Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth-Century Feminism

How do we know who should be included in the pantheon of historical feminists? “Feminism” is a contested term even in the present, and historical literature is full of kinds of feminists who would surely have had a hard time finding common ground: Nazi feminists and Jewish feminists, Catholic feminists and Islamic feminists, socialist feminists and utopian feminists, social feminists and equity feminists, imperial feminists and national feminists. The problem is especially sticky in periods before the advent of the term “feminism,” but there is no easy answer even when the women in question lived in times and places where the word, or a derivation or translation in an indigenous language, slipped easily off the tongue.

As even this short list suggests, the internationalization of feminism in the twentieth century has further complicated the problem. As women’s movements emerged in all parts of the world at different points in time, feminists began to talk to one another across national and regional boundaries. They sometimes used different terms, had different ideas, chose different strategies to fight for different goals. How, then, can we make sense of the diversity of feminism historically? Who, indeed, was a feminist?

Historians have mulled over the question and proposed various schemes of categorization based on gender ideology, specifically visions of women’s sameness or difference from men. Karen Offen’s distinction between what she calls “relational feminism,” which advocates equity for women in their traditional familial roles as wives and mothers, and “individualist feminism,” a (largely) Anglo-American tradition emphasizing human rights

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and personal autonomy, has had enormous impact (1988, 1995). Even those who argue about whether “relational feminist” tendencies deserve the label “feminist” acknowledge the existence of two different kinds of arguments for women’s equality.2

The ongoing discussion of gender ideology in feminism is fruitful, but it does not explain the lack of fit between feminists’ positions on sameness and difference and their strategic choices in the struggle for equality. Women have argued for the vote, for example, on the grounds that women, like men, are citizens but also on the basis that women’s special qualities would improve the political world. And some women who argued that women’s touch would purify politics also vehemently opposed labor legislation that treated women and men differently. A concentration solely on ideas ignores the fact that feminists are social movement actors situated in an organizational and movement context. Feminism is more than gender ideology; it is a collective identity. A collective identity approach shifts attention to the complex and ever-changing process of drawing the circles that separate “us” (i.e., feminists) and “them.”3 Because the meaning of feminism has changed over time and from place to place and is often disputed, it requires a framework that allows access not just to what women (or men) in a specific historical situation believed but to how they constructed, sometimes through conflict with one another, a sense of togetherness. Although the approach we propose acknowledges that feminists do not always agree on the definition of feminism or on feminist strategies or practices, it also recognizes that their disputes take place within a social movement community that, as it evolves, encompasses those who see gender as a major category of analysis, who critique female disadvantage, and who work to improve women’s situations.

We use the case of the international women’s movement in the early twentieth century to propose a collective identity approach to defining feminism. International organizing posed real challenges and the meaning of “feminism” underwent great change at this time. In the first decades of the century, a wave of enfranchisement divided women into suffrage haves and have-nots. Women in the industrialized world moved increasingly into public roles, but while women’s movements coalesced in dependent and formerly colonial countries, those in the developed world languished. And the rise of fascism and the spread of economic depression threatened wom-

2 See the comments on Offen’s article in DuBois 1989 and Cott 1989a. See also Cott 1989b and Wikander 1992. Scott 1988 reminds us that “equality” and “difference” are not polar opposites.

3 Other works on feminism in the collective identity tradition include Taylor and Rupp 1993 and Whittier 1995.
en’s newfound freedoms. There was nothing fixed about an international feminist identity in the 1920s and 1930s, and it is this dynamic process of contestation that we depict.

A collective identity approach

Feminist scholars unsympathetic to “identity politics” may view the concept of collective identity with a skeptical eye. Fearing an essentialist basis of identity, a divisive splintering into ever more discrete identities, and a move away from political action to self-absorption, many critics tend to be wary of organizing on the basis of identity. But the concept of collective identity as it has been defined by scholars of social movements is not essentialist or exclusive or apolitical. Rather, it allows an understanding of feminism as a political identity that is continuously negotiated and revised.

Social movement scholars agree that one of the distinguishing features of a social movement is the assertion of an identity in public life (Melucci 1989; Gamson 1992; Tilly, in press). Our analysis relies on recent sociological research on social movement identity construction, especially the insight that people do not bring ready-made identities—gendered, racial, sexual, or national, for instance—to collective action. This work, then, treats the collective identities that people deploy to make public claims as an accomplishment of an organization or a wider movement (Klandermans 1992; Mueller 1992; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994). Using this approach to analyze lesbian feminist communities, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier define collective identity as the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity (Taylor 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor 1996). In an attempt to understand collective identity as a characteristic that is constructed, activated, and sustained through interaction in social movement communities, Taylor and Whittier point to three processes involved in the formation of politicized identities: the creation of boundaries that mark off a group; the development of a consciousness of the group’s distinct and shared disadvantages; and the politicization of everyday life, embodied in symbols and actions that connect the members of the group and link their everyday experiences to larger social injustices.

