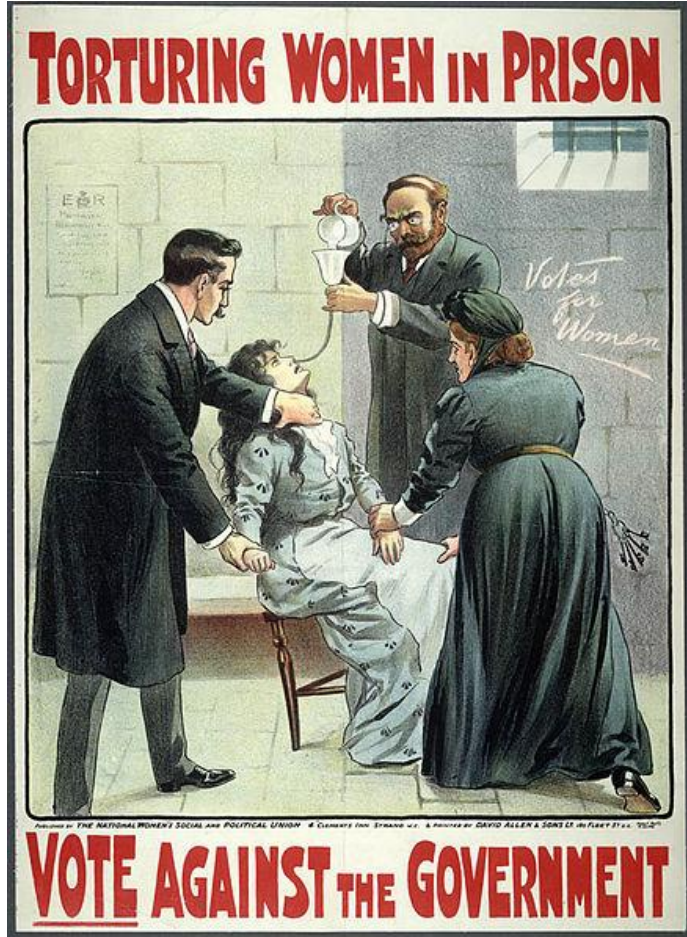




# The Suffragette

EDITED BY CHRISTABEL PANKHURST.  
The Official Organ of the Women's Social and Political Union.  
No. 14. VOL. 7. FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 1913. Price 1d. Weekly (7/12)

VOTES FOR WORKING WOMEN



# BRITONS



"WANTS  
**YOU**"

