Piecing Together Suffrage Internationalism: Place, Space, and Connected Histories of Australasian Women's Activism

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Over the past twenty years, suffrage historians have sought to reimagine their field—traditionally tethered to the nation—as an international one. The Australasian suffragists, who strove to overcome their perceived isolation by exchanging print, personnel, and ideas across borders, seem perfect candidates for such revisionist treatment. However, despite the invigorating push to destabilise the nation, which has rewired much of Australian and New Zealand historiography, the suffragists remain ensconced in national frames. Revisiting the rich Australasian scholarship on women, mobility, and cross-border organisation, this article discusses the political and intellectual barriers that have impeded attempts to reconstruct suffrage internationalism. Yet, documenting the suffragists' cross-border interactions requires more than replacing monolithic national histories with revised internationalist versions. Instead, responding to debates about the digitally driven rise of connected histories, this article argues historians should piece together suffrage internationalism as it existed in specific places—recovering often messy assemblages of transnational individuals, groups, and organisations. Such an approach will both illuminate colonial women's place in the networks that bound the fin-de-siècle world and provide a fresh perspective on the international women's movement.

Keywords: Australia; Australasia; feminist history; gender history; New Zealand; transnational history; women's suffrage.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 23 September 1892, Mary Lee, the seventy-one-year-old matriarch of the South Australian women's suffrage movement, responded magnanimously to an erroneous report that New Zealand had enfranchised all adult women. 'We, S.A., N.S.W. [New South Wales], & the other colonies have been racing each other in the noble ambition to be the first to reach the desired goal, women's suffrage. New Zealand has won...her victory is ours' (Lee, 1892a). Then, as now, trans-Tasman ties were both competitive and collegial. Weeks later, upon reading that

New Zealand's 1892 Electoral Bill had, in fact, been defeated at the eleventh hour, Lee was unsure 'if I am glad or sorry. I certainly have from the first set my heart on S.A. leading the way in this reform' (1892b). She did not have to wait long. Fifteen months after New Zealand became the first self-governing country to enfranchise women, on 19 September 1893, South Australia followed suit, beginning a cascade of electoral reform that included the Commonwealth of Australia (1902) and its six constituent states, ending with Victoria in 1908. From her delight in the colonial suffragists' competition, her sense of obligation to the embattled 'workers in this cause in the Old Country', and even her mistaken impression that the vote had come early to her colonial 'rivals', Lee's letters were characteristic of the Australasian women's suffrage campaigns (Lee, 1891; Women's Suffrage League of South Australia, 1894, 6).

Lee's remarks have long been a matter of record. Yet, despite her belief that the push for women's enfranchisement in Australasia was a transcolonial phenomenon with global significance, and her exhilaration at the suffragists' propinquity, historians have shown little interest in a shared Tasman story of the organised movement. Read together, accounts of the colonial campaigns elucidate a common story. Led by white, middle-class, urban women, with enclaves of working-class support, and fortified by a robust Protestant temperance vision, suffragists from Western Australia to the South Island of New Zealand drew on a shared tactical arsenal to garner public and parliamentary support for their demands. Despite these similarities and historians' broader fascination with what Anne Rees calls settler women's 'remarkably supranational...mental and actual geographies', scholars have paid scant attention to the intercolonial story of women's enfranchisement (2017, 51). What we have instead, as Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan noted twenty-five years ago, is a proliferation of largely parochial histories, fixated on who won the vote first and why uniquely in the antipodes, that obscures exactly how the suffragists worked within regional and international movements for the

expansion of women's political rights (1994a). Despite their intervention and others like it, and the popular acknowledgement of the suffragists' regional and international connections, Lee and her counterparts' efforts to provide aid and seek inspiration from fellow travellers beyond colonial borders remain understudied. Such a lacuna not only falls outside the prevailing currents in feminist history, but jars with a moment in which the 'reciprocal amnesia' that characterised Tasman relations has been supplanted by sustained interest in regional interactions amid a wider push from Australasian historians to 'shrug off the straightjacket of national history' (Bennett, 2004, 10; Brickell & Wanhalla, 2016, 5; Bones, 2018; Denoon et al., 2000; Mein Smith et al., 2008).