The problem with this definition is that it tends to emphasize the unitary aspects of collective identity and to ignore significant differences of
identity and interest (Gamson 1995). As the history of feminism so clearly shows, feminist identity does not dictate one ideology or political style. If, as social movement scholars suggest, solidarities and collective identities work in tandem to structure how activists define themselves, the claims they make, and even their ways of doing politics, then feminism as a political identity can be understood only in reference to women’s movements and their organizations.

To gain insight into the negotiation of feminist identity that takes place in any women’s movement, we think it is useful, as William Gamson (1991) has suggested, to think of collective identity as three embedded layers: organizational, movement, and solidary. The organizational layer consists of identities constructed around networks or groups that may or may not be part of a larger movement. The movement layer is broader and subordinates individual organizations to the larger cause. Finally, movements may or may not be based in even broader solidary identities—such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity—derived from people’s social locations. These layers may be, but are not necessarily, closely integrated.

This three-layer framework allows us to view the process of constructing a feminist identity in the first wave of the international women’s movement as shaped not only by the larger institutional and political context (Katzenstein 1998) but also by intramovement struggles to define and express women’s common interests. We show how a collective identity approach to defining feminism in the twentieth century (and presumably the twenty-first as well) both avoids a static notion of identity and sheds light on how feminists with conflicting interests and ideas are able to talk across their differences.

The international women’s movement
Transnational women’s organizations in the early twentieth century provide an excellent opportunity for exploring the process of constructing a feminist identity because they brought together women from a variety of cultures, albeit primarily women of European origin from the industrialized nations of the Western world. Transatlantic connections began in the mid-nineteenth century with visits and the exchange of written materials; they strengthened within progressive organizations devoted to abolitionism, socialism, pacifism, temperance, and women’s rights. In 1878, the first international women’s congress convened in Paris, and other one-time

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meetings unattached to established organizations followed. Yet no sturdy edifice could rise on the shaky terrain of occasional meetings. Furthermore, throughout much of continental Europe, legal restrictions on political activity and publishing hampered women’s ability to organize. Only in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth did internationally minded women ensure the continuity of an international women’s movement by creating new, lasting organizations that fostered an environment in which both transnational personal ties and commitment to an ideal of internationalism could flourish. With these organizations, the movement began to grow beyond the boundaries of Europe and what have been called the “neo-Europes” — lands where European settler colonies flourished (Crosby 1987) — and to survive the calamitous events of the first half of the twentieth century (Rupp 1994, 1997).

We focus here primarily on three major transnational women’s organizations, the International Council of Women, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (later International Alliance of Women), and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. These groups distinguished themselves from others that sprang up in the years surrounding the First World War by their professed openness to all women and their (admittedly limited) success in organizing beyond the Euro-American arena. During its first wave, the international women’s movement remained heavily Euro-American in composition and leadership. Women from the United States, Great Britain, and western and northern Europe constituted the original membership of international organizations and also dominated their leadership. This pattern was perpetuated through the choice of official languages — English, French, and German — and the location of congresses primarily in Europe, with a few excursions to North America.

In addition to the three major players, a wide variety of groups — some organized on a regional basis, some focused on specific goals, and some encompassing particular groups of women — proliferated, especially in the 1920s and 1930s (Reinalda and Verhaeren 1989). Although they sometimes competed fiercely, groups also cooperated by forming coalitions. In the shadow of the Bolshevik Revolution, the global Depression, the rise of fascism, and the war clouds gathering over both Asia and Europe, the 1920s and 1930s proved to be the heyday of the first wave of women’s international organizing.

**Organizational identity**

At the first layer of collective identity, women developed a sense of themselves as members of discrete organizations. The three major bodies grew out of one another and gradually took on different emphases and styles.
Even women who belonged to more than one group tended to identify strongly with a particular organization.

The International Council of Women (ICW) grew from seeds planted during a transatlantic trip in 1882–83 by U.S. suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The shoots broke through the surface at the 1888 convention of the U.S. National Woman Suffrage Association, where international representatives joined with U.S. suffragists to found the ICW. Despite its suffragist origins, the ICW from the beginning opted for a broad and uncontroversial program that would appeal to the largest number of women. As German secretary Alice Salomon put it, the ICW was “bound to be cautious, as it included women from the most outlying villages as well as from those regions better prepared for an energetic policy in favor of the franchise.” When the Council leadership insisted that anti-suffragists deserved a hearing at a session on women’s political rights at the 1899 congress, German suffragists Lida Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg called an alternative meeting that advocated the founding of an international women’s suffrage organization. After a preliminary meeting in conjunction with the U.S. National American Woman Suffrage Association convention in 1902, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) came into being in 1904 in Berlin, the site of the ICW quinquennial congress. After the wave of enfranchisements around the time of World War I, the group broadened its goals and changed its name to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, which required just an addition, not a rearrangement, in the French and German versions of the name.

Just as differences over suffrage hastened what the ICW considered the

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7 Alice Salomon, “Character Is Destiny,” 77, Salomon Papers, Leo Baeck Institute (hereafter abbreviated as LBI), New York.