**JOIN YOUR COUNTRY'S ARMY!**  
**GOD SAVE THE KING**

Reproduced by permission of LONDON OPINION

WOMEN OF BRITAIN  
SAY -  
**GO!**



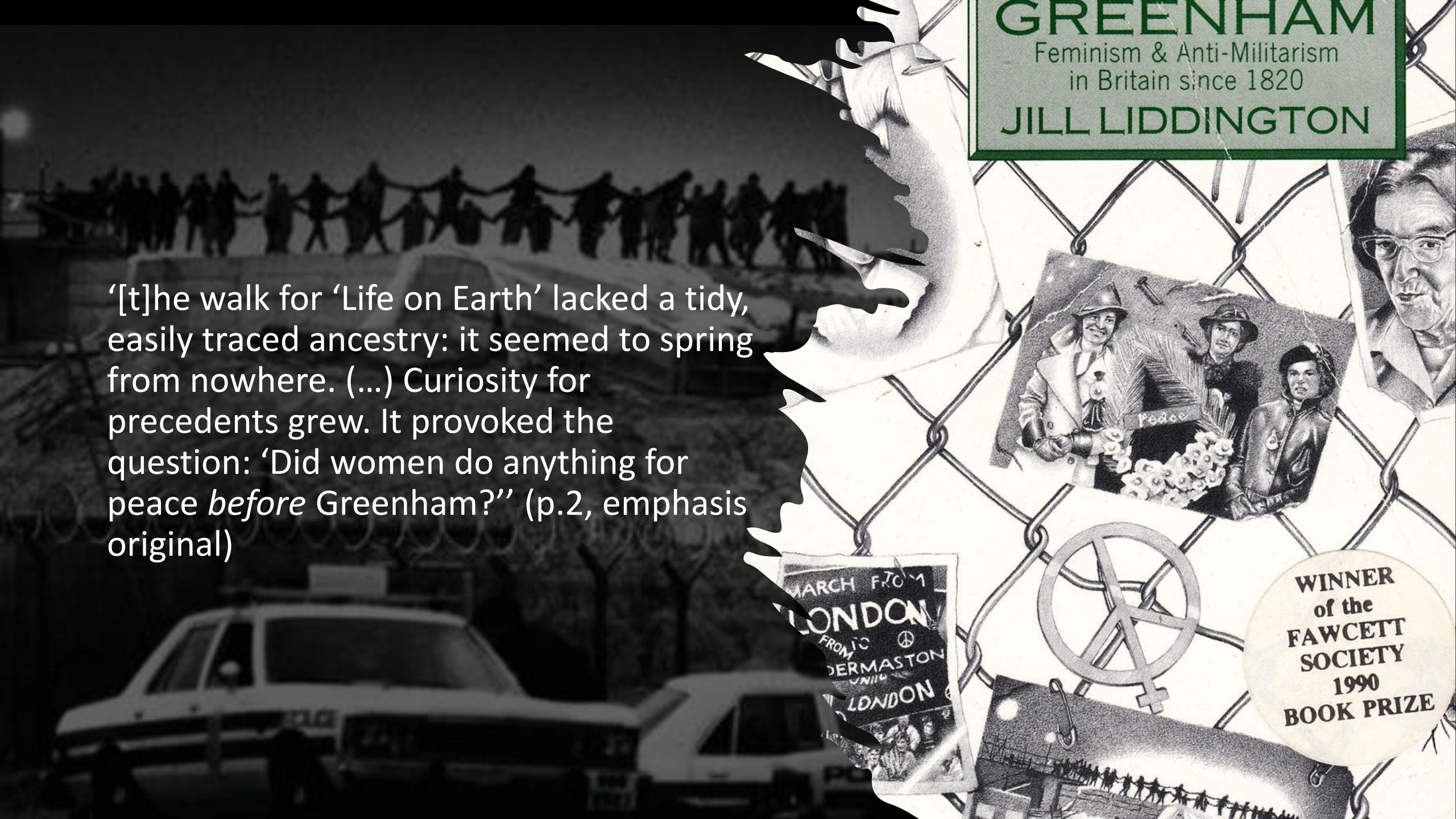


# GREENHAM

Feminism & Anti-Militarism  
in Britain since 1820

JILL LIDDINGTON

‘[t]he walk for ‘Life on Earth’ lacked a tidy, easily traced ancestry: it seemed to spring from nowhere. (...) Curiosity for precedents grew. It provoked the question: ‘Did women do anything for peace *before* Greenham?’” (p.2, emphasis original)



