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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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How It Began: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain

by

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Contents

Introduction

The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain obtained full victory when the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 extended voting rights to all adult women aged over 21 years. This was a significant event in Britain: for the first time in British history, women gained formal access to political participation that men had long enjoyed. And this success gives rise to an important question: what circumstances mobilized British women to pursue voting rights? This question has long interested historians. Studies on this topic abound, but most are historical accounts of individual events, related political organizations, or leading figures in the movement; surprisingly few have offered a comprehensive assessment of the important factors in spurring the movement.

The British women's campaign for voting rights had encountered many progresses and setbacks; and how such a battle began and continued should not be analyzed merely through chronological accounts. In addition, individual events of the campaign, organizations, and figures should not be viewed in isolation. To address the current gap of studies on this topic, this study will adopt an interdisciplinary approach to examine the rise of the movement by drawing on some major theories on the rise of political movements within the field of Political Science. Such an approach could contribute to deepening our understanding of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, for the political theories explaining the emergence of political movements could be applicable to this case and allow us to the identify the main circumstances that facilitated the emergence of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, whose origins historians generally thought could be traced back to the late eighteenth century (Rendall, 1984: 2).

Abundant findings by political scientists suggest that the circumstances that tend to give rise to political movements usually fall into three categories: political opportunities,

organizational resources, and ideological arguments that are able to mobilize and to recruit participants and are therefore critical to foster political movements. In light of these views, as well as current historiography on the movement, this paper hypothesizes that the interplay of the various factors relevant to the rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain could be categorized into three kinds: the political opportunities and the resources available to British women that facilitated their participation in British politics, and the feminist ideas that led to an ideological climate supportive for the cause of the movement.

Besides the question of what circumstances stimulated the movement, this study also seeks to address: how did the British women carry out the campaign for suffrage? Historians have generally agreed that British women crossed lines of class, geography, party and religion affiliations and united their efforts to achieve women's suffrage in this movement, but this tends to give the misleading impression that British women fought for suffrage as a homogenous group, undoubtedly united simply because they were of the same gender. However, it did not correspond to reality, as the following part of this study will show. Factors such as political outlooks, religions, but especially social class, significantly shaped British women's experience of their political participation, and subsequently, their involvement in the movement. One important implication of this paper is that since that woman in the aristocratic rank, middle class, and working class varied in their opportunities for involvement in British politics, their involvement in the movement deserved further differential analysis.

Finally, the conclusion that political opportunities, organizational resources, and ideological support played pivotal roles in the rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain could lead to the questions of whether these three factors were predicative of a women's rights movement elsewhere in the world. To investigate such possibility, the analysis of Britain is

followed by a brief discussion of the women's rights movement in the United States during the 1790s to the 1920s. And the presence of political opportunities, organizational resources, and ideological support during the women's rights movement in the United States seems to suggest a strong correlation between the presence of these three factors and the rise of a social movement aimed at women's emancipation.

Method of Analysis

A study of this nature is heavily dependent on the previous research of other scholars. The writings of other scholars provide the substance, the content, and sometimes, the arguments in some parts of this study. I have noted in the text where this is the case and have listed the sources of these materials which I have relied on.

Theoretical framework

The following section integrates some recent major explanations of the rise of collective actions and attempts to provide a theoretical framework to analyze the emergence of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain.

Political Opportunities

The importance of political opportunities in fostering the emergence of political movements has been well-documented. Scholars generally regard the core components that define political opportunities as including increasing political access, influential allies, declining state repressions (McAdam, 1996; Tarrow, 1998; Schock, 1999). In particular, Marks and McAdams (1999) defined that political opportunities as usually involving broader environments that facilitates the challenge of political opponents or opportunities for the challenging groups to form collective actions. For Gotham (1999), political opportunity referred to the various aspects

of government structure, public policy, and political conditions that "bound the possibilities for change and political action" and explains the various outcomes of collective movements.

