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# The national and the transnational in British anti-suffragists' views of Australian women voters

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# The national and the transnational in British anti-suffragists' views of Australian women voters

## **Abstract**

The issue of woman suffrage, and the unevenness of its development worldwide, provoked much heated discussion in the early twentieth century. In Britain women were campaigning – often violently – for the vote, while in the antipodes women already had at least the national vote. This paper looks at national and transnational aspects of this debate as it was played out in the pages of the *British Anti-Suffrage Review*. It looks at how conservatives in the British metropole were compelled to articulate, even reformulate, their sense of national and imperial identity in light of the existence of the Australian woman voter. It also uses a written exchange between travelling Australian suffragist, Vida Goldstein, and her British male correspondent to demonstrate how Australian feminists – despite taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them through imperial networks – did not necessarily feel compelled to articulate their sense of identity or belonging in imperial terms. On the contrary, Goldstein insisted on a national identity based on values at odds with those of her imperial counterparts; values drawn from a non-British, wider ‘new’ world.

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# The national and the transnational in British anti-suffragists' views of Australian women voters

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Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

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The issue of woman suffrage, and the unevenness of its development worldwide, provoked much heated discussion in the early twentieth century. In Britain women were campaigning – often violently – for the vote, while in the Antipodes women already had at least the national vote. This paper looks at national and transnational aspects of this debate as it was played out in the pages of the British *Anti-Suffrage Review*. It looks at how conservatives in the British metropole were compelled to articulate, even reformulate, their sense of national and imperial identity in light of the existence of the Australian woman voter. It also uses a written exchange between travelling Australian suffragist, Vida Goldstein, and her British male correspondent to demonstrate how Australian feminists – despite taking advantage of the opportunities offered to them through imperial networks – did not necessarily feel compelled to articulate their sense of identity or belonging in imperial terms. On the contrary, Goldstein insisted on a national identity based on values at odds with those of her imperial counterparts; values drawn from a non-British, wider ‘new’ world.

This article has been peer-reviewed.

## Introduction

The *Anti-Suffrage Review* (the *Review*) was the official journal of the British campaign against voting rights for women. Published by the Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League (1908–10), and then the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage (1910–18), it had two overarching aims: to inspire and gather wide public support for opposition to woman suffrage through extra-parliamentary propaganda; and to ‘exert direct pressure

on parliamentary decision-makers'.<sup>1</sup> The firm belief of female and male members of the League – members including Lady Jersey, Mary Ward (Mrs Humphry), Lord Curzon and Lord Cromer – was that granting female suffrage would have dire consequences for the English nation and, by extension, the British Empire. To demonstrate woman's inherent incompatibility with the masculine responsibilities of nation and empire, the League and the *Review* often drew on a language of universality. Woman's nature, they asserted, made her unsuited to the task. The unevenness of the imperial terrain in relation to the female franchise, however, complicated matters. While Britain resisted granting women the limited right to vote until 1918, the far flung colonies of New Zealand and Australia had already granted white women the vote close to two decades earlier. So, whether it liked it or not, the *Review* continually found itself drawn into discussions about the Australian nation, its Commonwealth Parliament and the white Australian woman voter. These led to further discussions about the relative positions on the global stage assumed by the British metropole, on one hand, and the Australian and New Zealand peripheries on the other. In the minds of British conservatives, these contrasting positions irrevocably differentiated the profound question of British female suffrage from the minor Australian experiment with female franchise.

This article explores national and transnational aspects of the discussions taking place in the *Review*. It reveals that in opposing woman suffrage in the metropole, British conservatives were compelled to address the Australian situation, and in doing so to reaffirm or reformulate their understanding of nation and empire. It also suggests that as Australian feminists were drawn into the debate, they felt increasingly able (or driven) to defend their position by articulating a sense of Australian identity and values drawn from a non-British, wider 'new' world. In this sense, the transnational structure of debates about suffrage promoted reflection on national character and global positioning in both Britain and Australia.

