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The Women's Movement and Internationalism in the 20th Century

ABSTRACT

This paper sketches some of the dimensions of internationalism in the women's movement from its nineteenth century origins through twentieth century peace movements (including during and after two world wars) to more recent uses of social media to campaign across national boundaries. It describes some of the varied forms of internationalism that shaped women's campaigns in the twentieth century, and raises the need for new historiographical approaches to enable studies of the women's movement as a truly global phenomenon.

Keywords: *women's movements, feminism, pacifism, suffrage, women's liberation*

In her 1938 work *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf suggested that women had a different relationship to nation states from that experienced by men. "As a woman", Virginia Woolf explained, "I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world."¹ Virginia Woolf's suggestion that a shared biological femininity might enable women to transcend national boundaries was reflected in a strong strand of internationalism that ran between the women's movements in different countries through the 19th and 20th centuries and persists into the present day. A belief that all women shared sexually-determined commonalities regardless of their nationality encouraged trans-national transferences of methodologies and ideas between the many women's movements that developed in individual nation states from the mid-19th century onwards. "The women's movement" or "women's movements" denote a world-wide phenomenon, whose smaller, state-identified composite groups are distinguished through the addition of regional or national epithets; the Scandinavian women's movement or the German

1 Virginia Woolf: *Three Guineas*, London 1993 (1938), p. 234.

women's movement for example. "However different we may appear," Hillary Rodham Clinton informed her audience at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995, "there is far more that unites us than divides us."²

International women's movements can broadly be identified as feminist, although many of them did not describe themselves primarily in this way. The word "feminism" is usually attributed to Charles Fourier, but rarely used before the 1870s. From that point it was rapidly adopted, appearing in Britain and America and throughout Europe.³ Definitions of feminism are varied, but in the case of the organisations discussed here it can be summarised in Karen Offen's definition as "a system of ideas and a movement for socio-political change based on a refusal of male privilege and women's subordination."⁴ International women's movements aimed to secure greater equality for women throughout the world, although their priorities and tactics have varied considerably over time.

Since the early nineteenth century there have been consistent attempts to organise a women's movement on a large if not global scale. The first of these grew out of personal networks between feminist activists that supported strong transatlantic links between organisations in America and Europe, as well as moving out to include South America, Australia and beyond. These connections underpinned the inauguration of international organisations that transcended the boundaries of individual nation states.⁵ This article describes some different examples and forms of internationalism that shaped campaigns for women's rights in the twentieth century, and considers how these conflicted with nationally-defined agendas. It concludes by questioning what new historiographical approaches to the study of connections between women's organisations in the past might be required if we are to develop understandings of the women's movement as a truly global phenomenon.

- 2 Hillary Rodham Clinton: Remarks to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, cited in: Tani Barlow: *International Feminisms of the Future*, in: *Signs* 25:4 (2000), pp. 1099–1105, here p. 1100.
- 3 For a detailed history of "feminist" and "feminism" see Karen Offen: *On the French Origins of the Words Feminism and Feminist*, in: *Feminist Issues* 8:2 (1988), pp. 45–51.
- 4 Karen Offen: *European Feminisms 1700–1950: A Political History*, Stanford 2000, p. 20.
- 5 See for example Karen Hunt: *Transnationalism in Practice: The Effect of Dora Montefiore's International Travel on Women's Politics in Britain Before World War I*, in: Pernilla Jonsson/Silke Neunsinger/Joan Sangster (eds.): *Crossing Boundaries: Women's Organising in Europe and the Americas, 1880s–1940s*, Uppsala 2010, pp. 73–94; Bonnie Anderson: *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860*, Oxford 2000; Mineke Bosch (ed.): *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance 1902–42*, Columbus 1990; Sandra Stanley Holton: *To Educate Women into Rebellion: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists*, in: *American Historical Review* 99:4 (1994), pp. 1112–1136.

Sisterhood is Global? The International Dimensions of the Early Women's Movement

Organised women's movements emerged in different countries from the mid-nineteenth century as groups of women began to come together to argue for greater social and political rights for their sex. In this period, commonly referred to as the era of "first-wave" feminism, women's organisations were restricted to Europe or to countries where significant European colonies had existed. Although they were often small, these collective groupings of women were frequently aware of each other's existence, and members forged friendships across countries, which formed the basis of the first international contacts and co-operation between women's organisations. An early example of this was identified by Bonnie Anderson whose chance discovery of a letter from two jailed French feminists asking for support from their "sisters" in two small women's organisations in America and France led her to uncover a complex web of friendship networks between American, French and British women that developed in the 1830s and 1840s, prior to or at the point when sporadic calls for women's rights were beginning to coalesce into identifiable movements in their separate countries.⁶ The subjects of their correspondence revealed a number of shared concerns ranging from economic inequalities, political questions such as women's suffrage to social issues including prostitution, divorce and whether women should retain their surname on marriage or take their husband's name. The recognition that women in other countries were discussing and organising around the same questions and that they faced similar problems due to their sex encouraged activists to discuss approaches and share resources across national boundaries. Although they did not attempt to form actual organisations across national boundaries in this era Anderson has suggested that these links were critical to supporting early feminists during an era when national feminist organisations were small and weak, and that in some instances they could act as a counterpoint to political tensions between women in individual countries.⁷

As well as providing personal support and encouragement for women working in countries where the political atmosphere was hostile towards feminism, achievements in individual countries could in themselves lead to further trans-national transference of ideas and experience. Securing equal educational opportunities for women was an early goal of feminist movements, and by the late nineteenth century University education for women was a reality in some countries. Despite this, newly-educated women remained