Responding to a new wave of Tasman and Pacific histories and recent efforts to reconceive the campaign for women's suffrage as an international movement, this article traces the past, present, and future of connected histories of women's suffrage in Australasia. After exploring how the colonies' respective campaigns became entrenched in national mythologies, it considers why, given the relish with which Australian historians of feminism have embraced transnational history, the organised suffrage campaigns remain wedded to the state and the nation. Mirroring developments in imperial history, feminist historiography has begun to emphasise the importance of place and the value of drawing connections between local and global activism. Used carefully, alongside an expanding digital archive of western international feminist organisations, this approach will lead to a deeper appreciation of Australian and New Zealand women's intercolonial and international engagements. At the same time, this article suggests that, rather than propagating new myths of frictionless internationalism, uncovering these women's stories—from the quotidian experiences of the suffragist rank-and-file to the adventures of globetrotting luminaries—will reveal much about the development, operation and, crucially, the limits of pre-war international women's organising.

1.1 SUFFRAGE AND THE ‘STRAIGHTJACKET OF NATIONAL HISTORY’

Although the nation frames most twentieth-century histories of women’s suffrage, the movement’s early chroniclers situated themselves within broader frames. The first histories of colonial women’s enfranchisement can be found in European and North American periodicals. Sharing the ‘feminist belief that history had to be written for a purpose’, victorious suffragists penned uplifting narratives ‘for the benefit of women in other countries’ (Joannou, 1995, 32; Sheppard, 1893; Spence, 1895; Wolstenholme, 1898). These attempts to control the colonial suffrage narrative did not go unchallenged. Male critics used the same channels to dismiss suffragist activism as subordinate to the masculine business of parliamentary politics (Bakewell, 1894; Young, 1894). Foremost among these was former New Zealand Cabinet minister William Pember Reeves’ *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*. The book, a comparative history of the colonies’ ‘experiments in law and administration’, featured a chapter on the ‘women’s franchise’ (1902, v). Whether seeking to burnish the legacy of the Liberal ministry that enfranchised women, or merely airing his prejudices about the ‘unsophisticated’ colonial women’s movements, Reeves used the book and his platform as the colony’s Agent-General in London to entrench the notion that politicians had gifted Australasian women the vote (Dalziel, 1994).

Ironically, *State Experiments* offered a model for a Tasman history of women’s enfranchisement. As in the 1900s, a wave of correctives to his ‘gift theory’ arrived in the 1930s. Yet with the vote won in Britain and the United States, and the international women’s movement refocussed on peace and economic rights, those writing women’s histories in interwar Australasia narrowed their scope. Instead of targeting foreign observers, feminists addressed domestic audiences, seeking to inscribe their forebears’ triumphs into emerging national narratives. Written, as Marilyn Lake notes, by a generation intent on building ‘maternalist welfare state[s],’ these histories emphasised the power of the ballot to improve

women and children's lives (1999, 12; Brown et al., 1936; Eldershaw, 1938; Fraser & Palmer, 1934; Simpson, 1940).¹ After this flowering of interest, suffrage movements received little attention until the mid-twentieth century. Then, a cohort of scholars began writing descriptive campaign histories that largely unfolded in colonial legislatures (Cobb, 1966; Ross, 1952; Scott, 1969). Yet, even the best of these, Patricia Grimshaw's *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, remained yoked to rebutting Reeves' stubborn gift theory, combining an astute examination of parliamentary politics with careful research on women's domestic activism to prove universal enfranchisement resulted from 'a feminist movement comparable to feminist movements elsewhere in the world' (1987, v).

Intended to fashion a 'communal past' within which women could 'seek their faces in the present with surer direction', the swathe of feminist histories that upended masculinist narratives of nation making in the 1970s overlooked the cross-border exchanges that shaped the suffragists' activism (Dixson, 1976, 14; Summers, 1975). Inspired by imported American Women's Liberation texts, the first generation of explicitly feminist historians endeavoured to connect Australasian history 'with a worldwide story of power struggles between women and men'. Yet, as Ann Curthoys observes, her cohort did not write worldwide histories (1988, 2–8; 2003, 80). Instead, following the same impulses as the interwar authors, the 'first books to emerge from Women's Liberation in Australia were national histories' as activist authors sought to effect domestic change (Lake, 1999, 251; Lake, 2007). For the most part these historians found little to admire about the 'conservative' suffragists and even questioned whether they could salvage a useable past from Victorian feminism. Thus, their work tended to assume or ignore suffragists' connections to the outside world, alternately suggesting colonial feminism was an 'indigenous response to indigenous conditions' or blindly derivative of metropolitan feminist thought (Cobb, 1966, 182–183; Summers, 1975, 358).