## A transnational approach to anti-suffragism

Historians of empire have long had cause to embrace transnational approaches to the past. The essence of empire involves movements

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Bush, 'National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage (act. 1910–1918)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, accessed 13 Nov 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/92492>.

and exchanges across national and colonial borders.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the historiography of empire must go beyond ‘discrete comparison[s]’ of metropole and periphery, as Fiona Paisley puts it, to recognise ‘the significance of circulating populations and ideas, including from “margin” to “metropolis”’.<sup>3</sup> This article illustrates the interconnectedness of empire in the early twentieth century. It also explores how people in the past understood that interconnectedness. Many in this era – whether in the metropole or the periphery – were acutely aware of the advantages to be gained from monitoring international developments and participating in the exchange of ideas and practices across national boundaries. This was particularly the case for those involved in movements for social and political reform. Antoinette Burton has shown how reformers across a range of fields in Britain sought inspiration from developments and ideas emanating from the ‘margins’ of Empire.<sup>4</sup> And as Marilyn Lake has argued, this appreciation of the value of ideas and practices across regions was also true of reformers outside the British Empire. In the United States, for example, the granting of female suffrage in Australasia was considered a momentous occasion, prompting well-known figures – such as renowned social reformer, Jessie Ackermann, Boston suffragist, Maud Park Wood, and feminist and prohibitionist, Josephine Henry – to consider the potential impact of this development on their own region.<sup>5</sup> The physical presence of Australian suffrage campaigners in other lands – Britain and the United States included – provided a tangible reminder of the further possibilities for transnational exchange.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Here I am applying an understanding of transnationalism as the movement of people, institutions and ideas across and through national boundaries. See Akira Iriye, ‘Transnational History’, *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 2 (2004): 211–222, 212; Ian Tyrrell, ‘Comparative and transnational history’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 52 (2007): 49; and, Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, ‘Introduction’, in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2005), 6–20.

<sup>3</sup> Fiona Paisley, ‘Introduction’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 16, no. 36 (2001): 272.

<sup>4</sup> Antoinette Burton, ‘Rules of thumb: British history and “imperial culture” in nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain’, *Women’s History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994): 486. This is not to say, of course, that humanitarian reformers in the metropole were not often critical of developments and practices in the peripheries, particularly as far as the treatment of the indigenous populations were concerned. See, for example, Alan Lester, ‘British settler discourse and the circuits of empire’, *History Workshop Journal* 54, no. 1 (2002): 24–48.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed discussion of American reactions to female suffrage in Australia, see Marilyn Lake, ‘State socialism for Australian mothers: Andrew Fisher’s radical maternalism in its international and local contexts’, *Labour History* 102 (2012): 55–70.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Australian suffragists in places like the USA, see Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia. A Gift or Struggle?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 231–43.

Our understanding of the impact of these transnational webs can be enhanced by studying not just radical reformers, but also conservatives. Burton has argued that conservatives in the imperial metropole tended to cling to the notion ‘that the movement of ideas, culture, and “improvement” flowed in one direction: ‘from home to away’.<sup>7</sup> Yet the fact that anti-suffragists in Britain were continually drawn into discussions about Australian woman suffrage – that they were then obliged to formulate their arguments within a transnational framework – meant that the flow of ideas about woman suffrage from the peripheries into the metropole played a role in shaping arguments against the enfranchisement of British women, whether their proponents chose to acknowledge that effect or not. Political decisions made in Australia were, in this instance, instrumental in helping to shape how many in Britain understood changing conditions within the British world.

## Transnational or national reasons for opposing female suffrage?

In the early phases of its campaign, the Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League articulated its position in terms that appealed to a universal truth: women, whatever their nationality, were not made for voting. The first page of the first issue of the *Review*, published in December 1908, explained that the League opposed female suffrage ‘because it involves a kind of activity and responsibility for woman which is not compatible with her nature, and with her proper tasks in the world’.<sup>8</sup> Women had made enough advancement over the past fifty years without the vote. The work that the nation now asked women to do, away from the machinations of party politics, was already enough for women to undertake. To throw these women into ‘the strife of parties ... [would] only hinder that work, and injure their character’.<sup>9</sup> Women were still citizens, even without the vote. As the editorial declared:

Men who have built up the State, and whose physical strength protects it, must govern it, through the rough and ready machinery of party politics. Women are citizens of the State no less than men, but in a more ideal and spiritual sense.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Burton, ‘Rules of thumb’, 486.