6 See Bonnie Anderson: *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860*.

7 Bonnie Anderson: *Early International Feminism*, in: Anne Cova (ed.): *Comparative Women's History: New Approaches*, New York 2006, p. 69; Bonnie Anderson: *The Lid Comes Off: International Radical Feminism and the Revolutions of 1848*, in: *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 10:2 (1998), pp. 1–12.

frustrated by the lack of suitable employment opportunities available at the end of their studies. Patricia Ward D'Itri's study of international connections between nineteenth-century women's movements has suggested that women who were able to take advantage of increasing opportunities for secondary and tertiary education in Britain, America, New Zealand and Australia "sought challenges abroad," taking "their educations and faith in progress and women's rights" with them.⁸ Newspapers and periodicals associated with national women's organisations aided awareness of activities in different countries by covering events and carrying articles describing conditions for women abroad. Periodicals also facilitated early attempts at international organisation, with national publications such as the *Englishwoman's Review*, *Le Droit des Femmes* and *Die Frau* reporting on activities abroad. The Women's International Congress in Berlin in September 1896 was advertised in Britain and America through a letter in the April issue of the *Englishwoman's Review* that invited women interested in presenting communications on a variety of topics ranging from women's education to their position before the law to submit proposals "either in English or in German."⁹ Collections such as Theodore Stanton's *The Woman Question in Europe* offered brief summaries of women's organisations in different countries allowing readers to familiarise themselves with leaders and organisations across the continent.¹⁰ The emerging canon of key texts of the women's movement was translated into different languages fuelling the spread of ideas, often on the initiative of individual activists. The Dutch translation of John Stuart Mill's *Subjugation of Women*, for example, was carried out by the socialist feminist Mrs M E Edwards (nee Noest), a Dutch woman married to an English man who was a member of the Fabian society and involved in several socialist feminist groups in pre-First World War England.¹¹ Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling provided an early translation of Friedrich Engels' *Women in the Past, Present and Future* as a series of articles in the *Westminster Review*.

Sporadic collaboration between women active in national campaigns encouraged the formation of international organisations to keep groups in different countries in touch with each other, and co-ordinate efforts on a national scale when appropriate. While research by Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor amongst others places the International Council of Women, the International Women's Suffrage Alliance and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom as the most significant of these, although these were not the first. Early international women's organisations were established to achieve specific aims such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union that formed in

8 Patricia Ward D'Itri: *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movements, 1848–1948*, Bowling Green Ohio 1998, p. 15.

9 *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 April 1896.

10 Theodore Stanton (ed.): *The Woman Question in Europe: A Series of Original Essays*, London 1884.

11 Krista Cowman: *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother!: Women in Liverpool's Political Organizations 1890–1920*, Liverpool 2004, p. 136.

America in 1874 and had affiliated branches in over 40 different countries by the 1920s. Despite its origins as a single-issue campaign group, the Women's Christian Temperance Union also campaigned on broader social inequalities facing women, becoming arguably "the first mass organisation among women devoted to social reform," taking up issues such as suffrage and peace and with extensive international operations.¹² Single-issue groups found that international organisation had advantages when combatting social problems that were not unique to one country. A British Continental and General (later International) Federation for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice, formed in 1875 with encouragement from British social purity campaigner Josephine Butler, attempted to counter the international trade in prostitution with co-ordinated international opposition that drew public attention to cross-border trafficking of women and girls. In an open letter to Josephine Butler expressing the wish to join this association, the New York Committee for the Prevention of Licensed Prostitution explained how they were encouraged through learning of "the progress of the work [...] in Great Britain [...] Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany."¹³ Other groups such as the International Women's Suffrage Alliance were able to share tactics despite differing national circumstances. As the number of countries where women could vote increased, the Alliance also encouraged its affiliated groups in areas where women were enfranchised to use their power and influence to bring international pressure to bear on this issue. Although these groups included some socialist women amongst their individual members, socialist women were also organising collectively into their own organisations as shall be seen.

Beyond the trans-national organisations formed to campaign around a single issue broader groupings of feminist organisations began to develop. Marie Goegg, a Swiss woman, set up an International Association of Women, the *Association Internationale des Femmes*, in Geneva in 1868. This lasted for two years before its activities were fatally disrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune which, according to Karen Offen, heaped suspicion on any organisation that had "international" as part of its title.¹⁴ Marie Goegg's organisation focussed much of its efforts on building a feminist peace movement, but was also concerned with achieving broader political and economic rights for women. In the wake of the Paris Commune it was revived with different leadership and a new title: *Solidarité: Association pour la Défense des Droites des Femmes*. Women made good use of the growing number of world's fairs and national exhibitions that in the later nineteenth century to put their own case. A *Congrès*

12 Ian R. Tyrrell: *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930*, Chapel Hill 1991, p. 3.

13 Letter from the New York Committee for the Prevention of Licensed Prostitution to Josephine Butler, 14 September 1876, in: *The Woman's Journal*, 7 October 1876.

14 On Marie Goegg's work see for example Sandi Cooper: *The Work of Women in Nineteenth Century Continental European Peace Movements*, in: *Peace and Change* 9:4 (1983), pp. 11–28; Karen Offen: *European Feminisms 1700–1950: A Political History*, p. 151.