9 On the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), see Whittick 1979 and Bosch 1990.
“hiving off” of the IWSA, disagreement about peace activism led to the emergence of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) from out of the Alliance.\textsuperscript{10} Although the Alliance’s 1915 congress, scheduled for Berlin, was scuttled when war broke out, some members were unwilling to give up on an international meeting: “Day and night I trouble my brains what we can do to stop this scandalous bloodshed,” Dutch suffrage leader Aletta Jacobs wrote to other Alliance members.\textsuperscript{11} But opposition to meeting in wartime axed the idea of Alliance sponsorship.\textsuperscript{12} As a result, a group of members from the Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, and Germany met in Amsterdam “in warm sympathy and the best harmony” in February of 1915 and issued a call for an International Congress of Women to be held at the end of April in The Hague.\textsuperscript{13} The famous congress established an International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace, which at war’s end took on the WILPF name.\textsuperscript{14}

Throughout the years, these three groups came to work more and more on the same issues, especially women’s rights and peace. The ICW remained cautious and inclusive, the explicitly feminist Alliance added the cause of peace to its perennial concern with women’s rights as more women won the right to vote, and the WILPF staked out the most radical positions from the outset.

Despite their familial relationship and history of overlapping membership and cooperation, members lavished fervent loyalty on their individual groups. Faced with the emergence of a new body or the extension of work into a different area, women proclaimed their allegiances. “For my part I feel convinced that Chinese walls will only give way before long-built-up organisations,” wrote Dutch Alliance member Martina Kramers in 1917.\textsuperscript{15} And when Alliance leaders heard that the upstart World Woman’s Party expected the Alliance to die and planned to take its place on the

\textsuperscript{10} The phrase “hiving off” comes from Marthe Pol Boël, “Introduction,” ICW Bulletin 16, no. 10 (June 1938).

\textsuperscript{11} Aletta Jacobs to Miss Macmillan, Miss Sheepshanks, Rosika, and other Suffrage friends, August 16, 1914, Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-40, New York Public Library (hereafter abbreviated as NYPL), also printed in Jus Suffragii 8, no. 13 (September 1, 1914).

\textsuperscript{12} Aletta Jacobs to Rosika Schwimmer, December 29, 1914, Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-52, NYPL.

\textsuperscript{13} Anita Augspurg to Rosika Schwimmer [German], Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-54, NYPL.

\textsuperscript{14} On The Hague Congress and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), see Bussey and Tims 1965; Costin 1982; Wiltshire 1985; Vellacott 1987, 1993; Foster 1989.

\textsuperscript{15} Martina Kramers [Kramers] to Rosika Schwimmer, September 10, 1917, Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-92, NYPL.
international stage, they resisted the very thought: "The idea of the Alliance going out and Alice Paul picking up the members, makes my hair stand," wrote Dutch member Rosa Manus. "THIS MAY NOT HAPPEN and I shall fight for it." When German Council secretary Alice Salomon came to visit the new WILPF headquarters in Geneva in 1919, the resident international secretary reported that Salomon was impressed by the work of WILPF members and was friendly, "though mainly loyal to the I Council of W." Pauline Chapronnière-Chaix, Swiss president of the International Council from 1920 to 1922, regretfully declined an invitation to the 1921 congress of the Women's International League because "I feel I must, for this year at least, concentrate absolutely upon my work for the I.C.W." When Dutch WILPF member Cor Ramondt-Hirschmann got back in touch with the International Council and International Alliance, she reported that "it struck me how far more congenial I felt with regard to the W.I.L." Such organizational loyalty played a powerful role in keeping groups alive. "People get so proud of and devoted to their own organizations," Alliance president Margery Corbett Ashby concluded. Emily Greene Balch, U.S. WILPF leader, tried hard "not to be a chauvinist with regard to a given organisation with which I am associated any more than with regard to my country," but she could not hide her loyalty to the Women's International League. Making the same comparison, another activist referred to falling into "the trap of patriotism, in this case toward the corporate bodies with whom one works and comes to love.

Membership badges symbolized the organizational identity forged within the individual groups. The International Council of Women set up a committee to develop a badge sometime after the 1899 congress and finally, in 1908, adopted a design with the intertwined letters "ICW," mod-

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16 Rosa Manus to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 8, 1939; and Carrie Chapman Catt to Rosa Manus, March 9, 1939, both in Catt Papers, reel 4, Library of Congress (hereafter abbreviated as L of C), Washington, D.C.; Bertha Lutz to Carrie Chapman Catt, January 14, 1939, National American Woman Suffrage Association (hereafter abbreviated as NAWSA) Papers, reel 12, L of C.