<sup>8</sup> *The Anti-Suffrage Review (Review)* no. 1, (December 1908): 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Throughout these passages, terms like 'state' are used to refer to generic entities. No specific nation-state is implied. These principles were conceived as applicable to modern democracies worldwide. And these sentiments were echoed in anti-suffrage campaigns globally.<sup>11</sup>

The pleas against woman suffrage in the *Review* may have had transnational appeal, but they were motivated by the actions of women in one particular place, England. The League, the *Review* explained, was driven to establish itself as an organised body because of the 'shock of repulsion' and 'wave of angry laughter' rocking England due to the recent, much publicised actions of militant suffragists there.<sup>12</sup> 'Have not the spectacles of the last few weeks', the paper asked, 'shown conclusively that women are not fit for the ordinary struggle of politics, and are degraded by it?' All militant feminists had succeeded in doing was to add to 'the violent excitable element in politics' and usher in a feeling of sex antagonism, 'rendering the calm and practicable discussion of great questions impossible; a feeling and antagonism disastrous to women, disastrous to England'.<sup>13</sup> Should these rogue women be successful in 'winning' the vote, the editorial concluded, the final outcome

would weaken our country in the eyes of the civilised world, and fatally diminish those stories of English sanity, of English political wisdom, based on political experience, which have gone – through all vicissitude, failure, and error – to the making of England, and the building up of the Empire.<sup>14</sup>

Quite quickly, as we will see, a growing emphasis on the specificity of the 'great questions' of British politics, together with an emphasis on England's unique sanity, wisdom, political experience and place at the centre of the civilised world, would mark a retreat from a universal approach to opposing the female franchise. It would be inflected, at the very least, by a more nationalist or, perhaps more accurately, imperial discourse. Women worldwide were not suited to the masculine responsibilities of managing the affairs of the state. Anti-suffragists worldwide attested to this.<sup>15</sup> But women in England, by virtue of their

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<sup>11</sup> For the example of anti-suffragist discourse in Australia, see Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, 186–211.

<sup>12</sup> *Review* no. 1 (December 1908): 1. Actions here included women tying themselves to lampposts, setting fire to mail boxes and throwing objects through shop windows.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> A similar discourse is relied on in the US publication, Ernest Bernbaum, 'Introduction', in *Anti-Suffrage Essays by Massachusetts Women* (Boston: The Forum Publications of Boston,

country's position at the head of a vast – and, at this time, troubled – empire were doubly unsuited to the task. In this case, national concerns trumped those of a more universal nature. This turn was shaped in part by growing public awareness of what were viewed as colonial experiments in female enfranchisement.

## National and imperial concerns

The argument that social, economic and political conditions were so vastly different between metropole and periphery that no attempt should be made to transplant the results of Australasian experiments on British soil can be illustrated by a series of articles weighing up the relative worth of the Imperial and the Commonwealth vote. In 1911, the *Review* reported a series of conversations between the Australian suffragist, Vida Goldstein, who was visiting Britain, and a British male correspondent, David Kyles. (Goldstein's presence in Britain is itself a very tangible instance of transnational exchange.<sup>16</sup>) And in the written account of intellectual exchange between an Australian female voter and a British male anti-suffragist, the meshing and clashing of imperial and colonial discourses was laid bare.

In April 1911, David Kyles wrote to Goldstein asking her:

What is the difference between the vote exercised by you in Australia and that exercised by me when I use my imperial vote in this country? Are the votes of equal value? Do they carry the same responsibility? Are they the same or is there a difference?<sup>17</sup>

The response he received was obviously not the answer he expected, for in August 1911, the *Review* drew readers' attention to 'the extraordinary opinion' expressed by Goldstein. 'The vote exercised by me', Goldstein wrote,

is to defend my right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Your vote represents your cash value to the nation. My vote is of infinitely greater value than yours, though the responsibility is the same, even in time of war. Adding, dividing, subtracting the

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1916), ix–xvii, xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Vida Goldstein was 'an internationalist', having travelled abroad on numerous occasions in support of women's suffrage. See, for example, Barbara Caine, 'Vida Goldstein and the English militant campaign', *Women's History Review* 2, no. 3 (1993): 363–76; and, Joy Damousi, 'An absence of anything masculine. Vida Goldstein and women's public speech', *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 2 (2008): 251–64.