International du Droit des Femmes met in Paris in July 1878 to coincide with the *Exposition Universelle* that opened in the city the same month. Further congresses met in Paris in 1892 and 1896, with another large event in Berlin alongside the *Gewerbe-Ausstellung*. The extent to which these might be considered as international movements or organisations is debatable. Richard Evans' early analysis questioned their significance and concluded that these were "better understood as attempts of the feminists of one country to gain prestige in their own land by giving their movement an air of internationalism" and points to the preponderance of women from the organising country amongst the delegates at these events.¹⁵ The report of the first Paris meeting in *The Women's Journal*, based in Boston, noted that although the meeting was "less overwhelmingly French" than previous gatherings it was limited to France, Italy and the United States with countries such as England and Germany "apparently unrepresented."¹⁶ Laurence Klejman's outline of late nineteenth century congresses concurs with Richard Evans that they did not really transcend their national context.¹⁷ Nevertheless, their occurrence demonstrated an awareness of the potential of trans-national co-operation between the early women's movements in different countries

Wider reach and more sustained longevity was achieved by the International Council of Women which was inaugurated in 1888, and had numerous affiliates by the early twentieth century across Europe and America but also reaching further into Australia, Argentina, China, Palestine and Persia and beyond.¹⁸ This rather conservative body originally aimed to link all pre-existing national women's groups, and attempted to preserve unity and develop numerical strength through avoiding confrontation or controversial or overtly political issues.¹⁹ Its president, Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Canadian governor-general, used her 1899 Presidential Address to Congress to express her "belief that woman's first mission must be her home," and attempted (with limited success) to recruit aristocratic women such as the German Empress into the Council's leadership. The International Council of Women's determined neutrality on questions such as suffrage, which was considered potentially divisive, prompted the establishment of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1904. In common with many national suffrage movements this body took the vote as its focal point, but was also active in campaigning on broader issues such as prostitution and slavery that had preoccupied earlier trans-national feminist

15 Richard Evans: *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840–1920*, London 1977, p. 247.

16 *The Woman's Journal*, 24 August 1878.

17 Laurence Klejman: *Les Congres féministes internationaux*, in: *Cahiers Georges Sorel: Revue D'histoire intellectuelle* 7:7 (1989), p. 71–86.

18 *International Council of Women: Papers Concerning the International Council of Women*, London 1899.

19 For a summary see Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Princeton 1997, pp. 15–21.

groups. Its newspaper, *Jus Suffragi*, played a critical role in keeping activists in different countries and continents in touch with each other's activities at a time when global communications were less immediate.²⁰ After the First World War, when membership was increasingly divided between suffrage "haves" and "have nots," the International Woman Suffrage Alliance became the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, then the International Alliance of Women: Equal Rights – Equal Responsibilities, generally known as the International Alliance of Women. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was another group that largely formed out of the Alliance in 1915, although other international organisations of women helped to shape this group's existence, as will be discussed. Leaders in the original body, the International Council of Women, viewed the development of other groups as an example of the "hiving off" of groups within its ranks, but the presence of the two later groups brought greater diversity to the international women's movement and there were degrees of overlap between the membership and leadership of both organisations.²¹

Socialist or Bourgeois Internationalism?

The identification of numerous historic examples of international activity and cooperation by women complicates attempts to describe a single international women's movement. Activists shared a commitment to securing greater economic, political and social rights for women but were divided over how these might be achieved as well as disagreeing over the extent to which full equality was desirable in areas such as franchise or marriage reform.²² One key division that historians have identified in the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries was that between the socialist (then communist) women's movements, on the one hand, and those of the so-called "liberal" or "bourgeois" feminist or "women's rights" activists on the other, both of which were committed to trans-national activities. There were some early attempts to link movements—Marie Groegg attempted to connect her *Association Internationale des Femmes* to the International Working Men's Association (the First International) but received no response—but separate organisation of liberal and socialist women was more usual.²³ Internationalism for both sides of this division meant recognising certain commonalities in women's position across different geographical

20 Mineke Bosch (ed): *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance 1902–42*; Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*.

21 Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, p. 21.

22 See for example Julia Bush: *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain*, Oxford 2007.

23 Sandi Cooper: *The Work of Women in Nineteenth Century Continental European Peace Movements*, footnote 20, p. 25.

locations; biologically determined inequality (through maternity, for instance) culturally or socially constructed inequalities (legal discriminations, or the lack of civic or political rights) and economic disadvantage. Women on both sides of this division found common ground with other women from different countries, and sought to organise beyond the boundaries of nation states, but two main types of international women's movements now developed distinct approaches to women's emancipation. Bourgeois feminists sought to link individual national organisations together in campaigns to overcome the sex-based inequalities facing all women regardless of their class. Socialist women's internationalism was able to utilise the pre-existing structures designed to facilitate co-operation between socialist parties across national boundaries if they were prepared to function as auxiliary groups to larger mixed-sex organisations such as the Second International and the Communist International.²⁴

Liberal feminists were committed to achieving gender equality, even if this might perpetuate some divisions between women. This is probably best seen in the example of campaigns for the vote which saw many liberal feminists prepared to accept a partial measure of enfranchisement as an important signal for sexual equality regardless of whether this left many working-class men and women without votes. Socialist thinking on women's emancipation followed the arguments of August Bebel's *Woman in the Past, Present and Future* (1879) and Frederick Engels *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). Socialists recognised the existence of particular problems for working-class women; nevertheless, they maintained that women's oppression was connected to class oppression and would have similar resolution.²⁵ In some countries, socialists were nervous of the potential of emerging women's movements to pull working-class women away from class-based political activity. These fears were not ill-founded. In Britain, for example, many women who started out as socialist feminists were not prepared to wait for postponed equality. The militant suffragette body, the Women's Social and Political Union, was originally formed as a "ginger group" to keep the Independent Labour Party engaged with demands for women's suffrage. Within a few years some of the more prominent socialist women who had initially prioritised socialist work and combined their suffrage activity with this left the Independent Labour Party to work exclusively for suffrage. Teresa Billington and Mary Gawthorpe both gave up their positions as organisers for the Independent Labour Party and Women's Labour League respectively to work for the Women's Social and Political Union in the same capacity.²⁶ Other countries also saw

24 Leila J. Rupp/Verta Taylor: Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth-Century Feminism, in: *Signs* 24:2 (1999), pp. 363–386.