17 Emily Greene Balch to Jane Addams, September 30, 1919, WILPF Papers, reel 35.

18 P. Chapronnière-Chaix to Emily Greene Balch, June 28, 1921, WILPF Papers, reel 18.

19 Cor Ramondt-Hirschmann to Jane Addams, May 22, 1930, Jane Addams Papers, reel 21.

20 Margery Corbett Ashby letter, conducted by Brian Harrison, September 21, 1976, cassette no. 6, Fawcett Library (hereafter abbreviated as FL), London Guildhall University, London.

21 Emily Greene Balch to Mrs. Villard, April 1, 1920, Jane Addams Papers, reel 13.

22 Doris Stevens to Helen Archdale, July 14, 1934, Stevens Papers, carton 4, Schlesinger Library (hereafter abbreviated as SL), Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.
eled on a brooch that had belonged to Susan B. Anthony and was passed on at her death to longtime president Lady Aberdeen.23 A U.S. leader, May Wright Sewall, insisted that the time put into designing the perfect badge was worthwhile because of the deep meaning of belonging: “As compared with the actual work to be done by the International Council,” she admitted, “it is true that the badge and insignia indicative of its intentions are trifling, but in themselves they are of vital importance.”24 Within the International Alliance, neither the 1904 founding congress nor correspondence in its aftermath hit on the perfect embodiment of internationalism, but the 1906 conference in Copenhagen adopted a badge portraying the figure of justice and the words Jus Suffragii. The Women’s International League, despite initial refusal of a membership symbol, adopted a badge displaying the word Pax at its 1921 congress. (The choice of Latin words for the Alliance and League badges reflected a desire to use an international, if Eurocentric, language.) Because membership badges represented an alternative to national symbols, such as flags, colors, anthems, and traditional dress and rituals, wearing one was an expression of both organizational identity and commitment to the larger cause of feminist internationalism. As this dual function suggests, loving one’s international group did not foreclose the construction of a second layer of identity.

Movement identity
Loyalty to individual groups did not cut off women’s interaction across organizational borders or their development of a collective identity as sister participants in an international women’s movement. Although the meanings of the terms feminist, féministe, or feministisch shifted across time and in different contexts, and although international feminists disagreed about specific strategies, through their cooperation and conflict they forged an identity as feminist internationalists. The Council, Alliance, and WILPF all claimed the term “feminist” at some point in the early twentieth century. The Alliance proudly adopted the self-description of a “general feminist organisation”;25 WILPF announced a “Feminist Programme” at its 1919

24 May Wright Sewall to Coworkers, December 31, 1903, 83–329 (5), Helene-Lange-Archiv, LB.
congress; and the ICW claimed a "feminist" viewpoint on the question of an equal moral standard for women and men.

Within international circles in the period before the First World War, the term "feminism" had come to connote, quite specifically, support for legal equality and equal opportunity in the labor market for women and men, particularly opposition to special — what was known as "protective" — labor legislation for women (Wikander 1992). By the 1920s and 1930s, feminism had multiple meanings, defined differently by various groups and individuals but nevertheless serving as the core of a movement identity.

The original and most circumscribed meaning of feminism, or what came to be known also as "equalitarianism," emerges in Cécile Brun-schwig's 1912 description of a French delegate for Correspondence Internationale as "une excellente féministe." Correspondence Internationale, founded at the 1911 Stockholm congress of the International Alliance, represented the first attempt to establish a group specifically devoted to fighting special legislation. We can see the same meaning in the claim of Equal Rights International (ERI), an anti-protective-legislation group founded in 1930, to have directed the discussions in coalition meetings "into more feminist channels." In preparing a pamphlet, ERI looked to the definition of "feminism" in Webster's International Dictionary: "the theory, cult and practice of those who hold that present laws, conventions and conditions prevent the free and full development of woman, and who advocate such changes as will do away with undue restrictions upon her political, social, and economic conduct and relations." Members of ERI and the other specifically equal rights groups regularly described women they met as "a fine feminist," "conscious feminists," "a keen feminist," "an advanced feminist," or simply "ONE of US."

30 Untitled notes, in folder marked "Pamphlet 1932–1933," ERI Papers, box 332, FL.
31 "Report of Operations at Geneva in September 1929 for Filing at Headquarters," [1929], ERI Papers, box 330; Doris Stevens to Margareta Robles de Mendoza, June 28, 1930, Stevens Papers, carton 10, SL; Florence Barry to Helen Archdale, March 14, 1934,
As women supportive of special legislation began to claim “feminism” as a broader term, those who held feminism to the older and stricter definition adopted qualifying phrases to distinguish what they saw as their true feminist views from this new, more expansive definition. In 1912, Hungarian feminist Rosika Schwimmer lauded an organization because it was “feminist in the highest sense.” Helen Archdale, a staunch British leader of Equal Rights International, referred, with no connotation of socialism, to herself and American equal rights advocate Alice Paul, as “left wing feminists.”