Ample evidences have indicated the effectiveness of political opportunities in spurring political movements. Kriesi et al. (1992:239) concluded that political opportunities provide the best movement formation by claiming that "overt collective action...is best understood if it is related to political institutions, and to what happens in arenas of conventional party and interest group politics." (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald 1996). Tarrow (1994:17-18) argued that people tend to join social movements as political opportunities arise, even those with "mild grievances and few internal resources". Amenta and Zylan's (1991) empirical study also supported these claims. After they compare multiple movements and consider how various factors affect movement mobilization, they concluded that political opportunities are highly important in fostering organized movement.

The importance of political opportunities in political movements aiming for a more democratic regime has been discovered. After conducting a longitudinal study of the thriving of Korean white-collar labor movements in the democratizing atmosphere after the 1987 June Democratic Struggle, Suh (2001) concluded that political opportunity is important in spurring political protest and leading to inter-union solidarity. Shock (1999) found the political opportunity framework relevant to explain the toppling of the Ferdinand Marcos and the suppression of political movement in Burma during 1980.

In this study, I focus on political opportunities as those opportunities for Britain women to influence politicians' decisions.

Resources available

While political opportunities theory are widely applied to explain the emergence of collective actions, organizations and the actors participating in political movements can offer resources such as members, money, leaders, skills, which is closely linked to why and when political movements arise (Freeman 1973; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978)). Minkoff (1995) examined the organization of various women's and racial-ethnic organizations, and concluded that resources available for organizing political movements are as important as political opportunities in understanding the goals promoted by these organizations get furthered. McCarthy and Wolfson (1996) pinpointed skilled leadership in local organizations of Mothers Against Drunk Driving as an example of the indispensable resources in increasing membership and activism in these groups. In Soule's (1999) study on the influences of the political context and movement resources on protest activities for various women's groups, support for the role of political opportunities was limited but substantial evidence indicated that organizational resources led to a greater level of protest activities.

Ideological support

Although researchers have found that not all arguments supporting the causes of political movements are equally likely to spur individuals to movement activism, they have found evidences that activists successfully framed their arguments to advocate their causes and to appeal to specific audiences such as potential movement participants or those with the potential to support movements. While Koopman and Duyvendak (1995:241) stated that "the success or failure of framing efforts by social movements remains an important issue to be resolved ", how actors frame ideological arguments to justify their demands for advocating for social change was found to be able to influence the mobilization of movements (Snow & Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986).

Summary
While most of the abovementioned literature on the rise of political movements focused on various political actions in countries other than Britain, the case of the Women's Suffrage Movement in the Britain would be an excellent case to test these theories. Moreover, if the conditions in Britain when the movement took place could be found to be grouped into the three groups: political opportunities, organizational resources, and ideological support, a potentially strong correlation between the coexistence of political opportunities, organizational resources, and ideological support and the rise of women's rights movements could be revealed.

In addition, since few of the existing studies on the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain in have considered simultaneously the impacts of political opportunities, resource mobilization, and ideological framing on its emergence, in the following section, I investigate how all three of these factors contributed to the rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain. I first describe the political opportunities for women to get involved in the British political life and the mobilization of women to participate in the movement as women's suffrage organizations sprang up. Then, I outline various theoretical understandings as to why women should be given opportunities to express their concerns in the realm of politics that later were used by British feminists to support their claims for suffrage. Finally, I conclude that the political opportunities, organizational resources and feminist ideologies all facilitated British women's campaign for suffrage and further test the importance of these three factors in the women's rights movement in the United States.

Explaining the British Women's Suffrage Movement

Political Opportunities and British women from the working-class, middle-class, and aristocracy

The Industrial Revolution (1760-1830) brought an end to the home economy, in which several generations lived under one roof and joined their productive labor to earn income. Many working-class women began to work outside home as factory workers for long hours, and then returned home to carry out their household duties (Ramelson, 1967: 23). As more women began to work alongside each other in factories, they became more aware of the potential to unite as a social force to improve both their working and living conditions. Indeed, trade union membership increased to 437,000 in 1914, a tripled amount of the number in 1900 (Rowamance & Littlefield, 1977: 21). The frequent female participations in textiles and in the shop women's steward movement also demonstrated working women's awareness of exploiting political opportunities to improve their conditions (Rowamance & Littlefield, 1977: 21).