25 For a brief overview of these two positions see Sheila Rowbotham: *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action*, London 1992, ch.16.

26 See Krista Cowman: *Women of the Right Spirit: Paid Organizers in the Women's Social and Political Union, 1904–1918*, Manchester 2007, ch. 2.

conflicts break out between socialist and independent women's movements. Leading Russian socialist-feminist Alexandra Kollontai warned that her country's burgeoning bourgeois women's movement represented "a serious threat to the unity of the working class movement" and felt moved to "warn the working women against being carried away by feminism."²⁷ The French socialist feminist Louise Saumonou and the German socialist feminist Clara Zetkin repeatedly issued similar warnings against collaboration with feminism to socialist women in their own countries.²⁸

Socialist feminists responded to the growth of autonomous liberal women's movements by developing their own organisations affiliated to the socialist parties of individual countries. It was arguably easier for socialist women to move beyond national boundaries to work at an international level as the mechanisms were already in place. The Second International, formed in 1889 to act as a global umbrella for labour and socialist bodies, had regular congresses where its members came together to debate international socialist policies. Socialist women's groups were thus able to forge international links within its perimeters. International Socialist Women's Congresses were held alongside the congresses of the International, starting at Stuttgart in 1907. In 1909, socialist women in America began organising national demonstrations for an International Woman's Day at the end of February, an idea taken up by the International Socialist Women's Congress at its 1910 Copenhagen meeting. Temma Kaplan has shown the importance of these events in focussing the attention of male socialists onto women's issues at a point when most politically active socialist women had no vote, so found it more difficult to raise demands through the usual political channels.²⁹ On 18 March 1911, for example, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire there were more than 300 International Women's Day demonstrations and socialists in the Austrian parliament publicly pledged their commitment to women's suffrage. Although events for the International Women's Day tended to be organised nationally, their status as part of a global campaign could lend confidence to comparatively weak national women's movements and lead to wider results. As in St Petersburg in 1917, when women's protests against rising bread prices timed to coincide with the International Women's Day were famously credited with sparking off the February revolution.

Under the influence of prominent socialist feminist thinkers such as Clara Zetkin, women in the Second International consistently differentiated themselves from bourgeois feminists. "The socialist women's movement of all countries [...] [works] not in coalition

27 Alexandra Kollontai: *Towards a History of the Working Women's Movement in Russia*, in: Alix Holt (ed.): *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, London 1980, pp. 50–51.

28 For France, see Charles Sowerwine: *Sisters or Citizens?: Women and Socialism in France since 1876*, Cambridge 1982.

29 For more details see Temma Kaplan: *On the Socialist Origins of International Women's Day*, in: *Feminist Studies* 11:1 (1985) pp. 163–171.

with the bourgeois women's rights advocates, but in partnership with the socialist parties."³⁰ At times, however, the issues that preoccupied the Women's Bureau of the Second International were exactly those on which other international women's organisations were campaigning, although the conclusions of socialist and non-socialist women could be different. The demand for parliamentary suffrage for women offers a good example. The Socialist Women's Bureau committed itself to demanding the introduction of universal suffrage simultaneously for men and women, rather than press for limited suffrage measures to equalise existing franchise laws. This did not necessarily lead to harmonious relations between socialist women involved in the Second International or its affiliate organisations and those who were committed to other groups such as the International Women's Suffrage Alliance.³¹

International Feminist Pacifism

Emphasis on the theoretical, tactical and organisational differences between the socialist and bourgeois international women's movements in the earlier part of the 20th century can obscure the moments of co-operation when feminists from different political traditions worked collectively. An obvious example, which has attracted much attention, is that of the women's peace movement. Anti-militarism or pacifism was an important part of the ideology of most women's movements before the First World War, and has been identified as "a common goal" of feminist internationalism.³² Marie Goegg's *Association Internationale des Femmes* (International Association of Women) saw peace as one of its main aims. Marie Goegg and many of her supporters presented the case for feminist pacifism in biological terms; they believed that women were innately pacifist and tied this to their maternal function, arguing that better-educated mothers might hold the key to raising a new generation of boys who would not seek to wage war. After the Franco-Prussian War Marie Goegg observed that while "Men love and want war; they know that women, on the other hand, do not," and suggested that advancing women's influence would offer a means to secure world peace.³³ Perspectives and analyses could differ; socialist women were more likely to emphasise the imperialist or class dimensions of militarism as well as its masculine character. Nevertheless, as the international situation worsened, and after war broke out in August 1914, leading anti-militarist socialists such as

30 Clara Zetkin at the 1907 Congress of the Second International, cited in: Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, p. 34.

31 June Hannam/Karen Hunt: *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, London 2002, p. 176

32 Patricia Ward D'Itri: *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movements, 1848–1948*, p. 4.

33 Sandi Cooper: *The Work of Women in Nineteenth Century Continental European Peace Movements*, p. 17.

Clara Zetkin began to rephrase their arguments in terms that outlined the gendered nature of war as well as its classed dimensions. In an *Appeal to the Socialist Women of All Countries* published in the German socialist women's paper *Die Gleichheit* in November 1914, Zetkin pointed out to her female readers that "when the men kill, it is up to us women to fight for the preservation of life."³⁴ The urgency that war lent to socialist and non-socialist feminist pacifists was to open the way to reconfigurations of the international women's movements between 1914 and 1918.