<sup>17</sup> *Review* no. 33 (August 1911): 163.

samenesses, and differences, there still remains a balance in my favour!<sup>18</sup>

The male vote in England, Goldstein highlighted, was given to men for 'property reasons'. Hers was granted for her 'womanhood' only. Hers was therefore of greater value, representing, as it did, the more 'progressive' and democratic values of the 'new' world.<sup>19</sup> By citing the vote as a tool for defending the rights to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness', Goldstein was drawing on values enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence; values that, given the context of their origin, might have been considered dangerously anti-empire. Certainly, in the years to come, Australian women voters would be increasingly accused of disloyalty to empire, as we will see.

Kyles' difficulty in accepting Goldstein's audacious, precariously disloyal, statement was all too apparent in his response:

I cannot fathom by what system of reasoning you reach your conclusions, nor do I understand the argument which seeks to disparage the Parliamentary franchise in this country in comparison with the Federal vote in Australia.

Reasserting his position, Kyles later declared that he could not conceive of 'anyone thinking that the Parliamentary vote in this country is not of infinitely greater importance than the Federal vote in Australia'. 'I suggest the true test of comparison', he continued,

is the relative powers of the Parliaments elected by the respective votes, and, in view of that, venture to think not even the most enthusiastic Australian would dream of suggesting that the Imperial Parliament was not far more important than the Commonwealth Parliament. Australia manages its own internal affairs for a population less than the population of the County of London. Australia cannot decide a question of peace or war, and has no India dependent upon it with a population of three hundred millions.<sup>20</sup>

'The ministers who are responsible to the British House of Commons', Kyles concluded, 'govern a world-wide Empire, for the maintenance of which they are responsible'.<sup>21</sup> Goldstein ended the correspondence by politely, if tersely, agreeing to disagree.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 163. The arguments here are almost the same as those in *Review* no. 27 (February 1911): 26.

This type of dialogue recurred frequently throughout the pages of the *Review*. There is ‘no real analogy’, the paper stated in March 1910, between the situations of “‘Britains beyond the seas” which have accepted female suffrage’ and those in Britain who had not. Anyone who would rely on such comparisons and therefore advocate woman suffrage for the imperial centre ‘must suffer’, the *Review* continued, ‘from the defects of a limited vision’.<sup>22</sup> Not only were social and political conditions ‘almost as great in distance as they are in point of geography from ourselves’, but ‘Australia and New Zealand have, so far, been happily exempt from the graver problems of Empire’.<sup>23</sup> This is not, one article claimed, to disparage the innovations that had been made ‘by our Dominions and Colonies’.<sup>24</sup> New Zealand and Australia, it continued, ‘are great fields of social and political experiment’. But, it was not so easy for Britain to adopt such experiments. With regard to ‘the social and political expediency of such a country and Empire as ours’, it was better ‘to maintain the distinction of sex which has always hitherto been treated as lying at the root of our Parliamentary system, and which has been, and is, recognised, with exceptions trivial in number and not in any way relevant in their circumstances, by all the great civilised nations of the world’.<sup>25</sup>

This was a time of imperial, and therefore national, crises for England. In the face of growing anti-imperial unrest in places like India and Ireland, national anxieties were rising. Feminist unrest at home only added to that anxiety.<sup>26</sup> Those who were worried about the potential disintegration of the British Empire, then, were reluctant to place international concerns about female suffrage above the immediate apprehensions of the nation. It is a pattern that fits with historian Akira Iriye’s arguments that, at times of national crisis, outlooks that are more universal or international tend to capitulate in the face of pressing local concerns.<sup>27</sup> Trouble in the empire – unrest among Britain’s ‘family of nations’ to cite Anne McClintock – worked to bring the focus back to the centre of imperial power and governance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Review* no. 16 (March 1910): 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Review* no. 21 (August 1910): 13 and *Review* no. 16 (March 1910): 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Review* no. 21 (August 1910): 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> The disruptive impact that gender unrest ‘at home’ had on imperial anxieties there is discussed in Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, ‘Marie Corelli’s British new woman: A threat to empire?’ *The History of the Family* 14, no. 4 (2009): 416–29.