If the daily toils of the working-class women had indeed given them the most incentives to gain influence in the policy-making process so as to improve their life, the fact that they had little time for anything else, let alone to join others in political attempts to improve her conditions, other than earning income and taking care of family posed a barrier for the realization of such wishes. And as industrialization gradually led to urbanization and brought more rural women to cities, many of them became prostitutes due to the typical low payment for women workers and the seasonal nature of many city jobs (Vicinus, 1977: xv). In addition, they lacked the material means and educational opportunities to acquire an education or skills that could allow them to develop into "fully conscious, socially alert, properly educated human beings" (Ramelson, 1967: 25).

Meanwhile, when voting rights were granted exclusively to men with landed property, if one of the strong reasons for granting women voting rights was that women should enjoy equal rights that men did, the working-class women had no good reasons to justify their claims for voting

rights: the working-class men enjoyed no rights for women to hope for. "Working-class men in this period were economically, politically and socially a crabbed and confined part of the nation, were energetically campaigning to establish rights", and did not establish their place in the political life until under the 1832 Reform Act (Ramelson, 1967: 32). And even such success was limited: 'in the boroughs of England and Wales the franchise was restricted to male householders with property worth at least ten pounds per annum in rent, and in the counties to the forty shilling male freeholder and the ten pound male copy holder' (Vickery, 2001: 1).

And when one investigates the extent of middle-class British women's involvement in politics, although ample studies are available regarding the improvements in educational, legal, and political opportunities that especially benefited middle-class women, few have demonstrated middle-class women participation in British politics. The nineteenth-century Britain witnessed an educational reform that aimed to give women a more rigorous education that newly incorporated subjects such as history, geography, and English (Rowmance & Littlefield, 1975: 19). After 1870, the state increased its efforts to expand education for the mass (Rowmance & Littlefield, 1975: 19). Higher education began to open its doors to women: Oxford and Cambridge Universities had recruited women as degree candidates by the 1880s (Rowmance & Littlefield, 1975: 19). And changes in law also enhanced women's independent status and rights as individuals instead of as appendages to husbands. In 1883, the Married Women's Property Act granted married women the right to manage their real and personal property (Rowmance & Littlefield, 1977: 20). The economic development of Britain around 1900 also assimilated more women into the workforce (Rowmance & Littlefield, 1977: 21). Between 1850 and 1900, women workers grew to over one third of the total work force; by 1914, more than half a million women were working

in shops and offices; close to a quarter of a million were working as teachers and nurses (Rowmance & Littlefield, 1977: 21).

Instead, the immense popularity of two Victorian magazines, the *Family Herald* and the *London Magazine* during the 1840's and 50's, revealed Victorian middle-class women's preoccupations and interests of staying feminine and respectable according to the Victorian ideals of womanhood (Vicinus, 1977: xviii). Since the demand for women's suffrage suggested venturing into the traditional male-dominated political sphere, it would be reasonable to assume that many of the middle-class women around this time hesitated to voice explicit support for women's suffrage.

While women's influence on politics has long little attention, it was by no means non-existent. Aristocratic women participated, although not directly, in British politics before voting rights were extended to all adult women. Through their connections with powerful males, their involvements in the patronage system, their participations in philanthropic and social associations, the women in the aristocratic rank expressed their political concerns and demand.

The aristocracy as a social group may be difficult to define for it rejects clear-cut criteria including rank, economic status, or cultural attributes, but the financial, cultural, or social status of a woman's male relatives, especially fathers and husbands, were usually strong indicators of her social status (Reynolds, 1998: 19). Moreover, although law in this period rendered women as ineligible for citizenship and political enfranchisement and customs opposed to women's participation in political issues due to the prevalent separate-sphere ideology that the public sphere was a male-dominated and that femininity prescribed domesticity as the only appropriate sphere for women, aristocratic women by no means confined their activities to taking care of their husbands and children. While being female made performing their duties as daughters,

wives, and mothers as the main focus of their lives, aristocratic women not only assisted to their husbands' career success, guarded thee heirs' future interests, or demonstrated to society their social standing, but also had social responsibilities to be fulfilled, especially the social, spiritual, and economic obligations to tenants on their lands (Reynolds, 1998: 28).