The outbreak of war in 1914 divided both socialist parties and national women's movements. Those who opposed the war were often surprised by the strength of feeling in favour of it by those whom they had previously regarded as allies; in Britain, for example, the leadership of the Women's Social and Political Union committed itself to jingoistic support for the war-effort, bitterly dividing its membership in the process. The German women's movement was similarly divided over how to react to the conflict, with pacifist women urgently attempted to connect across previously hostile organisational boundaries to sustain international dialogue with other women activists. Clara Zetkin's ongoing anti-militarism addressed women as classed and gendered subjects, and appealed to their common bonds as mothers and lifegivers regardless of their nationality. Her appeal in *Gleichheit*, quoted above, that called for all women to raise public opposition to war, was issued in defiance of the Social Democrats' wishes.³⁵ While members of socialist parties who had untied in the Second International now faced each other in opposing armies, women's status as non-combatants might possibly have eased their ongoing communications. The International itself effectively collapsed in August 1914, but its women's organisation attempted to continue. Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollontai and Clara Zetkin co-operated to arrange an International Conference of Socialist Women in Bern in March 1915, bringing together women from neutral countries as well as from belligerent ones. For the women who attended from combatant nations, participation in the event—which explicitly called for an end to the war—could be construed as treason. Consequently, as Kaplan has observed, their resolutions took little account of individual countries or their rights or wrongs in relation to the conflict but called for the "reconstruction of the Second International" and encouraged women from all combatant nations to work collectively for peace.³⁶

The following month another international gathering of women was held in The Hague. A conference of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance had been planned for Berlin in 1915, but was cancelled due to the war. Suffragists from the Netherlands now suggested reactivating it, but shifting the venue to their own neutral country.³⁷ The

34 Cited in Philip S. Foner (ed.): Clara Zetkin: Selected Writings, New York 1984, p. 116.

35 Philip S. Foner: Introduction, in: Philip S. Foner (ed.): Clara Zetkin: Selected Writings, p. 37.

36 Temma Kaplan: On the Socialist Origins of International Women's Day, p. 168.

37 Letter from Dutch Suffragists, in: Jus Suffragi, 1 December 1914.

International Woman Suffrage Alliance followed this suggestion, and the meeting received delegates from over 150 individual organisations, not just suffrage societies, again uniting women from nations on opposite sides of the conflict.³⁸ The Hague Conference led to the formation of an International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace to keep momentum behind its demands; at the end of the war this group convened a second conference in Zurich, which committed itself to peace and suffrage and laid the foundations for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. The conference is often presented as "the most celebrated [...] expression of women's internationalism," although as Ingrid Sharp has recently reminded us the veneer of unity was often cleaved by bitter disputes between and those who were less opposed to the war.³⁹

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom kept going beyond the First World War (and indeed remains active today). In the inter-war period it moved its headquarters to Geneva to offer better access to the League of Nations (see below). However its members often found themselves drawn into other causes that appeared more pressing, particularly when war was not an apparently imminent problem.⁴⁰ As fascism became a more evident threat through the 1930s feminists continued to prioritise peace. Leila Rupp has shown how opposition to war continued to offer socialist and non-socialist women's movements the opportunities to collaborate, forming "a fragile thread" between the two that re-emerged in several of the Popular Front organisations that attempted to build opposition to Fascism in the 1930s.⁴¹ In France in particular, Sandi Cooper has argued that women's continued disenfranchisement in the inter-war period made the peace movement a critical site for their political activity as they were unable to access political parties in the same way as voting women elsewhere in Europe.

Similar connections continued to emerge in the post-war era when peace campaigns continued to be an important site for trans-national connections between women moving into the later 20th century. For example, in 1981 a Women's Peace Camp was set up outside the gates of the American Air force Base at Greenham Common in Berkshire, England. The women's protest had an international dimension from the start as it was directed against the siting of American nuclear weapons that were intended for deployment on behalf of North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the event of a nuclear war. In December 1983 it hosted a mass demonstration when the base was encircled by over 30 000 women

38 Anne Wiltsher: *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Campaigners of the Great War*, London 1985, ch. 5.

39 Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, p. 3; Ingrid Sharp: *A Foolish Dream of Sisterhood: Anti-Pacifist Debates in the German Women's Movement 1914–19*, in: Christa Hämmerle/Oswald Überegger/Birgitta Bader Zaar (eds.): *Gender and the First World War*, Basingstoke 2014, pp. 95–214.

40 See Jill Liddington: *The Long Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain Since 1820*, London 1989.

41 Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, p. 35.

from all over the world. The Greenham camp, which remained until 2000, “became the inspiration and model for numerous other women’s peace camps around the world” including Seneca Falls, New York, Comiso in Italy, Soesterburg in the Netherlands and Pine Gap in Australia.⁴²

Inter-war International Organisations

Beyond pacifism and anti-fascism, the inter-war period was arguably less productive for international co-operation between socialist women although the mechanisms to facilitate this were stronger. The Third International or Communist International, which replaced the Second International in the 1920s, initially echoed the Second International’s position and declared itself “firmly opposed to any kind of separate women’s organisation.”⁴³ This changed quite quickly, under the direction of influential members such as Clara Zetkin, and by 1920 the Communist International had the mechanism for a formal international communist women’s organisation in place with conferences of Communist Women sitting alongside Communist International congresses. An International Secretariat for work amongst women was formed in 1921, and encouraged the development of national women’s sections affiliated to individual communist parties. Its aims, however, were to mobilise women for Communism rather than to advance many of the broader feminist aims of the pre-war women’s movements. Increased access to the Communist International’s archives since the 1990s has augmented research onto women’s role in the organisation, and whilst there is as yet no large comparative study of international activities by Communist Party women, there are detailed studies of the contribution that women from a variety of different national contexts made to the organisation. In Britain, for example, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn’s study of the autobiographical writings of Communist Party Members has suggested that women were offered restricted roles.⁴⁴

42 Margaret L. Laware: *Circling the Missiles and Staining them Red: Feminist Rhetorical Invention and Strategies of Resistance at the Women’s Peace Camp at Greenham Common*, in: *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* 16:3 (2004), pp. 18–41. On its reach see, for example, Alison Bartlett: *Feminist Protest in the Desert: Reaching the 1983 Pine Gap Women’s Peace Camp*, in: *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 20:7 (2013), pp. 914–926; on other camps see Bernice Carroll: *Women Take Action!: Direct Action and Social Change*, in: Berenice Carroll/Jane Mohraz (eds.): *Women’s Studies International Forum* 12:1, New York 1989, pp. 3–24.