Such qualifications represented a response to claims to feminism “in the larger sense”—meaning not confined to advocacy of identical legal treatment—by groups such as the strongly protectionist U.S. section of the Alliance, the League of Women Voters. By the late 1920s, those who identified with this sense of feminism began to use the term “humanist” to describe themselves. In response to a public charge in 1928 in the Alliance journal *Jus Suffragii* that the group was moving away from its feminist commitment by working for peace, U.S. former president Carrie Chapman Catt identified herself as a “humanist” who had “not ceased to be a feminist.” As her British successor Margery Corbett Ashby put it, “We cannot, we dare not be only feminists, we must be humanists as well.” For Ashby, feminism was “much like love: a new love takes nothing from affection already given, it is an added enrichment of life. In the same way a feminist is no less a feminist because she has reached a point at which she dare develop every side of her human nature and natural interests.”

German member Marie Stritt agreed, defining feminism as “the struggle against violence in every form.” Not surprisingly, Helen Archdale objected to this usage, comparing “humanist” to the older term “social reformer.” For her, a feminist “is one who works for the advancement of women’s intellectual and

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ERI papers, box 333, FL; Margery Corbett Ashby interview (n. 20 above); Ruth Van der Litt to Mabel Vernon, April 28 1930, Smith Papers, box 3, SL.  
Rosika Schwimmer to Fraulein T. Eschholz (German), July 20, 1912, Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-29, NYPL.  
Helen Archdale to Alice Paul, April 1, 1931, ERI Papers, box 331, FL.  
Quoted in Helen Archdale to Doris Stevens, August 11, 1929, Stevens Papers, carton 4, SL.  
Marie Stritt to Mrs. Bompas, February 13, 1928, printed in *Jus Suffragii* 22, no. 6 (March 1928).
social status,” in contrast to a humanist who “cares for the joys and sorrows of all humanity.”39

The dialogue on feminism and humanism must be understood in the context of mounting threats to peace and human rights, particularly after the Nazis’ accession to power in Germany in 1933.40 Just as communists, socialists, and other antifascists tried to call a truce among themselves in order to unite against the fascist threat, so too some internationally minded women sought to work with men and unite in a common struggle against the violation of human rights. Humanism—a kind of women’s “Popular Front”—did not, they thought, represent a setback for feminism. In 1936, in the face of crises in Abyssinia, Palestine, and Spain, Ashby asked whether it was time to put feminism aside and answered with a resounding “no”: “Feminism is the faith of women who believe in individual freedom and responsibility. It is but the women’s side to the great doctrine of freedom of thought and speech, of ordered self-discipline, of self-government, of free loyalty to the community, of equal opportunity and mutual assistance.”41

The redefinition of “feminism” as converging with humanism was also a response to the connotations of radicalism and antifemale sentiment that clung to feminism. In 1916, Scottish feminist Chrystal Macmillan described the beautiful Dutch suffragist Mia Boissevain as looking “so innocent that the men would never realize what a good feminist she was.”42 An editorial in Jus Suffragii on labor-saving devices in the home, requested by Greek board member Avra Theodoropoulos, pointed out that such matters interested feminists, “even... those rather mythical ones who are still sometimes pictured in the general press as valkyries with wild hair bent on riding down the whole of the male sex.”43 And when Martha Larsen Jahn, a Norwegian WILPF member, recommended a countrywoman to the League of Nations, she identified her as a feminist but not an “obdurate” one, “personally very agreeable, with plenty of tact and amiability and I think that it will be easy for her to collaborate with the men.”44 During the

39 Helen A. Archdale to Editor, Jus Suffragii 22, no. 9 (June 1928); see also Helen Archdale to Ada Sacchi Simonetta [French], February 24, 1934, ERI Papers, box 334, FL.
40 This is an argument advanced by Karen Offen in her forthcoming European Feminism(s), 1700–1950. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to read her chapter, “The Globalization of Feminist International Activity, 1919–1945,” in manuscript.
41 M. I. Corbett Ashby, “Message from the President and Board,” Jus Suffragii 31, no. 1 (October 1936).
42 Chrystal Macmillan to Rosa Manus, December 24, 1916, WILPF Papers, reel 35.
43 “The Month’s Miscellany,” Jus Suffragii 19, no. 5 (February 1925).
44 Quoted (in French) in Miller 1992, 161.
Second World War, Alliance secretary Katherine Bompas suspected that feminism "sounded old fashioned, anti-man or something odd."\(^{45}\)

Clearly, women in the international women's movement contested the legacy and use of the term "feminism." Over time, the boundaries separating feminists from nonfeminists were drawn in different places and by different parties. But they all agreed that something needed to be done to bring about equality with men, even if they had as many ideas about what that was as they had qualifying terms for "feminism." The bone of contention in defining who was and was not a feminist—support for identical laws for women and men—lay at the heart of post-World War I feminist struggles over policy questions as well. In fighting for suffrage, labor legislation, and nationality laws for married women, the international women's movement divided between those who evaluated laws solely on the basis of whether they treated women identically to men and those who had a vision of just laws for both men and women. Their differing frames corresponded to the labels "left-wing feminist" and "humanist," respectively.