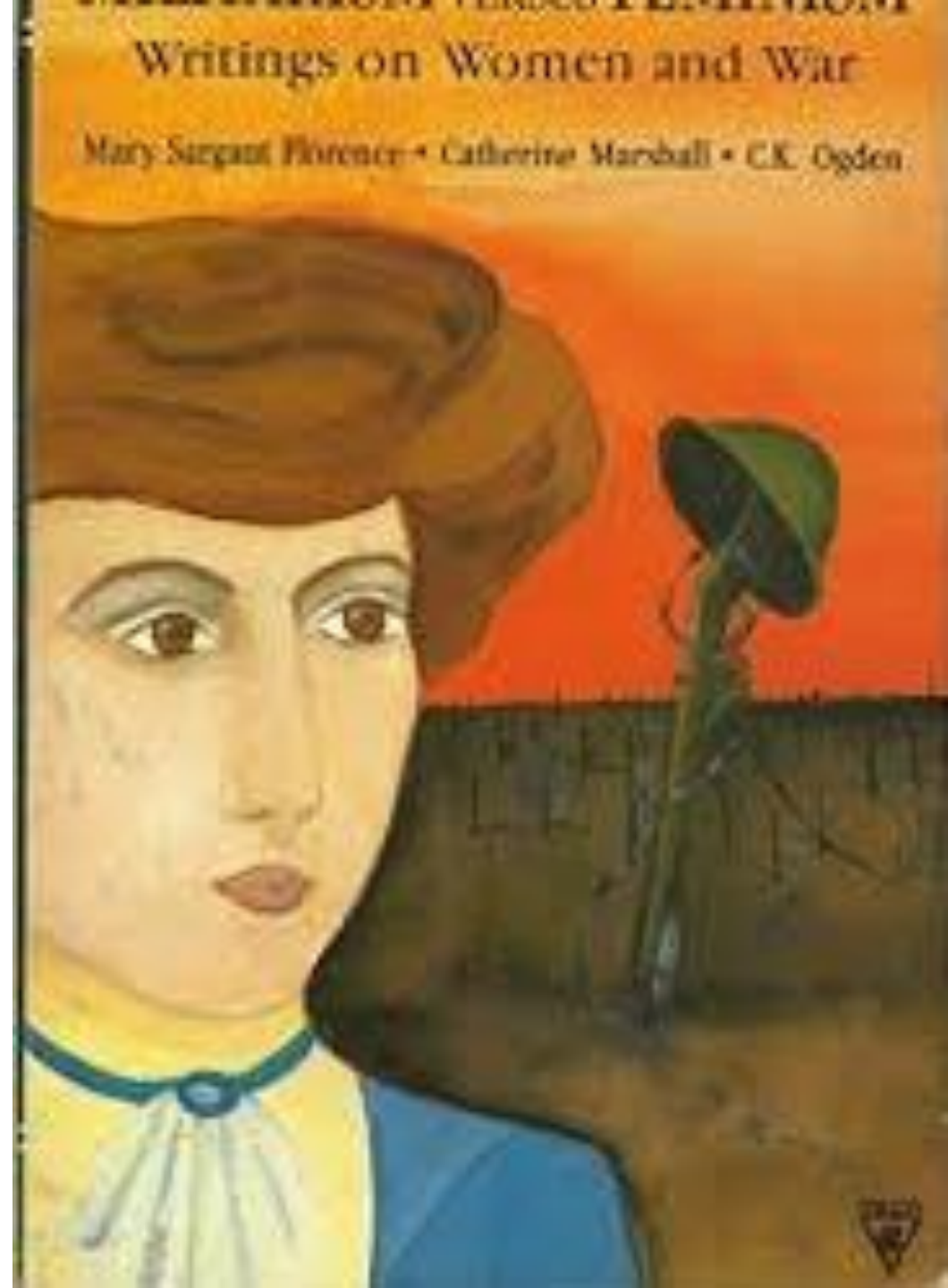


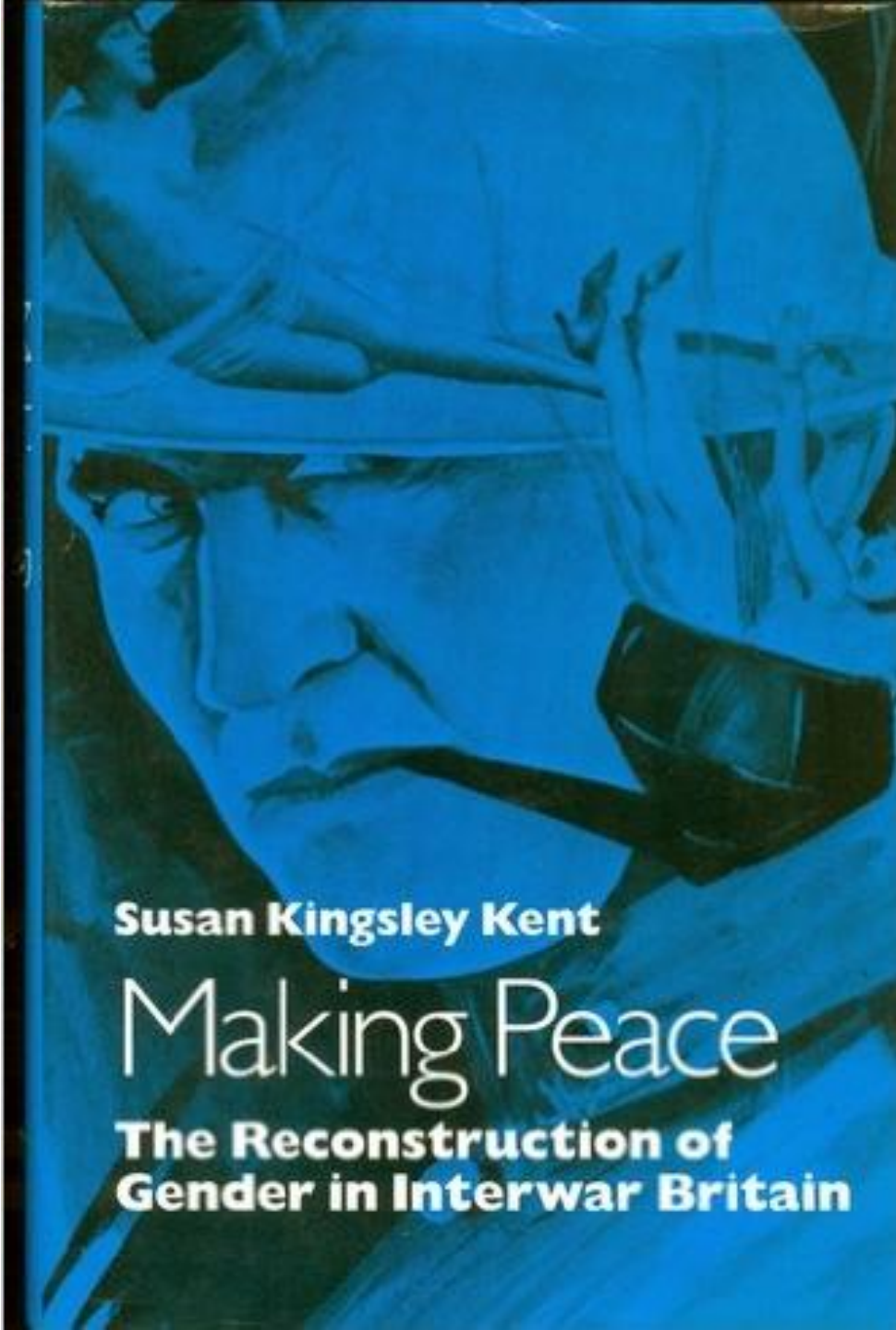
*Women's Peace  
Congress, The  
Hague, April-May  
1915*



# Jo Vellacott

- The Hague Congress marks a decisive moment in the British suffrage movement's history: the moment at which the feminists (who wanted the vote to **change** the political system) broke with the conservatives (who wanted the vote to "be admitted to the existing male political system, **unchanged**")
- The first group produced "a sophisticated feminist view of the war", while the other **conformed** to the roles expected of women in wartime
- Feminist memory should therefore place much greater emphasis on women such as Catherine Marshall, Helena Swanwick or Maude Royden, and much less on figures such as Fawcett and the Pankhursts





# Susan Kent

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- “the activities and ideas that we as historians identify as feminist at any given time (...) are contingent on the discourses that construct “women” and on the discourses of resistance that feminists produced in their challenge to society”
- Dominant discourse constructing women: “separate spheres” (men fight/women care)
- The pacifists called on women to oppose the war as “mothers of the race” = not feminism
- The patriots refused to do “care work” and openly declared their readiness to fight in the trenches if necessary = feminism



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Marc Calvini-  
Lefebvre

CLARE HEMMINGS

# “Affective attachments”

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- Three narrative but one grammar: ‘the affects of despair and hope, resentment and passion, are the motors of the narratives of progress, loss and return. They presume a shared affective state’ between the author and her readers
- Processes of Identification/Alienation
- ‘[s]o many fine things were said so long ago; it is shocking that they disappeared for so many years, but now it is a delight and a privilege to play a small role in the rebirth, relishing the sense which we are regaining of **connectedness and hope**’ (Kamester and Vellacott, 1987: 2).
- Susan Kingsley KENT, “The politics of sexual difference: World War I and the **demise** of British feminism”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 27, Issue 3, July 1988, pp. 232-253

WHY STORIES MATTER

The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory

# Consequences

- For suffrage history: a useless category
  - a polarised historiography mirroring the imagined polarisation of the past
  - more heat than light
- For feminist memory: an ambiguous relation to the "Anti-War Suffragists"
  - Catherine Marshall, Helena Swanwick, Maude Royden all figure on the plinth of the Fawcett statue
  - But contemporary feminist anti-militarists do not so much as gesture towards them