Over the next decade attitudes softened. Invigorated by the woman-centred approach in vogue in American feminist scholarship, historians began to contextualise the subjectivities of once maligned activist groups (Allen, 1986; Grimshaw, 1991). Confronted by an archive replete with evidence of interactions between Australasian women and their American ‘sisters’, historians of the WCTU began exploring overseas influences on colonial members’ work (Bunkle, 1980; Hyslop, 1976; Tyrrell, 1983). Yet, despite promising beginnings, interest in cross-border organisation did not stretch to the suffragists. Early attempts to introduce comparative analysis to feminist history fell flat (Allen, 1979). After all, for those occluded from the canon, the nation remained a ‘prime site of battle’ (Lake, 2007, 180). Rather than looking outward to their regional neighbours, after reconstructing the suffrage campaigns interested academics delved deeper within national boundaries (Coney, 1993; Hutching, 2010; Lees, 1995; Oldfield, 1992).

So, despite Judith Allen’s intervention, it took another decade for the national frameworks that bounded Australasian suffrage scholarship to crumble. In 1993, delegates at the ‘Suffrage and Beyond’ conference, held a century after New Zealand women first exercised the vote, envisioned an inclusive international history of women’s enfranchisement. Shadowing the transnational turn in American historiography, delegates deliberated women’s enfranchisement beyond its Atlantic centres and advocated the reconceptualisation of the women’s movement in general, and suffrage in particular, as an ‘international protest movement’ (Daley & Nolan, 1994a, 14). Acknowledging the Anglo-American biases of existing scholarship, those present sought to transcend transatlantic myopia by returning to the conduits of the suffragists’ ‘fundamental internationalism’: the temperance movement, the Second International, and suffragette militancy (DuBois, 1994). Writing from an antipodean perspective, Patricia Grimshaw perceived the opportunity for Australasian stories to alter the narrative of the international women’s movement and urged suffrage historians to reorient their

enquiries away from the Atlantic and towards the feminist world's nineteenth-century frontiers: New Zealand, Australia, and the American Midwest (1994).

Sandwiched between Mineke Bosch and Annemarie Kloostermann's intimate history of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) (1990) and Leila Rupp's groundbreaking *Worlds of Women* (1997), *Suffrage and Beyond* (1994) presaged a sea-change in western feminist history. In the 1990s, a generation of scholars, led by Rupp, 'laid the cornerstone for what has become the dynamic field of women's internationalism' (Threlkeld, 2017, 1). New histories documented the proto-feminist dialogue nurtured within mid-nineteenth century transatlantic friendship networks and the fin-de-siècle crystallisation of these nodes into formal organisations, like the IWSA and the International Council of Women (ICW) (Anderson, 2000; Holton, 1994; McFadden, 1999; Offen, 2000). Expanding upon early synoptic histories of international women's organisations, this new cluster of historians stressed that, in their drive for social, economic, and political reform, feminists considered their labours in transnational perspective (ICW, 1966; Whittick, 1979). Their work explicated the interplay between feminism, nationalism, and internationalism at the end of the long nineteenth century, illuminating a world of conferences populated by Euro-American elites pursuing what they considered 'universal' goals: peace, prohibition, and the eradication of gendered moral double standards (Berkovitch, 1999; Jonsson et al., 2007; Paisley, 2009; Rupp, 1994; Sandell, 2015; Schöck-Quinteros et al., 2007; Sluga, 2017). Still, suffrage fits uneasily here. Unlike such 'indissolubly transnational' issues, the fight for political citizenship was, according to June Hannam, better understood as a series of battles fought in specific colonial or national contexts (2005; Tyrrell, 2010, 75). Still, as Kathryn Gleadle and Zöe Thomas observe, recent scholarship has emphasised the movement's international character, bringing into focus 'the diverse conversations with which British [and American] campaigners' engaged likeminded

women across the world (2017, 2; Delap, 2007; Fletcher et al., 2000; Sneider, 2008; Sneider, 2010).