Feminist internationalists found common ground in trying to wrest the vote and enabling legislation from the dominant forces on the national and global scene, but they struggled almost as much with each other. Socialists in the international women's organizations attacked those who advocated the vote for educated or elite women only, calling this "lady suffrage."\(^{46}\) The 1926 Alliance congress blew up over the question of special legislation, prompting one newspaper to headline its coverage, "Rival Suffragists Take Row to Paris: Feminism Is Real Issue."\(^{47}\) The League of Nations-sponsored Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality, a coalition of international women's organizations designed to provide advice on the nationality issues of women who married foreign citizens, divided so bitterly between advocates of "equal" and "independent" nationality that they failed to bring about any change at all.\(^{48}\) Yet these were, for the most part,

\(^{45}\) Katherine Bompas, "The Rise and Fall of the Women's Movement," *Jus Suffragii* 35, no. 9, July 1941.


\(^{47}\) (New York) *World*, May 26, 1926, Jane Norman Smith Papers, box 12, SL.

\(^{48}\) Traditionally, when a woman married a man of a different nationality, she lost her own citizenship and gained that of her husband. The nationality question took on added significance after the outbreak of the First World War, when the customary practice led to a situation in which some women found themselves enemy nationals in the land of their birth while women born in enemy territory enjoyed full rights of citizenship. Attempts by individual countries to remedy this inequity after the war made some women, deprived by their own countries of their nationality but not granted that of their husbands', stateless. The issue of nationality came into the international spotlight around the Conference on Codification of International Law held in The Hague in 1930. Despite intense lobbying by women, the
women talking to each other, even when they disagreed. And from the outside they all looked very much like women with a shared feminist identity.

By the 1920s, for most of the women in the three major international organizations, the boundary that encircled feminist internationalists included all those committed to ending male domination and the subordination of women, whatever their position on identical legislation for women and men. Underlying their movement identity was a third layer of identity rooted in their sense of “we-ness” as women.

Solidary identity
At the broadest level, by both assuming fundamental gender differences and organizing in all-women groups, women in the international feminist movement drew boundaries that separated women from men. The discourse of difference resounded throughout the movement. German pacifist Anita Augspurg contrasted the “world of men,” “built up on profit and power, on gaining material wealth and oppressing other people,” to the “new world” women could build which would “produce enough for all and which would include the protection of children, youth and the weak.”

Augsburg’s life partner, Lida Gustava Heymann, likewise condemned men’s “lies and hatred and violence” and lauded the world women wanted to establish based on “love, right and mutual understanding.”

Such contrasts came to the fore especially in discussions of what women generally considered the male business of war and the female penchant for peace. Of the First World War, British WILPF member Mary Sheepshanks wrote, “Men have made this war; let women make peace—a real and lasting peace.” Hungarian Paula Pogany had never in her life “felt more aver-

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Conference maintained the principle of a woman’s nationality following that of her husband. Organized women then took up the cudgel against ratification of the Convention, leading to the formation of the Women’s Consultative Committee. Supporters of “equal nationality” called for identical laws for women and men, while advocates of “independent nationality” wanted to grant women the right to retain or change their nationality. Unable to reach agreement, they failed to persuade the League of Nations to reject The Hague Convention and its shackles on women’s nationality. See Page 1984 and Miller 1992.

49 Speech of Lida Gustava Heymann, WILPF Zurich Congress, [1919], WILPF Papers, reel 17.
50 Minutes, WILPF International Congress, September 3–8, 1934, WILPF Papers, reel 20; Speech of Lida Gustava Heymann, WILPF Zurich Congress [1919], WILPF Papers, reel 17.
51 Mary Sheepshanks, “Peace,” Jst Suffragii 13 (December 1918).
sion against everything what carries the character of manhood.” In the interval between the wars, Egyptian Alliance member Huda Sha’rawi proclaimed that “if men’s ambition has created war, the sentiment of equity, innate in women, will further the construction of peace.” Putting it more bluntly, International Alliance leader Carrie Chapman Catt insisted: “All wars are men’s wars. Peace has been made by women but war never.” In the midst of the Second World War, she ventured that men had never wanted to end war: “They like to fight, they like the adventure, they like the prestige, and they certainly love conquest.”

Underlying such gender consciousness was a widespread essentialist assumption that women’s biological capacity for childbearing made them inherently pacifistic. As Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, French suffrage leader put it, “Women who have given life must always have a horror of war.” Or as a German-language appeal to women as mothers of sons asked, “Have you forgotten the hour of his birth? No man can sympathize with that, for he has never with a hundred thousand pains borne a child.” Women who had given birth were coming more and more to realize “that it is senseless to continue to give life when this life will surely be annihilated by violence and war.” Over and over again, women referred to themselves as “guardians, nurses & preservers,” “Mothers of the Human Race,” “carriers of life,” “MOTHERS OF THE NATIONS,” “guardians of the new generations.”