A modest proposal: a turn towards  
students of ideology

# The “morphological” approach

- Ideologies are “maps” of concepts which help us navigate the world by
- Every ideology has a core/periphery structure
- The job of the analyst is twofold:
  - Identify the core
  - Map the diversity resulting from the association of that core with different peripheral concepts

# IDEOLOGIES AND POLITICAL THEORY

A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Michael Freeden



PERSPECTIVES ON FEMINIST  
POLITICAL THOUGHT IN  
EUROPEAN HISTORY

From the Middle Ages to the Present

Edited by  
TJITSKE AKKERMAN and SIEP STUURMAN



# Intellectual history

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"We distinguish three core components in feminist discourse:

- Criticism of misogyny
- The conviction that women's condition is not an immutable fact of nature and can be changed for the better
- A sense of gender group identity, the conscious will to speak 'on behalf of women', or 'to defend the female sex', usually **aiming** to enlarge the sphere of action open to women"

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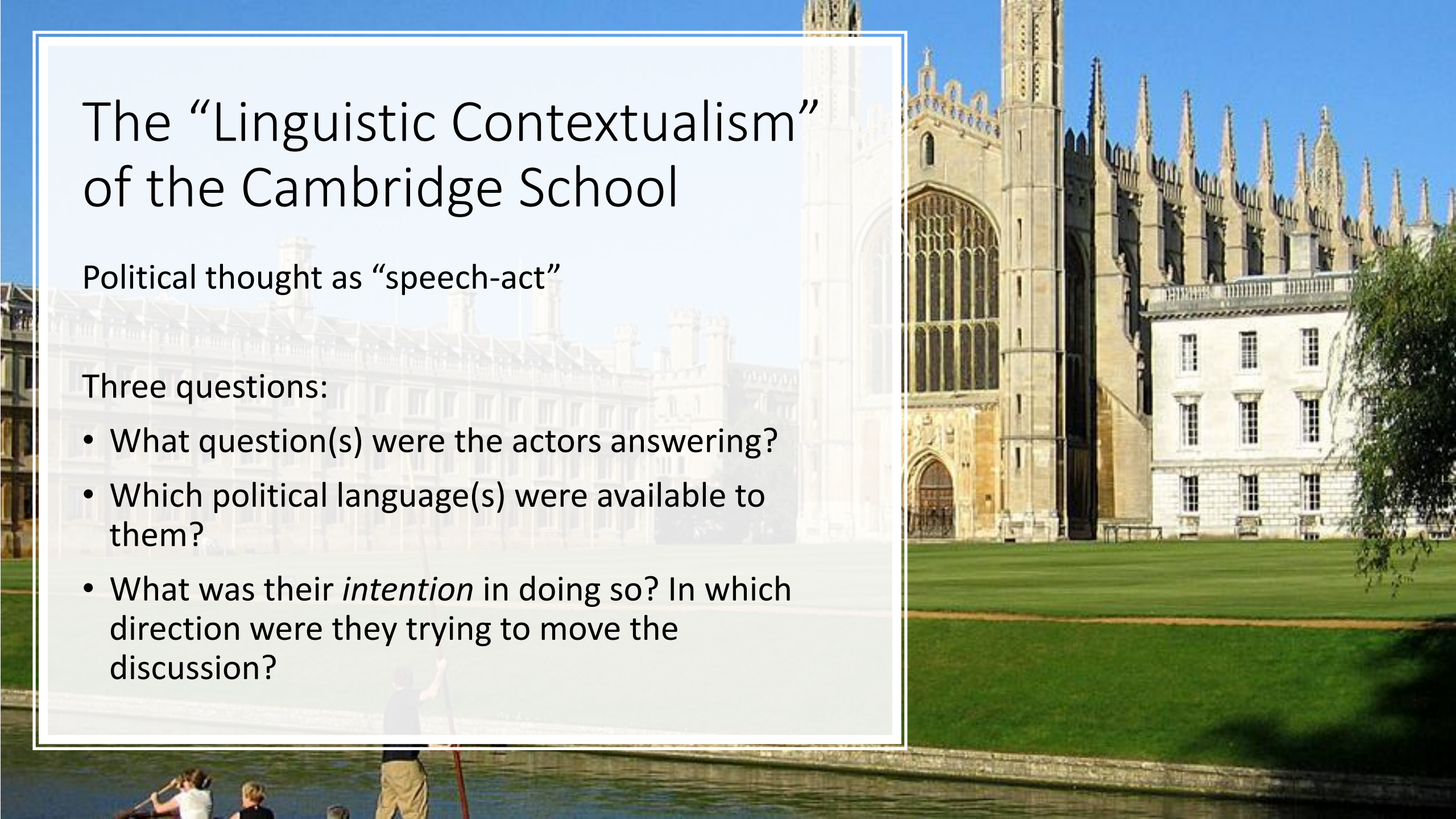
*"esprit de finesse"* (gulp)