Today, historians interested in the cross-border currents that animated fin-de-siècle reform movements sit atop a ‘mountain of scholarship, precariously dangling our legs over the precipice’ (Reinisch, 2016, 196). In the past five years, at least five influential collections concerning internationally minded activist women in the early twentieth century have been published (Bush & Purvis, 2016; de Haan et al., 2013; Janz & Schönplflug, 2014; Midgley et al., 2016; Sharp & Stibbe, 2017). Yet, despite claims that Leila Rupp unlocked a new world of inquiry for feminist scholars, most suffrage historians working to ‘reconceive...their project as an international one’—especially those documenting the period before the interwar expansion of international women’s organisations into Africa and Asia—have retained a familiar, Atlanticist bias in their work (Rosen, 1998, 1; Sneider, 2010, 692). With few exceptions, the spectres of the British and American suffrage campaigns still overshadow the experiences of internationally-minded suffragists elsewhere in the world (Evans, 1977; Edwards & Roces, 2004; Mukherjee, 2018; Sulkunen, 2015). Notwithstanding decades of reminders that more might be done to expand its remit, and however ‘diverse’ the conversations started by Anglo-American activists at the fin-de-siècle may have been, suffrage scholarship has yet to fully enact its transnational ideals (Bader-Zaar, 2011; Daley & Nolan, 1994a; Hannam, 2005).

The irony here is that, perhaps more than their North American and European counterparts, Australasian historians working at the intersection of transnational and gender history have had a transformative effect on the discipline, both at home and overseas (Wiesner-Hanks, 2011). Feminist historians Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys’ *Connected Worlds* (2005) is credited with reconfiguring Australian historiography—transforming transnational history from a radical critique of the nation into a standard implement in the academic historian’s toolbox (Simmonds et al., 2017, 1). Motivated by the mobility of their subjects—whether they

were actors flocking to Edwardian London and golden age Hollywood, missionaries lured to Asia by the promise of soul-saving and the prospect of adventure, or indigenous activists inspired by the struggle for civil rights in America—feminist historians put themselves at the forefront of exciting histories of cultural exchange (Curthoys, 2002b; Deacon et al., 2010; Paisley, 2012; Tyrrell, 1991; Tyrrell, 2010; Woollacott, 2001; Woollacott, 2011). Focussing equally on unruly life stories and sweeping histories of organisations like the World’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and Pan-Pacific Women’s Association, their work has provided a liberation from ‘the death grip of the national’ in favour of an analytical approach attentive to ‘connections and movements that...preceded, transcended or exceeded national boundaries’ (Matthews, 2005, 167; Struck et al., 2011, 577; Bishop, 2017a; Paisley, 2002, 2004, 2009; Page, 1986; Tyrell, 1991; Warne, 2012; Woollacott, 1998, 2000).

In spite of such trailblazing work on the myriad forms women’s cross-border organising took after 1918, the Australasian suffragists remain within a largely national frame. Tellingly, several important surveys of Australian women’s international activism elide the years between Victorian suffragist Vida Goldstein’s celebrated 1902 tour of the United States and the outbreak of the First World War (Caine, 1998; Lake, 2014; Lake & Campo, 2014). Likewise, pre-war internationalism is scarcely visible in the first comprehensive history of New Zealand women (Brookes, 2016). There are, of course, exceptions. Following her call for a new direction in suffrage studies, Grimshaw unravelled the coincidence of universal white enfranchisement and the political marginalisation of indigenous peoples across the Pacific (2000; 2001; 2009). Others have probed deeper into the colonial past, finding that antipodean settlers enthusiastically joined the debates about women and citizenship that animated the western world after the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Long before the organized campaigns for the vote, women contested the masculine political citizenship conferred on the Australasian colonists after the mid-century institution of responsible government (Bishop and Woollacott,