Therefore, aristocratic women's responsibilities as wives and mothers, their close connections to powerful males, their responsibilities to attend to their families' real estate affairs and to advance their families' interests provided opportunities to bring their influence beyond the scope of home and family and rendered their involvement in the British political life necessary. From these involvements, they not only exercised their influence in the British political life, obtained their families' interests, but also demonstrated that by carrying those duties closely related to feminine qualities, such as mothers, wives, and mistresses of real estates, they could address some of the concerns of the British political life such as poverty alleviation, education for the mass, and moral improvement for society.

1 Aristocratic women and the patronage system

The chief political issues for aristocratic women in the late eighteenth century concerned the advancement of the interests of their families. To further such interests involved requesting support from politicians for themselves, for their family members, or even for their friends to improve wealth, social status, or both, if possible (Reynolds, 1998: 17). Therefore, while aristocratic women rarely pressed for direct participations in government, they made known their concerns in politics through a tacit, if not authorized, claim to citizenship.

During the late eighteen century, political activities in Britain seemed to be often bound up with family affairs and familial interests were usually one of the important goals of political activities. Aristocratic women, in their family roles as wives/widows, mothers, daughters, and

socialites, often sought to obtain something for themselves, for their family members, or for their friends by requesting patronage from politicians (Reynolds, 1998: 17). While women were unable to hold government positions or to serve in the Church, aristocratic women usually sought involvement in the patronage system for official support to improve their male family members' wealth, social status, or both, if possible (Reynolds, 1998: 17). A good case to look at is a study of Sir Newcastle's surviving patronage requests between 1754 and 1762.

Approximately ten percent of his requests came from women (Reynolds, 1998:66). While it seemed a small portion, its significance should not be overlooked, for it was well possible that Sir. Newcastle was only one of the many politicians to whom the women made these requests. In addition, many requests were probably made face-to-face, instead of on paper (Reynolds, 1998: 66).

The change in the numbers of the letters Newcastle over his political life demonstrated his women patrons' awareness of the large political context and made their requests accordingly (Reynolds, 1998: 70). Newcastle received a large number of requests in 1754, when his political popularity was high after the 1754 election (Reynolds, 1998:70). When he stepped down and was out of office in 1756-57, the number of requests dropped significantly but rose again when he returned to office and peaked during the 1758-59 parliamentary season (Reynolds, 1998:70). When tensions between New Castle and King George III and Lord Bute became widely known after 1760, Newcastle received fewer requests but other politicians in good terms with the king and Lord Bute, such as Charles Jenkinson and the duke and duchess of Northumberland, received increasing requests (Reynolds, 1998:70).

Women's requests to Newcastle between 1754 and 1762 were found to be for themselves as well as for the men they were concerned about. Since husbands could usually "plead for

themselves, many demand for patronage made by women were for their sons or sons-in-law (Reynolds, 1998:67). In addition, as many as two-thirds dealt with financial arrangements such as pensions or annuities, and the rest concerned peerages (Reynolds, 1998: 67).

The structures and expressions of the letters also suggest that the writers were well aware of general political circumstances and took special care to show their unique familial situations to justify their claims and show their social connections to establish the worthiness of their requests to be attended to (Reynolds, 1998:70).

Finally, Aristocratic women affected political decision-making by exercising the influences by turning their homes into a social site from which they derived political support by utilizing their family connections and friendship networks. As many aristocratic women turned their homes into salons, host informal discussion groups, conducted political correspondences, discussed politically inspired child-rearing techniques and so on, the domestic sphere became an increasingly important site where women exercised their power of persuasion on politicians to elicit support to advance their families' interests (Vickery, 1998: 42).

2 Aristocratic women and philanthropy

The late eighteenth century witnessed increased philanthropic activities organized by aristocratic women, although they usually happened irregularly and often based on personal acquaintance with the recipients(Vickery, 1998: 103). In addition, aristocratic women's motivations in participating in philanthropic work were complicated: besides to help out the disadvantaged, they also aimed to fulfill what they deemed as obligations to the poor, which they usually learned at a young age, as the instructions that Lady Georgiana Liddell's mother's advice to her attested: "be kind and benevolent to all persons under you, and so regulate your expenses

as to be able to set aside a certain portion of your income for charitable purposes' (Vickery, 1998: 104).

