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Brown's "'The Truest Form of Patriotism': pacifist feminism in Britain, 1870-1902" - Book Review

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Brown, H., *The Truest Form of Patriotism': pacifist feminism in Britain, 1870-1902*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. viii +199. ISBN 0 7190 6530 5, Cloth, £45, ISBN 0 7190 6531 1, Paper, £14.99.

This study focusses on the emergence of 'pacifist feminism' from the 1870s on. Not all feminists were pacifists, of course. Nor were all pacifists supportive of the women's rights movement. So, 'pacifist feminism' is the term applied by Heloise Brown to 'a politics where the two modes of analysis are applied together to an understanding of the social and political order' (p. 4). Pacifist feminism emerged as the peace movement was being transformed from a cause primarily shaped by religious values, to one reflecting political ideals. This transformation, Heloise Brown suggests, was facilitated by the idea of arbitration, an idea associated especially with free trade radicalism and the figure of Richard Cobden. Within pacifist feminism she identifies three additional currents besides this: 'Evangelical feminism'; 'moderate internationalism'; and 'international citizenship'. 'Evangelical feminism', as the term suggests, held to a religious approach to the question, arguing that the adoption of Christian principles would bring both universal peace and the advance of women's rights. 'Moderate internationalism' opposed any further extension of empire, and sought to develop international links between women's movements. 'International citizenship' was the latest of these strands to emerge, appealing to a notion of sisterhood among women, able to cross national boundaries so as to reform international relations. Competing conceptions of patriotism, and contrasting attitudes to the imperial project underlay, then, some of the conflicting opinions on this issue among the leadership of the women's movement and of pacifist feminism.

A range of methods is adopted in pursuit of the analysis offered here. So the first chapter examines feminist responses to the 'physical force' argument against women's enfranchisement: the argument that women were disqualified from citizenship because they did not, and could not, bear arms. This disqualification took on a particular meaning in the context of imperial expansion through conquest, and was countered by arguments about women's particular capacities for moral force. The second chapter offers an analysis of the position of three women's rights journals on the issue, and concludes that the little-studied *Women's Signal* gave expression to the clearest feminist perspective on peace. Attention then switches to the Peace Society, a body that adopted an absolutist stance, declaring all war wrong. In Europe, by contrast, many pacifists were also radicals ready to support violent means in the struggle for national self-determination. Religious affiliation is identified as a significant factor in the leadership of the Peace Society, one overwhelmingly composed of dissenters: the first two secretaries of the Society were Congregationalists, while Friends formed a significant section of its membership. In the early 1870s, however, at a time when the major organisations of the women's rights movement were being established, women found themselves excluded from its leadership, and confined to an auxiliary role. For some time the Peace Society continued to view any association with the women's movement as dangerous.

Heloise Brown argues that, in consequence, many women turned to the more secular pacifist organisations, for example, the International Arbitration and Peace Association (IAPA). This body did not require its supporters to commit to absolute pacifism, and was more sympathetic to the women's movement, allowing women, for example, to sit on its Executive Committee. It was shortly joined by a breakaway feminist section of the women's auxiliary of the Peace Society, while an evangelical Friend, Priscilla Peckover, formed women's associations within localities, and affiliated to the Peace Society, that rapidly became a mass movement. Another woman Friend, Ellen Robinson, whom Heloise Brown identifies as pursuing the perspective of moderate internationalism, subsequently took over the re-established women's auxiliary of the Peace Society. Under the influence of these two women Friends levels of cooperation between the Peace Society and the women's movement grew, and it became more international in outlook.

The societies led by Priscilla Peckover were particularly attractive to many women whose pacifism reflected their religious values. Her work, Heloise Brown argues, was also significant in establishing an autonomous women's peace movement, and in articulating a position that made peace a women's issue. Despite her personal absolutism on the question, Priscilla Peckover also showed a strong commitment to international cooperation with bodies that took a more moderate position. She also became a prominent voice in anti-imperialism. Meanwhile, Ellen Robinson worked in parallel with Priscilla Peckover, though in association with socialist and working-class organisations, and from a position that combined, it is argued, feminism, Quakerism and Liberalism. The two women shared, however, a conventional conception of 'women's mission', deriving from their religious values, and leading them to articulate a form of patriotism that emphasised the moral force that women might bring to bear on international relations. Both were drawn to the IAPA, which, by maintaining two separate women's auxiliaries, proved capable of accommodating many different perspectives, from evangelical religion to secularism and to neo-Malthusianism. Moreover, the incorporation of a significant number of feminists meant that pacifism, in turn, came to have a considerable influence within the women's movement.

This study brings a fresh perspective to the history of both the peace movement and the women's movement and fills a surprising gap in the existing literature. So it is likely to provide an important reference point for future researchers in this area. There are points where the line of argument is not altogether clearly expressed, for example, in the classification of various forms of feminism put forward in chapter two, and similarly in the discussion of the different currents among Friends in chapter three. Nevertheless, this study will be welcomed for the detailed scholarship it brings to a neglected area in this period of women's involvement in pacifist organisations. Its account of pacifist feminism serves as a useful balance to recent emphases on imperial feminism, important though these are, most especially in its recognition of the enormous varieties of perspective within the women's movement. Heloise Brown has convincingly demonstrated how pacifist feminism served to advance both the debate on 'the

woman question' and the internationalist movements of the period.

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