2016; Coleman, 2017; Woollacott, 2015). Amid a boom in scholarship on feminist print culture, welcome attention is also being paid to the circulation of ideas—rather than just analysing texts for their ideological content—across the extensive global publishing and reading networks that linked suffrage-era feminists (Stevenson, 2017, 2018). Above all, Australasian historians have lavished attention on the ‘suffrage diaspora’, documenting the efforts of seasoned activists who travelled to ‘teach feminists in the Imperial “heartland”’ in the 1910s (Hannam, 2005, 554; Caine, 1993; Millar, 2003; Nicholls, 1996; Oldfield, 1992; Taylor, 1992; Trethewey & Whitehead, 2003; Wainwright, 2017). While research exploring these few women’s privileged status in pre-war Britain is valuable, it seems clear that there is a problem of periodisation. As Lucy Delap and Maria DiCenzo contend of the Atlantic world, little detailed scholarship bridges the gap between the Victorian feminism of the Australasian suffrage movements and the rise of post-suffrage women’s movements in the twentieth century (2008, 53).

The suffragists continue to be lauded as the epitome of the democratic spirit that distinguished and, for some, continues to distinguish Australia and New Zealand from the rest of the world. Yet, they have been viewed in isolation and overlooked in the drive to globalise Australasian histories. Katie Pickles believes that a lingering sense of historiographical inferiority in New Zealand, Canada, and Australia militates against women’s history projects with a transcolonial scope. Despite all three countries possessing ‘parallel historiographies’, she argues that the prevalence of insiders writing national histories, an aversion to referencing academics from outside the canon, and the difficulty of marketing small nations’ histories overseas have inhibited the publication of comparative histories (Pickles, 2011). Ann Curthoys reported a similar phenomenon when reviewing a ‘fine’ work of New Zealand history: ‘I suddenly saw my own work as non-Australians might see it – esoteric, familiar, and unnecessary’ (2003, 70).

The avalanche of transnational scholarship published in the years following Pickles' essay suggests this 'cultural cringe' could be a thing of the past. Instead, other impediments account for the absence of a connected antipodean history of women's enfranchisement. Firstly, time has not diminished the imperative to write 'feminist history targeted at the nation-state in order to force it to change' (Lake, 2007, 183–184; Curthoys, 2003; Twells, 2016). Secondly, the surge of interest that coincided with the colonial suffrage movements' centenary celebrations preceded the historiographical impetus to recapture a connected past. In New Zealand alone, the 1993 Suffrage Centennial Year Trust Whakatū Wāhine financed 500 academic and community history projects (1994). The year's riches may well have been construed as a glut, as little scholarly attention has been devoted to the campaign in the succeeding twenty-five years (Macdonald, 2009).² Similar boom and bust cycles can be seen across the six Australian suffrage campaigns. Finally, for all its insights, the scholarship on cross-border organising that has energised feminist history since the late 1990s is preoccupied with 'successful initiatives' (Carlier, 2014, 78–79). Yet, as Joan Sangster cautions, 'transnational political connections and attempts to create internationalist organisations and sentiments were always a double-edged sword' (2007, 18). Certainly, Australian and New Zealand suffragists' interactions with one another and the rest of the world resist easy categorisation. Projects that uncritically celebrate the claims to international leadership made by, and about, women like Kate Sheppard and Vida Goldstein in the aftermath of colonial and national enfranchisement, ignore the suffragists' often strained relations within Australia, across the Tasman, and with the international suffrage movement (Devaliant, 1992; Wright, 2014).

Whatever the merits of re-examining the suffragists with regional or transnational lenses, any such project must reckon with growing unease at the ascendance of panoramic approaches to the past (Bell, 2013; Adelman, 2017). Because of the relative novelty of national

history and the rapidity with which transnational approaches have been adopted, these concerns are acute in Australasia (Curthoys 2002a; Curthoys, 2003; McAloon, 2012; Simmonds et al., 2017). While acknowledging the value of studying ‘lives and events...shaped by processes and relationships that have transcended the borders of nation states’, many fear that the ascendancy of spatial metaphors and transnational frameworks amounts to a new orthodoxy that forecloses important avenues of enquiry (Curthoys & Lake, 2005, 5). Whether driven by intellectual curiosity, or in pursuit of the rewards on offer for publishing in international forums, critics argue that dependence on transnational tools has produced histories that disregard local specificities and ‘small spaces’, normalise extraordinary individuals, and omit disconnections, failures, and everyday lives that fall outside their remit (Bell, 2013; Simmonds et al., 2017). Put simply, what does the emphasis on mobility and connection mean for the static and the isolated, the men dwelling in tents outside rural towns or the ‘woman from Queensland, who never left the country’? (Twomey, 2017, 97).