Such duties to perform charitable activities largely resulted from their ownerships of landed estates, and from the recognitions that welfare of the tenants habituating in their lands significantly affected the reputation and prestige of the aristocratic family and that the relationships between the aristocracy and its tenants are important for maintaining social order. Such charitable activities usually involved supporting needy crafts- and tradespeople, assisting with emigration, running clothing clubs; and the most common form was giving away gifts to satisfy the poor's immediate, short-term needs (Vickery, 1998: 105). And the regular visits to the tenants' houses and monitoring their living conditions allowed aristocratic women to get to know their tenants and to establish personal ties with them (Vickery, 1998: 105). In addition, as the views became increasingly popular in this period that poverty stemmed from personal moral failures and did not deserve relief, more aristocratic women shifted to another kind of charity: providing employment opportunities to the impoverished tenants by hiring them to live and work as servants in their houses, as such method not only ameliorated poverty, but also allowed tenants opportunities to provide for themselves through their own labors (Vickery, 1998: 107).

Such charities occurred largely in the countryside, where vast landed estates were located. In cities, aristocratic women's charitable work usually took place in philanthropic organizations (Vickery, 1998: 110). Such forms of charitable activities were not directly targeted an individual, as often it was in the countryside, but at certain social groups that demonstrated the need for relieving their difficult situations, ranging from health, to finance, to moral welfare, etc (Vickery, 1998: 110-12). Aristocratic women's supports took three principle forms: donating a sum of money from the allowances that their fathers or husbands usually set aside for them; hosting

fund-raising events at "their large houses with "suites of reception rooms and extensive gardens"

whether in London or in the country; and allowing charities to advertise their engagements to

demonstrate their endorsement of their philanthropic causes so as to attract more members

(Vickery, 1998: 112-15).

Also worth noting is that those politically ambitious often engaged in philanthropic work to

advocate their political beliefs and to seek influence on policy making. For example, to advocate

her desire to improve ventilation in the country, Henrietta, wife of the second Lord Stanley of

Alderley, ran estate schools and campaigns and later founded several schools and organizations

to empower women including Girton College, the Girls' Public Day School Company, the

Medical College for Women, and the Women's Liberal Unionist Association (Vickery, 1998: 91).

3 Aristocratic women and religion

Since during the nineteenth century, since religion and politics overlapped significantly,

personal religious outlooks may significantly impact a politician's career (Vickery, 1998: 72).

Therefore, although aristocratic women's religious enthusiasms and beliefs differed widely, due

to their positions as guardians of heirs and assistants to husbands, aristocratic women cared

significantly about how their religious outlook would affect the advancements of family interests.

For example, while Duchess Charlotte Buccleuch faced ten years' strong opposition from her

husband to join the Roman Catholic Church, for he was an active politician and worried that his

wife's conversion would hurt his career amid a heightened hostility towards the Church of Rome

(Vickery, 1998: 77). Moreover, since aristocratic women's social positions gave them a deep

sense of paternalism, their involvement in religious life, such as frequently connecting with the

priests of particular churches, did not spring from the desire to fulfill a womanly obligation but

served as a way to solicit information in the circle of politicians to familial political interests (Vickery, 1998: 89-90).

4 Aristocratic women's work in education

Before the 1870 Elementary Education Act, education for people outside the aristocracy relied on the voluntary provisions of educational resources by the churches and the landowning class (Vickery, 1998: 91). And the comments by the 1861 Newcastle Commission: "The general cause of apathy is the non-residence of the landowners. … In the thinly peopled rural districts the higher classes consist of the landlords and the clergy, the farmers forming the middle class. The farmers are often hostile to education; the landlords, unless resident, are indifferent" shed light on the availability of educational opportunities for the masses (Vickery, 1998: 91).

Even so, evidences existed indicating aristocratic women's commitment for the education of the local children. And their involvements in schooling for their tenants ranged from financing the establishment of schools and supervising its daily operations by looking for suitable teachers or becoming teachers themselves (Vickery, 1998: 92-3).