# The “Linguistic Contextualism” of the Cambridge School

Political thought as “speech-act”

Three questions:

- What question(s) were the actors answering?
- Which political language(s) were available to them?
- What was their *intention* in doing so? In which direction were they trying to move the discussion?



Published on 21st 11th 1910

**The War Paper for Women**

**VOTES FOR WOMEN**

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE SUFFRAGISTS

Vol. 11, No. 49, FRIDAY, JANUARY 14, 1910. Price 1d. Weekly

**A VOTE! FOR THE CHILD'S SAKE**

EDITORIAL: "What's the use of suffragettes if they don't vote for the women who they want to vote?"

**The Common Cause.**

The Organ of the Women's Movement for Reform.

Vol. I, No. 49, FEBRUARY 4, 1910. ONE PENNY.

Some types of Electors who did NOT sign the Petition, drawn from the description of a woman in charge of a Polling Station.

**THE WOMAN'S DREADNOUGHT**

Published by the WORKERS' SUFFRAGE FEDERATION

Vol. IV—No. 12 SATURDAY, JUNE 10th, 1912. Price One Penny

**THE CHOICE OF DELEGATES TO PETROGRAD**

**MILITARISM**

**THE ELECTORAL REFORM BILL IN PARLIAMENT**

**OUR GREAT PUSH**

EUROPE

**WOMEN VOLUNTEER POLICE.**

**THE VOTE**

THE ORGAN OF THE WOMEN'S FREEDOM LEAGUE

Vol. X, No. 224. Published on the 21st 11th 1910. FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 1910.

Edited by C. DESPARD.

**PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.**

**OUR POINT OF VIEW.**

**THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE.**

**AR & GENERAL INSURE YOUR CAR**

Published on 17th 1st 1913

**The Suffragette**

BY CHRISTABEL PANKHURST.

The Official Organ of the Women's Social and Political Union.

No. 14—VOL. 1. FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, 1913. Price 1d. Weekly

**VOTES FOR WORKING WOMEN**

"Her children shall rise up and call her blessed."

My corpus: the suffrage press

# The linguistic context

- One question for suffragists: “how should women respond to the war *as women?*”
- Emerging from two society-wide debates:
  - What should women’s role in *this* war be?  
Hegemonic ideological language: separate spheres – adapted to the war context
  - Was the UK’s decision to enter the war justified?  
Hegemonic ideological language: xenophobic patriotism
- Result: not 2 answers, but (at least) 4, articulated around 4 different identities

# As “patriots”

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- 16 April 1915 (month of the Hague conference): ‘In the present national crisis, our appeal is to the **patriotism** of women’ - *The Suffragette*
- 8 October 1915: *The Suffragette* became *Britannia* and adopted the strapline: “For King, For Country, For Freedom”
- Reason? “The problem with Germany is that it is an “over-sexed, that is to say over-masculine nation” Emmeline Pankhurst, 23 April 1915
- Strategy? Maximise the opportunities presented by the temporary alliance of separate spheres ideas with xenophobic patriotism (“comparative patriotism” N. Gullace)