<sup>27</sup> Iriye, ‘Transnational History’, 211–16.

<sup>28</sup> Anne McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Gender, Race and Nationalism’, in *Dangerous Liaisons. Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock,

## A global socialist conspiracy and antipodean woman's disloyalty to empire

Imperial and national anxieties might have brought the focus back to Britain, but developments in the margins of empire also gave metropolitan anti-suffragists new opportunities to reframe their arguments. The key development here was the growing presence of socialism on the world stage and, more particularly, in Australasian politics.<sup>29</sup> The combination of socialism and female voters, the *Review* declared, threatened 'Republicanism in the Empire'. With regards to Australia, Australian men might have handed women the vote as a sort of 'idle compliment', the paper mused, but that did not mean that certain groups of men worldwide would not benefit unfairly from the making of that chivalrous but entirely misguided decision.<sup>30</sup>

In 1910, when the Labor Party in Australia won the federal elections, forming the world's first ever majority labour government,<sup>31</sup> the *Review* published a brief piece declaring that in Labor's 'sweeping victory' the Australian women's vote was 'cast solidly for the victors', an outcome that had 'wrought a complete revolution in the political world'.<sup>32</sup> The female electorate, it seemed, had been 'appealed to in a way in which it had not been appealed to before. The heart, not head, was attacked'.<sup>33</sup> Roused from their political lethargy, in an uncharacteristic 'spasm of political activity', they 'quite natural[ly]' voted in a Labour government.<sup>34</sup> The Labor Party's enthusiasm for woman suffrage in Australia carried with it a threat that was not confined to Australian politics. Look at the United Kingdom, the *Review* directed, where 'any modified concession of Woman Suffrage would inevitably open the door' to the 'Socialistic Labour party'.<sup>35</sup> This sentiment was further reinforced a few years later, in 1913, when the *Review* printed a letter from 'a well-informed correspondent' who stated:

Before the women had been enfranchised in Australia there had never been a Labour Government; since then every State except

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Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>29</sup> By 1917, with events unfolding in Russia, socialism was certainly a much publicised and, in many quarters, much feared arrival.

<sup>30</sup> See *Review* no. 27 (February 1911): 26; and, *Review* no. 103 (May 1917): 34.

<sup>31</sup> 'Australian Labor Party website', <http://www.alp.org.au/australian-labor/labor-history/>, accessed 5 March 2012.

<sup>32</sup> *Review* no. 18 (May 1910): 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Review* no. 27 (February 1911): 26.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Victoria has been governed by Labour. There is no question that this result has been achieved by means of the women's vote.<sup>36</sup>

It was not even as if the Labor woman voted out of a deep sense of moral responsibility; rather it was largely from party instinct. The 'woman voter in the colonies', it was then concluded in another piece in 1914, was 'only a pawn in the game of politics, and of the opportunistic politicians who have enfranchised her'.<sup>37</sup> As a sex, women voters in Australia were, 'in the great majority', 'organised by and for the men's leagues'.<sup>38</sup> Another 1914 correspondent declared 'woman's Suffrage has simply forwarded the most socialistic form of legislation'.<sup>39</sup> The *Review* congratulated itself for issuing early the warning that Australia had entered 'lightly' into an experiment, 'the results of which no one can as yet foretell'.<sup>40</sup>

This insistence on the Australian woman voter's culpability in the rise of socialist politics meant that the *Review* overlooked – or completely ignored – evidence of the work of Australian women against socialism. Some women's organisations, most particularly the Australian Women's National League (AWNL) – which, according to Marian Quartly, was fiercely independent of men's leagues – made opposition to socialism an explicit part of their political platform. Indeed the AWNL's resolute objection to the Labor Party's presence in Australian parliaments drew disapproval from male politicians, liberal and conservative alike.<sup>41</sup> The diversity of the female vote in Australia – indeed the general complexity of female expressions of citizenship at this time – was not given recognition in the pages of the *Review*.<sup>42</sup> To do so might have undermined the campaign against the Australian suffrage experiment and perhaps even required recognition of the value of ideas emanating from the colonies.