Moreover, provision of educational resources provided aristocratic women to show concerns and interest for their tenants' welfare, and they expected those helped to show gratitude and deference in return (Vickery, 1998:93). Moreover, the goal of such involvements in providing educations for the disadvantages was to reinforce existing class distinctions and maintain social order, since curriculum was designed to teach the masses duties and obligations to the ruling classes (Vickery, 1998: 93). This perhaps well explained why usually students from the same social classes attended the same schools and their school experience differed significantly (Vickery, 1998: 99). For example, at the annual events of schools, middle-classes pupils would be visited by a "great man" such as a middle-ranking politicians or man of letters, who would

give a speech to them and remind them that they were expected to fulfill important social

obligations in the future, but working-class children would have a day off to do a road trip

(Vickery, 1998: 99).

Women's Suffrage organizations and Resources

As Gamson (1975:15) argues, mobilization, a process of increasing individual's readiness to

act collectively, resulted in the forming state-wide suffrage organizations and positioned the

suffragists to engage in various strategies to persuade lawmakers and the electorate that women

should have voting rights. The emergence of organized feminist movements needed participation

of women from all levels of the social hierarchy. The formation of the suffrage organizations

could be regarded as one of the first critical steps in launching a suffrage movement. In fact, in

Britain, there was little or no suffrage activity before the suffragette association was formed, but

as the organizations that later became representative of the collective efforts of suffragettes

sprang up, suffragettes engaged in a myriad of activities designed to promote suffrage

(McCammon et al. 2001). This part of the paper explains how significant women's' suffrage

organizations contributed to extending voting rights to women by providing relevant resources.

Existing studies on the movement seldom mentioned the formal schooling that woman

might have received from schools, adult education or colleges as important for how they fought

for enfranchisement. Instead, for many women, it was their participation in these suffrage

organizations that allowed them to discover the effective strategies to fight for their causes for

suffrage in a male-dominated political life. By providing British women with skills, self-

confidence, networks, sense of collective identity, women's suffrage organizations stimulated the

rise of women's public political activism. Membership in these organizations not only

empowered women by allowing them to learn and to exercise the political kills, but also prepared

them for the fulfillment of duties to the public sphere as active citizens once they gained voting rights.

The indispensable role that two national suffrage societies played in securing women voting rights has been extensively analyzed. For example, the cooperation between these two organizations secured some 257,000 signatures to a women's suffrage petition in the mid-1890s, bringing a movement commonly viewed as declining into revival (Smith, 2007: 17-19). The early campaigners for women's voting rights included the suffragists. They mainly used peaceful methods to spread the campaign including drawing posters, writing letters, holding meetings, publishing and distributing leaflets, marching and rallying. Most of them were members of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) founded in 1896 (Smith, 2007: 19). And they sought the support of men by trying to solicit the support from various political parties.

Such strategies turned out unsuccessful, for those political parties always saw the advancement of women's rights as subordinate to their party loyalty and consideration of party interests. The liberal party was unwilling to support suffragists, fearing that women's suffrage would lead to more votes for their rivals: the conservatives. But the conservatives refused to support women's suffrage, either. Finally, the only party who supported women's suffrage was the Labor Party, but it was a party too small at that time to be of real significance.

And the lack of progress frustrated many women and led to the formation of another group of campaigners: the suffragettes. In 1903, a new organization was founded: The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). They were a militant group. They tried to draw people's attention to the cause they were fighting for through violence and vandalism. One of the most frequent common tactics they adopted included interrupting political meetings. And they had strong

reasons for the logic for adopting such strategies. Firstly, they wanted to challenge male authority. Secondly, such male confrontational politics would expose the 'brutality and misogyny' in the current male-dominated political system (Vickery, 2001:207-10). Lastly, the arrest of the suffragettes and the subsequent imprisonment created the image of these women as martyrs fighting for a justified cause.

The disagreement as to whether male support was necessary for gaining women's suffrage persisted throughout the movement. The NUWSS leader regarded the support of male voters and the parliament, which had only male members, was essential for their cause. But the WSPU leaders, whose viewpoints chiefly represented by Christabel Pankhurst, decided to portray the movement as a war in which women waged against men, seeing it as a way to arouse public sympathy and therefore possibly more support (Smith, 2007: 56). As it turned out, the WSPU's strategy, although successfully expanded its membership basis and financial resources, hindered the law reform for women's suffrage (Smith, 2007: 56). Moreover, Pankhurst's strategy reinforced the Victorian stereotype of the submissive women and the dominant men, undermining the organization's efforts to convey a sense of empower for women (Smith, 2007: 56).