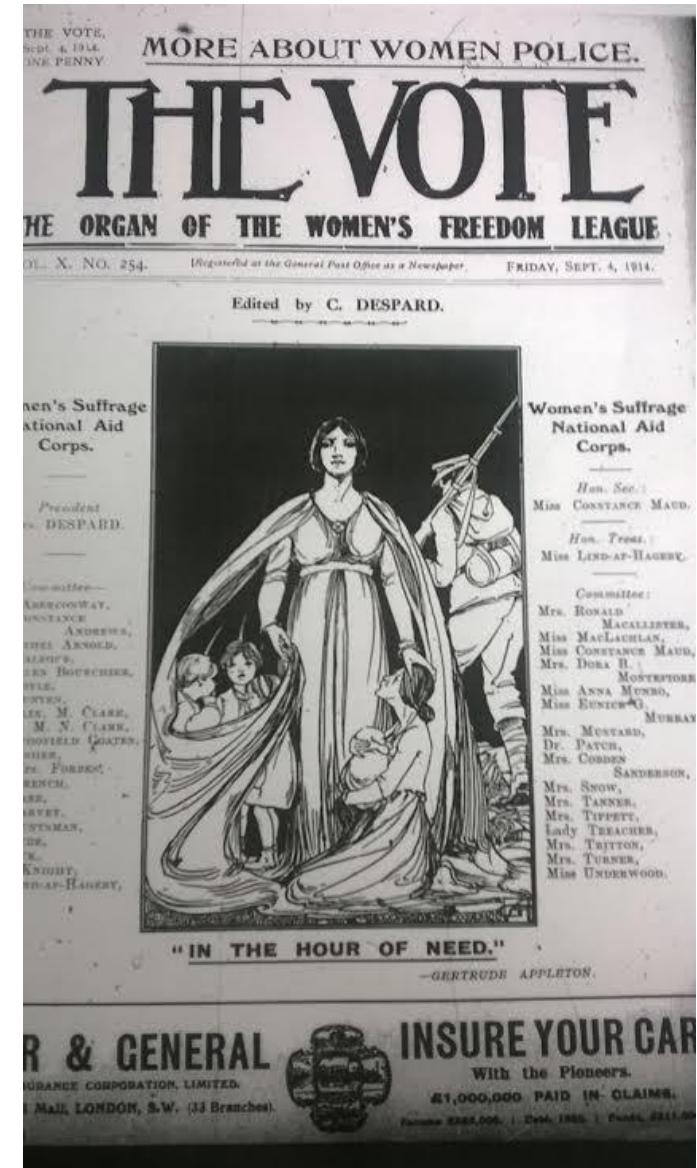


# The “Bellairs incident”: a case of “right-wing feminism”?

- Context: parliamentary debates over extension of the franchise to all men (and women?)
- Emmeline Pankhurst asked Commander Bellairs to announce to the House of Commons that British women would prefer NOT to have the vote if this would allow ALL soldiers to have the vote
- Nicoletta Gullace: typical theatrics of “right-wing feminism”
- A different possibility: nationalism is a cannibalistic political language

# As citizens

- "Let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship, whether our claim to it be recognized or not" – Millicent Fawcett
- Argument:
  - In war, whatever its merits, the citizens of a nation must remain united to survive
  - Citizenship has 2 faces, one male, one female
  - Men's citizenship involves fighting, women's citizenship involves caring (for mothers, soldiers, refugees, "alien enemies", children...)
- Strategy: neutralisation of separate spheres by accepting its premise but rejecting its hierarchy



# Overriding aim: keep the sexed nation united

Hence a critique of those who threatened the idea of a united nation

- Patriots: "I do not think it is the function of men or women to lecture each other on the special duties of the opposite sex. These duties are **sufficiently obvious**" Millicent Fawcett
- Pacifists: were encouraged to put their energy into "relief work" and an "education campaign" to avoid future wars. Those who attended the Hague were denounced as "traitorous"

And of the patriotic press, which kept excluding women from the national community (soldiers' wives, prostitutes, "khaki fever", etc...)