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52 Paula Pogány to Mary Sheepshanks, February 8, 1915, Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-54, NYPL.
53 “L’Orient et l’Occident en coopération,” La République, April 20, 1935, Margery Corbett-Asby Papers, box 484, FL.
55 Carrie Chapman Catt to Margery Corbett-Asby and Katherine Bompas, June 16, 1942, Catt Papers, box 3, NYPL.
57 Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, “A Call to the Congress,” Jus Suffragiæ 20 (March 1926).
59 “Women’s Organisations for World Order” [German], n.d., WILPF Papers, reel 110.
Maternalist appeals served as a staple of the propaganda issued by international women’s organizations.61 Most echoed the 1936 “Call to Women” issued by the Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix, a mixed-gender peace campaign whose women’s section attracted the participation of organized women: “Mothers everywhere feel a growing despair. They tremble at the thought that the children they have borne must undergo the horrors of another war.”62 But motherhood as a basis of solidarity did not have to be essentialist, as illustrated by a 1920 appeal “To the Women of Palestine Who Love Peace,” which called on women as the socializers of children to use their power to help “their sons and daughters grow up free from religious and racial prejudice, free from all that is dwarfing in the wrong kind of patriotism.”63 Motherhood had the potential to unite all women, even those who had never given birth. As Rosika Schwimmer put it, “Even women who are not physically mothers, feel all as the mothers of the human race.”64 That appeals to motherhood could be strategic, as well as heartfelt, is suggested by WILPF leader Emily Greene Balch’s comment, “I see value in sentimental appeals to ‘the mother heart.”’65

Another powerful argument for women’s difference targeted wartime sexual violence as a stark boundary separating women from men. The International Council of Women’s Peace Committee protested in 1913 against “the horrible violation of womanhood that attends all war.”66 According to Carrie Chapman Catt, the “conditions of war subvert the natural instincts of many men of all races, who temporarily return to the brutal practices of the most savage primitive races.”67 Expressing a gloomier view of “civilized” men’s peacetime behavior, Schwimmer protested that the “victimizing of children, young girls, and women of all ages so common in peaceful times, because under the double standard of morals men are


62 “A Call to Women,” [1936], no. 24, Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix (RUP) Papers, International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (hereafter abbreviated as IISG), Amsterdam.

63 “To Women of Palestine who love Peace,” September 1920, WILPF Papers, reel 1.

64 Rosika Schwimmer, “War and Women,” n.d. [1914], Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, box A-48, NYPL.

65 Emily Balch to Elisabeth Waern-Bugge, December 12, [1934], WILPF Papers, reel 2.


67 “The Atrocities of War,” Jus Suffragii 9 (October 1, 1914).
not outlawed for sexual crimes, is multiplied in war time." Picking up the theme of violence, the flyer announcing the 1915 Hague Congress referred circumspectly to rape as one reason that women needed to come together internationally: "The moral and physical sufferings of many women are beyond description and are often of such a nature that by the tacit consent of men the least possible is reported. Women raise their voices in commis- sionation with those women wounded in their deepest sense of womanhood and powerless to defend themselves." Violence against women, like motherhood, had the potential to unite women across cultures.

Not all expressions of boundaries between women and men had such potentially universal appeal. One strand of discourse in the pre–First World War period called attention to women’s social roles in the home. Lady Aberdeen, ICW president, argued that devotion to the home brought women together across the chasms of class and race. Finnish Alliance member Annie Furuhjelm saw the "motor force of the whole movement" as the "intuitive comprehension of women that they have to go out of their own individual homes in order to make the big world more of a home." For Mary Sheepshanks, the fact that women had for so many generations been isolated in their homes made their schemes for reform different from men’s. As women in industrialized societies increasingly moved into the labor force and recognized divergent patterns of social organization in different parts of the world, this theme lost some of its salience.

Likewise, the motif of women’s disfranchisement or lack of political power diminished over time. At the founding congress of the International Council of Women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton referred to the "universal sense of injustice, that forms a common bond of union" among "the women of all nationalities." When U.S. women still lacked the vote, Carrie Chapman Catt saw Chinese suffragists beholding "the same vision which is arousing the women of all the Nations of the Earth" and, turning her gaze to the Balkans, asserted that there "are wrongs of countries and of classes to be righted, but the wrongs of women are common to all races and nations." Mary Sheepshanks agreed: "Unenfranchised, unequal be-

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70 "The Presidential Addresses delivered by the Countess of Aberdeen during the visit of the I.C.W. Executive Committee to Paris," June 1906, ICW HQ.
71 Annie Furuhjelm, "Our Alliance," Jus Suffragii 8 (May 1, 1914); Mary Sheepshanks, "What Women Want," Jus Suffragii 8 (July 1, 1914).
72 National American Woman Suffrage Association 1888, 33.
73 Carrie Chapman Catt to Editor, (New York) Sun, January 11, 1913, Catt Papers, box 1, NYPL; Carrie Chapman Catt, "Congress Announcements," Jus Suffragii 7 (February 15, 1913).
fore the law, suffering from innumerable disabilities and injustices, [women] will preserve the bond of their common sisterhood.\textsuperscript{74} But the granting of women's suffrage in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and many of the European countries around the time of the First World War created division between enfranchised and still-voteless women. Although the 1911 congress in Stockholm had resolved that the nations with suffrage “feel that their work is not done . . . as long as the women of any country remain disfranchised,” women voters seemed increasingly eager to move on to other issues.\textsuperscript{75}