Even within the WSPU, the degree of violence of their militant tactics remained hotly debated. The disagreements among various historians on whether Pankhurst knew and permitted the members to organize a protest to throw stones at the windows of the Prime Minister's windows at 10 Downing Street in response to the previous brutal treatments that suffragettes suffered in the hands of policemen suggest the disagreements between the leaders and the members on the extent of violence they could use in the campaign (Smith, 2007: 59),

Ideological support

British politics had long been remained an exclusively male sphere. To understand how women came to challenge the separate-spheres ideology, to demand suffrage, and to eventually construct a society based on female ideals, we need to examine the ideological origins of the movement. The cause of the movement was inseparable from the rise of feminist writings during the late eighteenth century, lots of which aimed at liberating women from a wife/mother role for male needs and giving women great freedom to choose their roles in life.

The late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century witnessed better education and wider career choices for women in Britain. As more women entered the workforce and gained financial independence through work and gained access to more educational opportunities, such as attending universities, they became increasingly discontent of being denied suffrage, which would allow them the chance to raise their concerns about improving society. And the main reasons for their arguments for voting rights included these: firstly, many believed that as citizens of Great Britain, the government's decisions affected them, so they had a right to vote for the MPs who pass the laws. Secondly, they paid taxes as men did, so they should have a say in how that money was spent.

In addition, those non-landed property owners, including shopkeepers, professionals, and tradesmen, began to demand during the latest decade of the eighteenth century, universal suffrage, arguing that their patriotism and the principle of liberty as an inherent human right were sufficient reasons for them to become active citizens. Such claims supported women's claims to be given a larger role in political life. The reason was simple: if men's rights to vote should not be limited by the property that they owned, then on what grounds could the refusal to extend similar rights to women be justified?

However, such trend was countered by several strategies. One was to portray women as incapable for political activities by highlighting them as "emotional, passive, submissive, and dependent". Another was to use the notion of separateness of public and private spheres and to argue that women should focus on the domestic sphere and giving women opportunities to enhance their influence in the public sphere would render them less devoted to their husbands and children and this would cause worse consequences for society.

While during the late eighteenth century, the British women's political activities were curtailed by the ideology of separate spheres and the popular belief that women possessed inherent traits that rendered them unfit for political life, the French Revolution brought impetus to buttress women's claims on their rights for political participation. Around the 1790s, Europe witnessed a surge in feminist thinking (Rendall, 1984: 2). And the ideas on women's nature and women's role in family and society had profound impact on the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain. In particular, ample feminist writings lent support to the argument for women's direct participation in politics by opposing the abovementioned views.

While intellectual women differed in their political tendencies, from the conservative "blue-stockings" such as Hannah Moore to the radical Mary Wollstonecraft, they all produced writings that would later be used to justify women's Suffrage. Both believed that education could help women prevent the dangerous tendency of developing excess of feelings –what were then commonly termed as sensibility – to the detriment of their ability to reason. They also shared the conviction that a rigorous would render women as better companions to their husbands and better teachers to their children. In addition, while Moore's argument for education for women relied mainly on its merits on improving women's abilities to fulfill her domestic responsibilities, Wollstonecraft insisted that no fundamental differences existed between women and men, and

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carried her arguments as far as to suggest that women were by no means unfit for political life. In particular, after Thomas Paine responded to Burke's piece with his *The Rights of Man* in 1790, in which he argued that citizenship should be given to individuals with the capacity to reason, regardless of possession of property, Mary Wollstonecraft claimed in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 that since women possess the ability to reason as men do, they are entitled to all the rights and responsibilities accorded to men to contribute to politics. She also argued that should women receive educational opportunities to cultivate those manly virtues, women could be industrious, independent members of society.