Digging into the suffragists’ cross-border interactions need not entail replacing tired nationalist mythologies about women’s enfranchisement with refreshed internationalist versions. Nor need it draw from a privileged cast of characters or rely on narrow conceptions of mobility. Rather, scholarship that considers the organisational and individual elements of the Australasian campaigns to expand women’s rights can demonstrate how the tendrils of internationalism touched all those associated with the suffrage movement. By the late nineteenth century, travel was no longer an elite phenomenon and affected the lives of many more women than a lucky handful of globetrotters (Bishop, 2015; Drayton & Motadel, 2018, 10–11; Robinson-Tomsett, 2013). Despite Mary Lee’s transnational vision, like most in the movement her age and straightened circumstances meant that she seldom left Adelaide, and never Australia, after emigrating from Ireland in 1879. Furthermore, the travels of her more illustrious counterparts, like Goldstein, as well as lesser-known figures like the New Zealand

suffragist Mary Powell, were funded by subscription from local women's organisations, who ardently believed their mission would profit from exposure to overseas ideas and activists (Auckland WCTU, 1900; Bomford, 1993, 34; WCTU of Australasia, 1900, 20).

Instead, such research is as likely to emphasise the fragility of cross-border connections and show the lengths women went in order to build, maintain, and unsettle links between the local and the global (Keating, 2016a; Keating, 2016b; Keating, 2018). For this reason alone, it remains important (Blackwell et al., 2015; Midgley et al., 2016). Belying the promise of transnational history, subjects from the transatlantic centre still eclipse women at the margins. A deeper history of women's activism requires historians to explore 'feminism's byways as well as its mainstreams, its dissidents as well as its representative voices', devote equal attention to its peripheries and centres, and explain why some networks proved more durable than others (DuBois, 1998, 172). Rather than retreat from connected histories, Felicity Berry contends that the opposite is required. In particular, she asserts that colonial women's lives and their familial and community ties offer the perfect opportunity to further conceptualise regional and international networks (Berry, 2015). Fiona Paisley concurs, arguing that antipodean internationalist women, doubly marginalised by gender and distance, provide a useful point of entry for historians working to discover 'the potential and limits of the international' (2016, 577). It seems clear then that scrutinising the personal and organisational records of antipodean suffragists and determining their place in local, regional, and international women's movements will enrich our understanding of their lives. Perhaps it will even temper transnationalists' 'exuberant cosmopolitan fantasies' of a progressive, hyper-mobile, and frictionless past (Macdonald, 2013; Kramer, 2016, 352).

1.2 A WAY FORWARD

Piecing together what Elizabeth Harvey calls layered networks that ‘permeated various spheres’ of Australasian women’s organising, ‘the local, national/inter-colonial...and imperial’ requires reckoning with another battleground of feminist scholarship, the archive (2013). Here, in centralised repositories, historians confront the ‘bond between history making and nation making’ at its most explicit (Rees, 2017, 53). In the case of women’s enfranchisement, a byword for an exceptional history of egalitarianism in both countries, and especially New Zealand where suffragists’ materials have been accorded the status of constitutional documents, the sway of the national is remarkably strong (Department of Internal Affairs, 2016). Thus, unpicking the knot of personal and organisational bonds that linked mobile subjects, requires scholars to first employ mobile research methods and then subvert ‘the logic of the archive’ (Rees, 2017, 53). For example, to uncover the connections forged by Kate Sheppard—the best known of the New Zealand suffragists—and her colleagues in the Christchurch WCTU, one must examine materials scattered across the world. The union’s major collections lie in the National Library of New Zealand, in Wellington, and Sheppard’s papers in Christchurch. These are complemented by the countless letters, pamphlets, newspapers, and photographs Sheppard and her counterparts exchanged with suffragists in Sydney, Adelaide, and Melbourne and as far afield as Denver, Leeds, and Amsterdam. Each of these fragments—most of which reside far from Christchurch—constituted part of a flow of texts, objects, and personnel that connected likeminded women across the world. Such artefacts were not hollow trophies signifying Sheppard’s personal cosmopolitanism. Rather, they were treasured by all members. In 1907, for example, the Christchurch union displayed sections from the 1893 suffrage petitions—containing almost 32,000 signatures, they constituted the crowning achievement of their suffrage campaign—at the New Zealand International Exhibition, flanked by photographs and ephemera sent from women’s organisations across the