43 Alan Alder (ed.): *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, London 1980, p. 47.

44 Gidon Cohen/Andrew Flynn: *In Search of the Typical British Communist*, in: Kevin Morgan/Gidon Cohen/Andrew Flinn (eds.): *Agents of Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, London 2005, p. 37–57, p. 41.

Here, the Communist Party women's sections became identified with less political roles such as fundraising or promoting social networks amongst party wives whilst the "main" party work focussed on men engaged in heavy industry. After Clara Zetkin died in 1933, the International Women's Secretariat lacked an effective leader, and many national sections floundered or were disbanded.

Communist women's organisations were not the only ones to arguably suffer from party connections. Studies of the national women's sections of other political parties has shown how party-political alignment could limit their potential for growth by tying their focus tightly to party concerns (such as in the case of the British Labour Party which discouraged women from too active a role in campaigns to promote birth control for fear of losing working-class catholic support). Party women's sections also rose or fell in line with broader party fortunes; the Women's Liberal Federation had been the largest of all party women's groups in pre-First World War Britain and had provided many leaders of international women's organisations, not least Lady Aberdeen and Margery Corbett Ashby who led the inter-war International Congress of Women. Through such strong international connections, Liberal women in Britain were able to play a significant role in shaping international liberal feminist ideologies, but their own organisation was unable to survive the terminal decline of its parent party in the twentieth century.

Those international women's organisations that were independent of the party had more success in the inter-war years. The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the International Council of Women all continued, although their memberships now overlapped with newer bodies that became increasingly important in connecting national women's movements and shifting feminist demands onto a world stage. The gradual decline of colonialism in the inter-war period encouraged a more genuinely international dimension to their membership; the Egyptian feminist Huda Shaarawi was elected as vice-president of the International Woman Suffrage Association in 1923, and the organisation held its triennial conference in Istanbul in 1935.⁴⁵ National women's organisations continued to divide on ideological and tactical grounds, however, and these divisions spilled into the international arena in the inter-war era. The American women's movement was broadly divided between militant and reform wings, with militant feminists seeking equality in all areas while social reformers were more concerned with the implementation of welfare reforms that would benefit all of society as well as women.⁴⁶ The British movement similarly divided

45 Karen Offen: *European Feminisms 1700–1950: A Political History*, p. 343.

46 For discussion of how this affected international feminism, see Paula F. Pfeffer: *A Whisper in the Assembly of Nations: United States Participation in the International Movement for Women's Rights from the League of Nations to the United Nations*, in: *Women's Studies International Forum* 8:5 (1985), pp. 489–471.

between “new” or welfare feminists and equality feminists.⁴⁷ At the level of international feminist organisation these divisions coloured debates about how best to improve women’s position globally.

International activities and the growth of an international women’s movement were aided in the inter-war years through the emergence of non-governmental organisations, which provided new forums where women’s movements could press their demands across national boundaries. Carol Miller’s research has shown how many of the key international women’s organisations in existence in 1918 established bases in Geneva to co-ordinate work with the League of Nations, making the city “the international centre of the women’s movement” in the inter-war years.⁴⁸ Through the League, older organisations such as the International Conference of Women and the International Alliance of Women joined with new groups such as the International Federation of Working Women and the Open Door International to continue campaigns for peace but also to attempt to advance women’s position more broadly through their work on women’s nationality and their attempts to see an internationally-recognised Equal Rights Treaty.⁴⁹ This did not have universal support amongst feminists, as those on the welfare or reform wing of the movement feared that the treaty might signal an end to protective legislation for women in certain trades. The quest for an equal rights treaty led the League of Nations to eventually appoint an expert committee to report on the Status of Women in 1938.⁵⁰ Leila Rupp’s evaluation of the League of Nations makes a clear link between women’s work here and their achievements in the United Nations, which included equal rights for women in its charter.⁵¹

Later initiatives within the United Nations gave feminist organisations further opportunity to campaign collectively across national borders. From its foundation a number of women’s organisations including the International Women’s Alliance, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the World Young Christian Women’s Association were given consultative status within the United Nations.⁵² The United Nations had its own Commission on the Status of Women, although engagement

47 For a brief discussion of the different positions see Krista Cowman: *Women in British Politics, c.1689–1979*, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 151–153.

48 Carol Miller: *Geneva – The Key to Equality: Inter-war Feminists and the League of Nations*, in: *Women’s History Review* 2:3 (1995), pp. 219–245.

49 See Miller: *Geneva*; also Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement*, pp. 217–222.

50 Paula F. Pfeffer: *A Whisper in the Assembly of Nations: United States Participation in the International Movement for Women’s Rights from the League of Nations to the United Nations*.