By 1917, the final year before women's suffrage was granted in Britain, anti-suffragists' fears for the fall of the empire through a lethal

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<sup>36</sup> *Review* no. 58 (August 1913): 173.

<sup>37</sup> Quoting Sir Almroth Wright in *Review* no. 64 (February 1914): 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Review* no. 58 (August 1913): 173.

<sup>39</sup> *Review* no. 70 (August 1914): 136.

<sup>40</sup> *Review* no. 18 (May 1910): 4.

<sup>41</sup> Marian Quartly, 'Defending "The Purity of Home Life" Against Socialism: The Founding Years of the Australian Women's National League', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 2 (2004): 183.

<sup>42</sup> For studies of female political culture and organisations in Australia at this time, see Marilyn Lake, 'The Inviolable Woman: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship in Australia, 1900–1945', *Gender and History* 8, no. 2 (1996): 197–211; and Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, 'The National Council of Women of Victoria. Suffrage and political citizenship 1904–14', *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 2 (2008): 224–36.

combination of socialism and female voters had increased in intensity. 'The Socialist trend of every single Suffrage State ought to serve as sufficient warning', the journal implored, that far '[t]oo much is at stake in the Mother Country to allow a similar course to be adopted'.<sup>43</sup>

A vote given now for Woman Suffrage represents a dozen votes in ten or twenty years' time given to the cause of Republicanism in the British Empire.<sup>44</sup>

The victory of 'extreme Socialism' in suffrage states, the paper intoned, 'constitutes a grave warning to a country with the national and international responsibilities of Great Britain'.<sup>45</sup> Woman suffrage's intrinsic links with an international socialist trend spelt the potential disintegration of the British Empire. Fear of opening the doors of British Parliament to socialist politicians was certainly one of the reasons for denying British women suffrage on equal conditions to men until the late 1920s.<sup>46</sup>

What accelerated these conservative fears for the empire and cemented an already fierce opposition to granting British women the vote? Doubtless, disturbing global events like the revolution in Russia played a part in increasing anxieties about the growing influence of socialist politics. However, when directly addressing the question of whether women should be given the vote or not, the perceived role of women voters in the failure of two consecutive conscription referenda in Australia was also an important factor. In the instance of the conscription debate, female voters in the Antipodes had, the *Review* asserted, demonstrated a dangerous propensity for direct disloyalty to the Empire.

From 1914–1918, despite their work in support of the war, British suffragists were condemned for being 'unpatriotic' for continuing any aspect of the campaign for the female vote while the nation and the Empire were at war.<sup>47</sup> Female voters in Australia were likewise declared 'unpatriotic', but their offence was far more serious. They, the paper insisted, were responsible for the failure of the Conscription Referendum in October 1916, a referendum that 'narrowly rejected a proposal to conscript Australians for overseas military service'.<sup>48</sup> Quoting the

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<sup>43</sup> *Review* no. 103 (May 1917): 34.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Review* no. 101 (March 1917): 18.

<sup>46</sup> Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, 339.

<sup>47</sup> *Review* no. 101 (March 1917): 18.

<sup>48</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 164.

Sydney correspondent for *The Times*, an article on 'The Experience of Australia' maintained that the failure of the referendum was due to 'the emotionalism of the women electors, who thought they would be condemning men to death if they voted "Yes"'.<sup>49</sup> Australian female voters, Labor, as well as surprisingly non-Labor women, 'helped to swell the "anti" vote in each State':

Their action [the *Review* continued] has dumbfounded some most ardent supporters of Woman Suffrage, because there is irrefragable evidence that they permitted their emotions to guide their pencils in the booths, and reason and patriotism appealed to them in vain. In the supreme trial of citizenship most women 'shirked their duty'.<sup>50</sup>

Regarding this last line, the *Review* states, 'These are harsh words, which for our own part we should have hesitated to use'.<sup>51</sup> Yet it repeated them three times on the same page to wring maximum effect.