world. The booth, described by the union as ‘the most cosmopolitan Bay in the Exhibition’ emphasised members’ pride in their place in, and commitment to, a continuing transnational struggle (*White Ribbon*, 1906a; *White Ribbon*, 1906b).

In the push to recognise cross-border ties between suffragists it is vital not to beget histories preoccupied with women like Sheppard who had the money and leisure to undertake overseas journeys and indulge in prolonged correspondence (Daley and Nolan, 1994a). As most historians are painfully aware, few women could ‘place...in posterity’s hands the documents necessary to engage posterity’s feeble attention’ (Malcolm, 1995, 65). Such silences make it harder to tell the stories of working-class women who organised in pursuit of the vote, to say nothing of the handful of Māori who joined the New Zealand campaign for parliamentary suffrage (Cooper et al., 2003; Deverall, 2004; Rei, 1993).³ Accordingly, such work must go beyond the study of emblematic individuals like Sheppard and join a body of research on ‘non-elite transnationalism’, revealing how ordinary women constituted the intercolonial and international spheres (Rees, 2016, 7). In this endeavour, it is vital to marry collective biography—a standard tool for historians interested in illuminating the lives of historically overshadowed women—with ‘unfashionable’ organisational history (Caine, 2010, 45–65; Threlkeld, 2017, 7).

Few of the Australasian WCTU’s leaders, to say nothing of its 8,000 members or the thousands of others who joined independent suffrage leagues have extant papers. However, the records of these mass-membership organisations attest to these individuals’ quotidian connections with women and activist organisations far beyond their hometowns. Here, as ever, the local and international intertwined. From their formation, WCTU branches followed edicts from international headquarters instructing them that ‘every document issued should be filed away’, while the ICW’s colonial affiliates shared with their European and American leaders a commitment to preserving their history for future generations (National WCTU, 1891, 219–

225; de Haan, 2004). These neglected troves of local reports and minutes allow careful readers to substantiate previous assertions of the suffragists' 'fundamental internationalism' (DuBois, 1994, 254). Examining the records of a single WCTU branch, for example, allows us to build on Deborah Jordan's observation that news of New Zealand women's victory in 1893 galvanised Queensland's suffrage campaign (2017, 89). Months later Helen Dewar, a lynchpin of the Auckland union, migrated to a quintessentially Australian small space: Mount Morgan. There she presided over a WCTU branch and lectured widely on the franchise at the very moment when Queenslanders embraced the mass-petitioning tactics that had succeeded in New Zealand. Dewar's story was common. Throughout the 1890s, the Auckland branch—which funded Mary Powell's world tour—welcomed recruits from across Australia and sent seasoned suffragists to Queensland, South Australia, and New South Wales (Keating, 2017). None of these activists were wealthy or well-known but, enabled by the network of WCTU branches scattered throughout the region, their efforts show that any woman equipped the appropriate letters of introduction could join the traffic of 'transcolonial circuit makers' that linked Australian and New Zealand settlements at the turn of the century (Steel, 2013, 363).

Linking suffragists in Auckland or Mount Morgan with wider 'worlds of women' is an easier task now than for previous generations of historians. Whereas many of the sources required to substantiate the range and significance of the Australasian suffragists' cross-border connections were either unknown to antipodean historians or, more likely, impractical to access, the digital revolution in archival practice has opened new avenues of inquiry. For historians of women and gender, such tools have provoked intense debate. Like any revolution, the '[re]creation of the Western print archive'—a phrase that denotes the project's geographical and epistemological limits—remains incomplete (Hitchcock, 2013, 9). There are important questions about selection biases in digitised repositories and the accuracy of the software used to navigate them (Cordell, 2017; Hamilton & Spongberg, 2017; Hitchcock, 2013; Putnam,

2016). However, fears that the popularity of digital research tools marks a death knell for chance archival discoveries or that they encourage a brand of ‘drive-by transnationalism’ are exaggerated (Davison, 2009; Putnam, 2016).