51 Leila J. Rupp: *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement*, pp. 224–225.

52 Martha Alta Chen: *Engendering World Conferences: The International Women’s Movement and the United Nations*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 16:3 (1995), pp. 477–493, here p. 478.

in its work was patchy with only two out of seventeen women's organisations responding to a request for information on women's status in individual countries in 1947.⁵³ By the 1970s, when second-wave feminist movements were again drawing attention to women's unequal status, and requesting input from the United Nations.⁵⁴ Two representatives on the Status of Women Commission, Helvi Sipilä and Florica Andrei, took up the idea for an International Women's Year; on the Commission's recommendation, the General Assembly of the United Nations set this as 1975. The United Nations Decade of Women followed on from this, ending in 1995.⁵⁵

Political scientists have seen the United Nations Decade of Women as a turning point for the development of an international women's movement. Carolyn Stephenson's mid-point evaluation of its work suggested that it was "both a creature of, and creator of, the international women's movement," while Martha Alter Chen observed that the International Women's Year which started the decade "marked the beginning of a new "women's era" in the United Nations and the emergence of a global women's movement."⁵⁶ Judith P. Zinsser went further to claim that prior to the declaration of the International Women's Year the United Nations "did little to advance the cause of women's rights," but that this changed in the following decade.⁵⁷ A historical perspective on these developments, however, makes them appear less pivotal. Rather than marking the start of a new era of international cooperation of women's organisations, it might be placed within a longer chronology of feminists already active in international organisations working closely with international bodies such as the League of Nations to achieve worldwide improvements in women's status.

The United Nations World Conferences for women that took place throughout its Decade of Women (Mexico, 1975, Copenhagen, 1980, Nairobi, 1985, and Beijing, 1995) played an important role in strengthening a sense of an international women's movement. Valentine M. Moghadam's analysis of these events records them as "perhaps the most important form of UN-assisted networking" for feminists, which allowed for wider discussion of women's issues and brought global gendered inequalities squarely

- 53 Paula F. Pfeffer: *A Whisper in the Assembly of Nations: United States Participation in the International Movement for Women's Rights from the League of Nations to the United Nations*, p. 468.
- 54 On the origins of this see Carolyn M. Stephenson: *Feminism, Pacifism, Nationalism and the United Nations Decade for Women*, in: *Women's Studies International Forum* 5:3/4 (1982), pp. 287–300.
- 55 See Hikka Pietilä/Jeanne Vickers: *Making Women Matter: The Role of the United Nations*, London 1994.
- 56 Carolyn M. Stephenson: *Feminism, Pacifism, Nationalism and the United Nations Decade for Women*, p. 287; Martha Alta Chen: *Engendering World Conferences: The International Women's Movement and the United Nations*, p. 478.
- 57 Judith P. Zinsser: *From Mexico to Copenhagen to Nairobi: The United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985*, in *Journal of World History* 1:1 (2002), pp. 139–168.

onto an international agenda.⁵⁸ For many women working in small local groups the conferences brought a sense of international networking.⁵⁹ Delegates to Beijing, the largest and most discussed conference, spoke of a sense of “interconnectedness of issues and people,” despite the many differences in feminist methodology and ideology that the conference—and the decade—had revealed.⁶⁰ Further research into these events and into the organisations involved in them may lead us to reconsider our current chronologies of international women's movements by demonstrating greater levels of activity in the 1930s and 1950s, eras currently regarded as periods of retrenchment, hidden in the troughs of the familiar “wave” metaphor.

In the post-war era, forums such as the United Nations continued to provide an important platform for women's demands. International women's movements broadened their concerns, in line with shifts in the priorities of national feminist movements, and the extension of participation in international conferences and congresses that shifted attention away from the problems of women in the developed world. At the same time, Western feminism was changing. The campaigns for political and social rights that characterised what has become known as “first-wave” feminism up to the First World War were superseded by new concerns. Second wave feminist slogans such as “the personal is political” supported campaigns on issues such as access to contraception or abortion, sex-tourism, rape and sexual violence. Organisations continued to underpin these, but activists were equally likely to be connected through personal friendships and contacts, often forged by new patterns of mobility in post-war Europe (for example through periods of studying or living abroad). Many of the new grass roots women's organisations that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s lacked the structures that defined earlier groups; a deliberate attempt to foster equality and avoid hierarchies or leadership cults has complicated attempts to subject them to historical analysis. These connections have proved much more difficult to map; the “official” groups such as the International Alliance of Women continued, but appear to have had little resonance with women involved in social movements at the grass roots. The growth of women's studies in the academy has connected layers of feminist activists throughout Europe, for example, but again has been criticised for losing its connections to social activism.⁶¹ The International

58 Valentine M. Moghadam: *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*, Baltimore 2005, p. 89.

59 Deborah Stienstra: *Women's Movements and International Organisations*, Basingstoke 1994 describes the relationship between grass roots and international feminism during the period of the Decade of Women.

60 Mallika Dutt: *Some Reflections on US Women of Colour and the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and NGO Forum in Beijing, China*, in: Bonnie Smith (ed.): *Global Feminism Since 1945*, London 2000, pp. 305–313.

61 For a discussion of the impact of this, see Judith Bennett: *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, Manchester 2007.

Women's Day offers a good example of how women's movements continue to operate loose international coalitions that are difficult to map but that are clearly impacting on the lives of individual feminists and contributing to a sense of an important international movement. Since the Second World War the International Women's Day has largely lost its socialist connections, but it continues to provide a key focus for raising women's demands across national boundaries. This was seen in Palestine in 1988, when the International Women's Day offered a framework that brought four disparate women's groups together in a joint programme of activities, and saw their members "engaged for the first time in collective political actions in the streets."⁶² Yet although it has the potential to provide a unifying focal point, no single body co-ordinates the International Women's Day, and its observance varies across countries.