Moore and Wollstonecraft focused on examining women's nature and women's roles in the domestic sphere and the public sphere. In fact, those issues remained as pivotal in other thinkers' writings, who were also concerned with women's status in Britain. Catherine Macaulay in her *Letters on Education* (1790) shared Moore and Wollstonecraft's ideas on an equally rigorous education for women and men, arguing that although the observations were not without basis that women frequently exhibited vices such as vanity, duplicity, and ignorance, it was due to the sort of education they had received (Randell, 1984: 18). Subsequently, she prompted people to question the validity of the belief of women being innately inferior to men, and prescribed an education that acknowledged equal moral rules for women and men (Randell, 1984: 18).

In contrast to these women thinkers who acknowledged no natural inferiority of women to men, Diderot (1772) stressed on the inevitable effects that women's biological system bring to women's spirits and minds, arguing that women's reproductive function, as well as their social treatments such as the patriarchal relationships in marriage and restricted legal status, explained their tendency to following the dictates of emotion instead of reason (Randell, 1984: 19).

Thus, as the writers who were concerned with the rights of women around the late eighteenth century debated about the fundamental question of women's nature, the causal relationship between the conventional societal treatment of women and the realization of women's potential to contribute to family life and society, they provided advocates for women's suffrage with the theoretical grounds on which their justified the cause of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain. Later, as the leading figures of the movement, whether Christabel Pankhurst or John Stuart Mill, their writings or speeches to mobilize more women to fight for suffrage frequently demonstrated a strong reliance on the earlier feminist ideas that sprang up during the late eighteenth century.

Explaining the women's movements in the United States

As the abovementioned analysis showed, the British Women's Suffrage Movement was strongly facilitated by the privileged women's involvement in politics, which demonstrated that women's feminine qualities and traditional roles could contribute to society in a distinct fashion. And in the United States, the social environment seemed more favorable for women to get involved in political life: a society relatively free from class restrictions, a higher women/men population ratio, the possibility for women to hold position in the Puritan churches, a culture that are more likely to promote equality of both partners in marriage (Bolt, 1993.4). Thus, the United States possessed a social environment that entailed less restrictive access for women from different classes to participate in political life.

As for the organizational resources, while the United States did not witness the rise of national feminist organizations that coordinated feminist campaigns cross the country in a similar way as the British National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women's

Social and Political Union (WSPU), the American feminists fought for women's rights through participating in "anti-slavery campaign, temperance, club, and social settlement work" (Bolt, 1993:4).

So far as ideological support was concerned, while the British produced ideologies more influential than the American, the United States witnessed earlier female educational opportunities (Bolt, 1993: 4). In addition, as Americans turned to the British for ideas on how to improve labor organization, job training, problems arisen from urbanization, they also were willing to learn from the British how to promote a more equal society between the men and the women (Bolt, 1993:4).

Conclusions

In summary of the preceding discussion, aristocratic women's involvement in political life proved themselves as possessing skills and understanding to address particular concerns of the states such as education for the mass and poverty alleviation. In addition, women's suffrage organizations united women from different social classes and equipped them with skills to further the campaign, providing the movement with valuable resources. Finally, the feminist ideas sprang up in the late eighteenth century led to a common understanding of women as a distinct force with the potential to improve society.

In the women's rights movement in the United States that took place not very far apart in time, political opportunities, organizational resources, and ideological support were also present, albeit in different ways. This causes us to suspect that the coexistence of political opportunities, organizational resources, and ideological support would be essential, or even indicative of the possibility of a rise of a feminist social movement, which awaits further testing in other countries.

As we look back on the history of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, an important question naturally comes up: how did it change women's involvement in British politics? Did it lead to civil equality for men and women, which was one of the major goals of the movement? Thane (in Vickery, 2001) argued that the partial extending of enfranchise to women in 1918 led to a series of legal reforms that opened certain career options to women, that stimulated state-provided financial assistance to widowed mothers and orphans, financial support to illegitimate children required from the father, and improved healthcare for women and children, etc. In addition, Lawrence (in Vickery, 2001) found British politics became less violent during the inter-war period, and related this change to the introduction of women into the voting process.

The process during which Britain women alleviate the restrictions imposed by gender may be long. Yet with a better understanding of how they used to succeed in realizing this goal, British women, or even women in other countries, could at least have some lessons to draw on if they would like to strive for greater opportunities for freedom and self-autonomy.

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