The general lack of political power continued, however, to draw a line between women and men, at least in countries where men had some political rights. Siao-Mei Djang, a Chinese woman writing a pamphlet for the Women's International League in 1929, could still refer to “the problems which are universal to womanhood.”\textsuperscript{76} Enfranchised women tended to focus on the independence of women from traditional political parties. According to Emily Greene Balch, women, “in the main outside of the politics of the past,” were “free from bad old political habits and traditions, and free to strike out a new political method, not dominated by party, in which social and moral values shall outweigh all others.”\textsuperscript{77} Likewise, when Hitler came to power, the Women's International League issued a “Statement on Fascism” proclaiming that “we women, the greater part of whom are outside all political parties, and consequently not obliged to take the orders of any of them, can understand these events independently, with our simple common sense, and our sense of what is human.”\textsuperscript{78}

The notion of women’s difference from men—whether biologically or socially based—found organizational expression in the separatist nature of the three major international bodies and the coalitions they formed. Although women proclaimed the exclusion of men a temporary expedient and periodically considered opening up their groups, they persisted in organizing apart from men, giving institutional form to their convictions of difference.

Those who questioned the assumption of women's difference were voices crying in the wilderness. The crowd at the 1915 Hague Congress

\textsuperscript{74} Mary Sheepshanks, “Is Internationalism Dead?” \textit{Jus Suffragii} 10 (June 1, 1916).


\textsuperscript{76} Siao-Mei Djang to Mary Sheepshanks, July 30, 1929, WILPF Papers, reel 19.

\textsuperscript{77} E.B., “Our Work,” \textit{Pax et Libertas} 1 (February 1900).

\textsuperscript{78} International Executive Committee, “Statement on Fascism,” April 11–15, 1933, WILPF Papers, reel 10.
hissed down one woman for saying that "the average woman is no more for peace than men are," showing not only the existence of dissent but the emotion invested in the dogma of difference. The disillusionment of the First World War and the mounting threats to peace in the 1930s took their toll on some activists. Rosika Schwimmer, in 1934, admitted that she no longer believed in women's natural pacifism. But even though internationally organized women knew that their identities as feminist internationalists and as members of their organizations separated them from the mass of women, gender consciousness and a commitment to female solidarity underlay those other identities.

Conclusion

Women in transnational organizations in the early twentieth century forged three interacting layers of collective identity. As members of discrete—if historically and strategically connected—groups, they expressed organizational identities. Cooperating and struggling to win equality for women, they managed to forge a movement identity as international feminists, even if organizational loyalties at times got in the way. And, at the most basic level, they constructed a solidarity identity as women who differed in fundamental ways from men, displaying the kind of gender consciousness that scholars of the women's movement have found to be critical to women's activism (Klein 1984; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Ferree and Hess 1994). The discourse of difference did not dictate agreement on the specific strategies that international feminists pursued for winning equality. Women on both sides of the policy struggles over suffrage, labor legislation, and nationality—those who sought identical, gender-blind laws and those who opposed them—based their positions on a belief in women's difference. The process of constructing an international feminist collective identity suggests, at least to a limited extent, the possibility of overcoming national differences, certainly still a dream of the contemporary global women's movement.

Beyond the case of the international women's movement, we offer a collective identity approach derived from recent research on social movements as a productive way to rethink the problem of defining feminism. By connecting feminist identity to organizations and movements, such an approach allows us to look beyond the traditional texts of feminism to the

79 Rosika Schwimmer to Gabrielle Duchêne, n.d. [1934], WILPF Papers, reel 20.
thinking, actions, and expressions of the women who embraced feminist identities. The distinction we propose between organizational, movement, and solidary identities reveals the different ways feminists in the international women’s movement saw themselves. Pregiven gender interests, feminist ideology, or organizational imperatives alone do not explain the strategic differences between feminists in this period. Our typology, however, offers insight into the way identity politics can lead to new forms of solidarity that respect both particularities and similarities.

This conceptualization does not, of course, provide a simple solution to the question of who was a feminist. But it does suggest a way that we might try to sort out the complicated interactions among women in diverse places and historical periods. As the international case makes clear, a focus on collective identity demonstrates that the nature of “feminism” is constructed as it evolves over time, emerging from contests over who belongs and how best to win equality for women. In every group, in every place, at every time, the meaning of “feminism” is worked out in the course of being and doing. The disagreements that, depending on one’s perspective, either plague or enliven feminism are not necessarily about drawing the circle of “us” smaller and smaller. They show who is talking to whom and how understandings of feminism are unfolding. Feminists today would do well to pay attention to this contentious process in thinking about feminism both historically and in the present.

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