Political Scientists have emphasised the importance of Women's International Non-Governmental Organisations (WINGOS) in reducing gender inequalities throughout the world, pressing campaigns on issues such as child prostitution, trafficking of women and preserving the legal rights of women where these conflict with local religious decrees. Globalisation has encouraged such links by creating a de facto "transnational public sphere" where common concerns can be swiftly identified. Just as in the nineteenth century, print culture remains an important forum for forging transnational links and making connections between women's movements in individual countries, encouraging transnational collaboration and activism. A good example of this is in the world of feminist zines, small-scale independent magazine publications that effectively form a "global network of young women [...] able and eager to [...] promote each other's projects" according to the editor of the United States zine *Ladyfriend*.⁶³ Transnational transference of Zines' content has been aided through technological developments such as the *Grrrl Zine Network*, an internet resource site which linked to "more than to thousand feminist zines from forty-three countries in fifteen languages" by 2009.⁶⁴

New social media have offered numerous different ways for feminists to connect and organise on international lines, sometimes bypassing formal organisational structures altogether. Often, as in the case of sites linking zines together, new social media function in quite traditional ways sharing information and tactics or co-ordinating campaigns. They bring other potential for international activity too, however. "Going viral"—spreading rapidly across the internet in real time—has shaped a number of early twenty-first century feminist campaigns and played a key role in opening up some of the worst examples of

62 Joost R. Hiltermann: The Women's Movement During the Uprising, in: *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20:3 (1991) pp. 48–57, p. 51.

63 Elke Zobl: For Ladies and All Their Friends: *Ladyfriend* Zine: An Interview with Christa Donner (Cleveland), published in *Grrrl Zine Network* 2002.

64 Elke Zobl: Cultural Production, Transnational Networking and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines, in: *Signs* 34:1 (2009), pp. 1–12.

sexual inequality or oppression to international scrutiny. Jessica Neuwirth explained how the proliferation of feminist websites has enabled almost instantaneous international action by feminists who

log onto the computer and find an e-mail about the latest woman sentenced to death by stoning for adultery in Pakistan or Nigeria At the www.feminist.com website you find a petition of protest signed by individuals and organisations in countries around the world [...] in the past twenty-four hours.⁶⁵

Analysing one of these campaigns—the SlutWalk Movement—Joetta L. Carr has charted how the comment by a Toronto police officer to York University students that they could avoid rape by not dressing like “sluts” in January 2011 sparked of a series of international protests with “Facebook and Twitter [functioning as] the main organizing tools for the hundreds of local protests that were advertised on every continent.”⁶⁶ Yet whilst commentators such as Valentine Moghadam are positive about the potential of new forms of social media to promote both “the formation and especially the activities of transnational feminist networks,” other observers have been more cautious pointing out to issues such as the unequal access to such technology or the ability of repressive regimes to monitor or block communications on a large scale.⁶⁷ The history of such immediate developments remains to be written.

Conclusion

Writing the history of International Women's Movements is a complex task. The first challenge is how to capture the plurality of a number of movements that frequently claimed to speak in the name of all women whilst at the same time representing sectional interests, as we have seen. Socialist and non-socialist feminists developed similar models for international organisation, but did this from very different perspectives, and sometimes in strong opposition to each other. The United Nations acknowledged a number of key international women's organisations in the 1940s, but omitted others, meaning that taking United Nations recognition as a starting point might fail to capture the

65 Jessica Neuwirth: *Globalization: A Secret Weapon for Feminists*, available online at: <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/inter/globaliz.html> (accessed 21 September 2015).

66 Joetta L. Carr: *The SlutWalk Movement: A Study in Transnational Feminist Activism*, in: *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 4 (2013), pp. 24–38, p. 26.

67 Valentine M. Moghadam: *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*, p. 91. For more cautious perspectives see for example Loretta Kensinger: *Plugged in Praxis: Critical Reflections on US Feminism, Internet Activism and Solidarity with Women in Afghanistan*, in: *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5:1 (2003), pp. 1–28.

strength or diversity of international co-operation beyond this arena. There is also the vexed question of chronology. Many studies of international women's movements have followed the chronology implicit in the wave metaphor and so concentrated on events up to the First World War and from the 1960s. Following this metaphor may have seriously underestimated the importance of women's activity in periods that fell between the peaks of these two waves, while overestimating events presented as "milestones" or "turning points" which may be part of a longer trajectory. Concentrating on the history of particular organisations may have exacerbated a tendency to underestimate, as the small number of historical studies that exist on bodies such as the International Women's Suffrage Alliance or Open Door International suggest that they failed to attract younger members at particular points, so diminished in importance while other new groups emerged and flourished.

Another challenge is that of how to capture international dimensions of the women's movement in the post-war era. Studies of pre and inter-war internationalism have shared some of the features of traditional studies of political parties or organisations. However, since the 1980s, there has been an explosion of groups within the women's movement that organise across national boundaries. Charting such activity is a complex matter. Valentine Moghadam's study which defines a trans-national women's movement in the 21st century as one which contains women from at least three different countries, organising "above the national level," cites several dozen that fit this definition, broken down under their main interest headings including economic rights, reproductive rights, conflict resolution and human/equality rights.⁶⁸ How to recapture their activities is unclear. In smaller grass roots groups internal organisational structures may be more fluid, and record-keeping less meticulous, making their activities difficult to record and map. The problem of accessing traditional sources as recognised by most historians is even greater in cyberspace where archiving of websites is often carried out—if at all—on an individual, haphazard basis meaning that many important instances of international feminist activity may be untraceable. Writing the history of these movements will require a radically different approach.

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68 Valentine M. Moghadam: *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*, p. 4.