Rather, tracing the trajectory of a woman like Madge Donohoe, a schoolteacher who left Sydney in 1899 and ended up as New South Wales’ foremost representative at international women’s congresses, is only feasible now that fanciful archival leads can be chased in online repositories (Keating, 2016). As with Dewar, because Donohoe’s career—particularly her efforts to ensure the supremacy of state-based organising against the threat of ‘national singularity’ after Federation—fell into the cracks between colony, state, nation, and empire, her achievements and what they reveal about the movements she served, have fallen into obscurity (Atkinson, 2013; Bones, 2017). Pairing Donohoe’s letters with stories gleaned from digitised editions of Australian, British, and Dutch newspapers led me to London, and the archives of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, the peak body for British suffragists, and its global equivalent, the IWSA. Years later, in Wellington, I chanced upon a rare photograph of Donohoe, clipped from Berlin’s *Der Tag* and enclosed in the diary of a New Zealand acquaintance. The seductive power of the tools that began this journey, as Kate Hunter has argued, must not blind us to omissions, silences, and distortions in the sources we use (2017). At their best, digitised sources allow historians the freedom to fashion ‘new narrative[s] of women’s past experiences’ and, at their most basic, the simple ability to determine their full names (Bishop, 2017b). Yet, for the moment at least, in the pursuit of Donohoe, Dewar, and the dozens of others who silently crossed colonial and national borders, funded by thousands more who lacked the familial and financial wherewithal to replicate such trips, the paper record—as well as a healthy scepticism as to its limits—remains paramount.

2. CONCLUSION

Despite their interest in the colonial suffrage movements and wholehearted engagement with a transnational past, Australasian historians have been surprisingly reticent about the regional and international connections built, maintained, and even severed by the suffragists. Efforts to illuminate transnational events hidden in the national penumbra concentrate on the post-twentieth century, leaving earlier suffrage campaigns embedded in a national and colonial past. This despite the suffragists' long legacy of organising below and beyond the nation. Following new trends in the international history of women's suffrage movements, this article has argued that histories of Australasian women's enfranchisement should bear more resemblance to the 'socio-political movement' from which they arose, which was 'at once local, national, international, and transnational in scope' (Yan & Offen, 2018, 10). By focussing as much on places as monolithic nations—bustling port towns like Auckland and 'small spaces' like Mount Morgan—and making careful use of the newly accessible archives of 'layered' organisations like the ICW and WCTU that linked branch, region, nation, and globe, we might reach a closer understanding of how the suffragists—elite and ordinary alike—found their place in the world. Such work will not only demonstrate the importance of forming connections to the immediate and the everyday if such bonds are to thrive but also showcase the contributions antipodean women made to the operation and development of regional and international organisations, as well as the limits of this new international sphere for those in big cities and rural towns alike.

¹ Maternal citizenship, which defined women's place in the nation biologically was, as Susan Magarey (2001) notes, 'very distinctly, *not* what [the suffragists] sought'. Instead, it represented a constrained version of the rights they had fought for at the turn of the century (pp. 171–173).

² Public interest in the history of women's enfranchisement in New Zealand, however, remains strong, as evidenced by the observation of 'Suffrage Day' (19 August), and the 2018 Suffrage 125 campaign (Ministry for Women, 2018).

³ Given that Māori women were enfranchised on similar terms to their Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) counterparts, the question of their absence from the New Zealand women's suffrage movement (and its histories) is a subject of debate. Although demands for female political representation in the Paremata Māori (Māori Parliament) coincided with the WCTU-led, and overwhelmingly Pākehā suffrage campaign, as yet historians have found little crossover between the movements. Charlotte Macdonald (2015) argues that the two campaigns ought to be considered in unison. However, as Miranda Johnson (2016) contends, Māori women's arguments for rights 'in their own political domain' followed a path distinct from their Pākehā counterparts' (pp. 228–245).

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