Perhaps 'loyal' women in the peripheries were rendered invisible by the fact that, unlike women in Britain, they were barred from assuming any official role. They were prevented from performing paramilitary activities or serving in the defence forces (apart from nursing at the front).<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the *Review* chose, for strategic reasons, to overlook the war propaganda work of organisations like the Australian Women's Service Corps and war work of Australian women in the Red Cross.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps, again, it was the visibility of a minority of feminist pacifists in Australia like the Women's Peace Army (WPA) of Vida Goldstein and Adela Pankhurst that led to the formation of this opinion about Australian woman's dereliction of duty.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, evidence of the anti-war work of a group of Australian feminists in the face of British suffragists' overwhelming support of the war effort served as yet another example of the potential, if not confirmed, disloyalty of Australian women voters. However this conclusion was reached, the

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<sup>49</sup> *Review* no. 99 (January 1917): 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* This was an accusation that the AWNL denied vehemently. The official organ of the AWNL, *The Woman*, ran a piece in 1917 that stated: the AWNL 'has indignantly repudiated the assertion of Sir Almroth Wright "that the women of Australia were responsible for the defeat of the Conscription Referendum in October"'. *The Woman*, no. 1 (August 1917): 185.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Joan Beaumont, 'Whatever happened to patriotic women, 1914–1918?' *Australian Historical Studies* 31, no. 115 (2000), 276.

<sup>53</sup> Beaumont, 'Whatever happened to patriotic women?'

<sup>54</sup> See Joan Beaumont's and Pam McLean's individual chapters in Joan Beaumont, ed., *Australia's War 1914–1918* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995).

defeat of the conscription referenda in Australia confirmed for the *Review* that, despite the different conditions between Great Britain and Australia, and that imperial responsibilities could not be compared with the domestic concerns of a small nation, there was little doubt that the women of both metropole and periphery were essentially the same.<sup>55</sup> It is on the inherent nature of women that the *Anti-Suffrage Review* invoked the right to transnational comparison. Women the world over, as demonstrated by Australian politics, were prone to be caught in 'the firm grip' of party politics, especially socialist party politics, and so can 'no longer act independently'.<sup>56</sup> It would be 'a good thing', then, the paper asserted, 'if the warning could be written in words of fire in the house of every Suffragist and every politician in this country'.<sup>57</sup> And the words that would form this warning to the British nation and the British Empire? That: 'In the supreme trial of citizenship most women shirked their duty'.<sup>58</sup> For the anti-suffragists, by 1917, events in the colonies proved the case against women's movements worldwide.

## Some concluding thoughts

The movements for and against women's suffrage in the early twentieth century served as sites of transnational exchange – of people and ideas – and prompted reassessments of national and imperial identities. In terms of imperial identity, events in the 'margins' of empire did provoke reactions from metropolitan anti-suffragists and therefore played a role in shaping metropolitan conservative discourse, whether British anti-suffragists were willing to admit this or not. Of course, the flow of ideas and people from the peripheries into the metropole also had an effect on Australian views. As Goldstein's exchange with Kyles reveals, these early twentieth century debates also served as a site of contestation involving old and new understandings of the core-periphery relationship. By rejecting the notion that the imperial centre and the imperial vote were more important than the colonial peripheries and the Commonwealth vote, Goldstein brought into question their moral and political hierarchy. In doing so, for historians, she serves to undermine the legitimacy of what Lambert and Lester refer to as the reductionist model of core-periphery

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<sup>55</sup> *Review* no. 99 (January 1917): 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

designations.<sup>59</sup> By looking at the core-periphery relationship through the lenses of gender and democracy, Goldstein managed to recast the relationship between both sites to promote, in Kirsten McKenzie's words, 'a more contested, unstable and mutually constitutive frame'. Together, what Goldstein and events in the settler colonies of Australasia did, then, was to facilitate 'the continual reformulation of imperial discourses, practices and culture'.<sup>60</sup> Imperial-colonial interconnectedness remained, but those connections were more complex, dynamic and open to wider influence than the traditional core-periphery model has often recognised.

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<sup>59</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Introduction: Imperial spaces, imperial subjects', in *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. David Lambert and Alan Lester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Lambert and Lester, 'Introduction', 2.