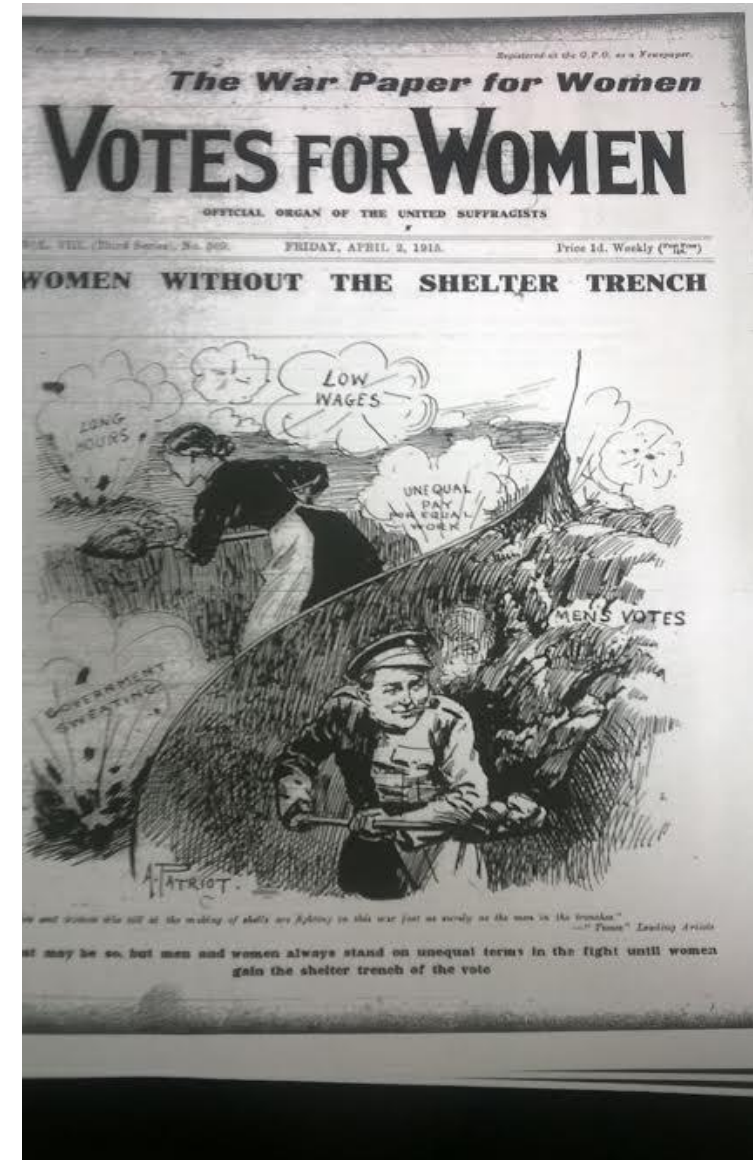
# As “Mothers of the Race”

- Argument: as mothers, women are naturally anti-war + women are the only political force capable of stopping the war
- Strategy? REVERSAL of the polarities of separate spheres when it came to war
- Result:
  - Reversal of the accusation of treason from patriots
  - Defence of the idea that a shared identity as mothers > other bonds of identity like nationality or class
  - Maintenance of the pre-war internationalism of the women’s suffrage movement and using it to offer a concrete solution to the conflict
- Yes, this feminism was essentialist but this essentialism was the only viable way of making such an unpopular position audible. It was no match for the pull of nationalism however.



# As "Suffragists"

- '[O]ur immediate appeal is for suffragists, even at this crisis, not to forget the prime importance of their own cause'
- Argument:
  - Women do not have an opinion on the war by virtue of their sex
  - Women do not have a greater appetite for this or that form of work by virtue of their sex
  - But women DO have a shared experience: powerlessness and subordination
  - Conclusion: women must "keep the suffrage flag flying"
- Strategy? Reject separate sphere altogether
  - Systematic denunciation of the double standard (mobilisation, pay, atrocities)
  - "Should women shoot?"





# Feminisms

A GLOBAL  
HISTORY

LUCY  
DELAP



## Conclusion

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‘feminism never has the option of putting forward its own, uncontaminated, self-generated understandings of “women”: its “women” too, is always thoroughly implicated in the discursive world’ Denise Riley, 1988

Using the category “feminism” in this way to read the suffrage past is useful:

- For suffrage history: an understanding of the movement as a site of contestation over the meaning of “women” and the relationship of that category with the key concepts of nation, mother, and citizen
- For feminist memory: here lies a “usable” past, one filled with cautionary but also inspiring tales, warts and all

# Thank you



X Fermer

Visualiser les données

## Sites of Feminist Memory: A Map of Memorials to the Women's Suffrage Movement

This map seeks to **geolocate the memorials to the Women's Suffrage Movement** all over the world.

It is a small contribution to the decades-long effort by activists and scholars to raise public understanding and awareness of the significance of our shared feminist past.

We hope it will provide an invaluable resource for citizens, teachers, researchers and students.