

# Suffrage campaigners on the ocean wave



Dr Jo Stanley, FRHistS  
Lancaster University Centre for Mobilities Research

# Sylvia Pankhurst & women's mobility

## AIM

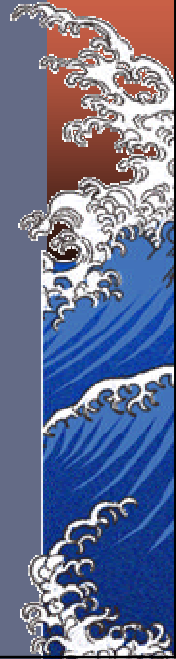


*Sylvia with Haile Selassie I*

- ▶ To explore how the suffrage struggle shaped women's travel and internationalism.
- ▶ To see how this particular suffragist, Sylvia, was especially significant in the (gendered, classed and racialised) history of mobilities

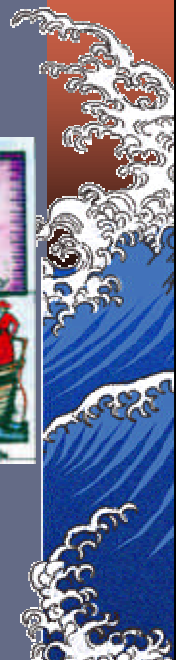
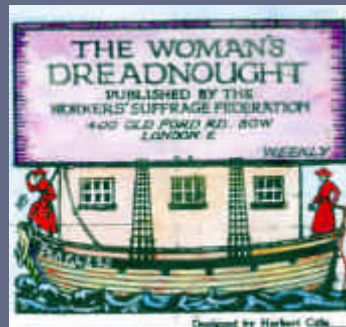
## What we'll be looking at:

- ▶ *Brief reminder of Sylvia and sea*
- ▶ *Where I'm coming from*
- ▶ *Motility, mobility & gender – the ideas*
- ▶ *A brief history of suffrage campaigners' sea travels*
- ▶ *Sylvia's travelling history*
- ▶ *Sylvia appraised as motile and mobile person, an internationalist*



## Reminder: Sylvia and the sea

- ▶ Travelled by sea
- ▶ Used Dreadnought & sea as metaphor for women's struggle
- ▶ Knew - and worked to ameliorate – seafaring's impact on sailors' partners
- ▶ Thought internationally – sea not barrier to connections.



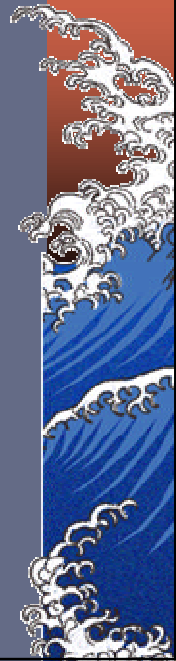
## Where I'm coming from: My sea research began with stewardesses: gender/class/mobility



Aunt May Quinn, c 1912.  
Born 1888. First sailed 1930s,  
aged 40-ish



Sylvia, 1909  
Born 1882  
First sailed 1913, age 31



## My research: moving from stewardesses to piratesses



# My research: moving towards gender, mobilities and subjectivities.



Promo tour:  
Taranaki 2004



At the wheel: Osaka  
Maritime museum,  
2010



Nova Scotia, 2011

## Mobility, motility and gender defined (John Urry)

### 1. Mobility:

**real embodied people travelling for work, migration, escape...**

*But mobility can also include*

- imaginative travel (seeing places on TV)
- virtual travel (internet transcends geographical distance)
- communication through letters, texts, faxes



### 2. Motility:

**A sense that we *can* move, that we are capable of mobility**

# Mobility, motility and gender defined: 3. Gender



- ▶ the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women
- ▶ Along with class, most pervasive principle used in classifying life
- ▶ A set of attitudes that makes people who are non-males into the Other
- ▶ Tool that's used to justify exclusion and denigration



## How does gender affect mobility?

1. *Access to travel: money, power, history*
2. *Uses of transport are different : e.g. child care, non-radial journeys*
3. *Practices on misogynist ships: women cautious as 'outsiders' & Other.*



*Britannia: 'What's the use of telling me I rule the waves, if they won't let me have the vote?'*



# 1885 – 1935: mobility marketed as desirable



# WW1, then mass tourism, enabled women's motility



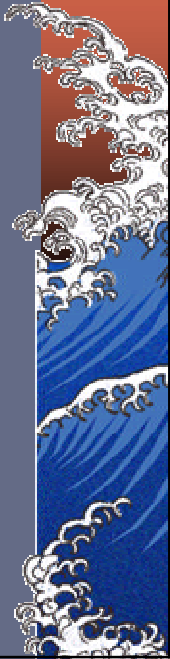
## Why/how suffrage women were mobile in different ways to other women

- ▲ Education incl governesses
- ▲ Domestic travel
- ▲ International travel
- ▲ Correspondence
- ▲ Knowledge shared via newspapers
- ▲ Purposes: campaigning, meeting, holidaying
- ▲ Abroad to recover from hunger strikes
- ▲ Christabel's 'exile' in Paris as inspiring

*Ubiquity, thy name is suffrage!...*

*Our women were everywhere.'*

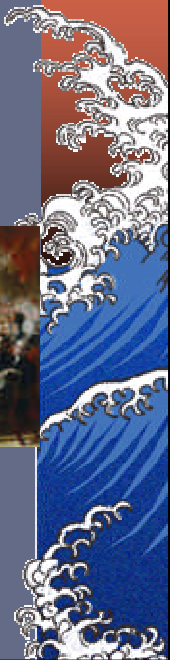
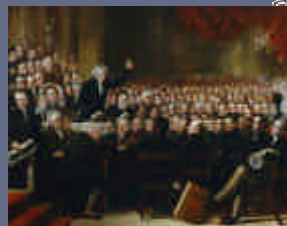
*(Christabel)*



## Suff's travels: 19C

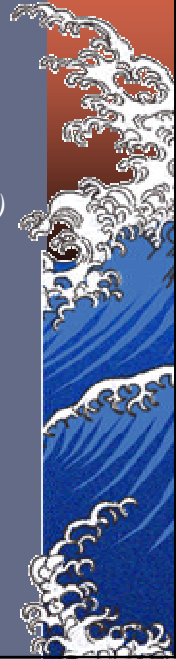
**Crossing seas because peace and internationalism part of women's concern for all rights**

- ▲ 1840: World anti-slavery conference in London (see pic)
- ▲ 1848: First ever women's rights convention, NY
- ▲ 1888: Washington conference that founded International Council of Women (AC Scatcherd and Laura Ormiston Chant).
- ▲ 1893: World's Congress of Representative Women in Chicago ( Jane Cobden Unwin)



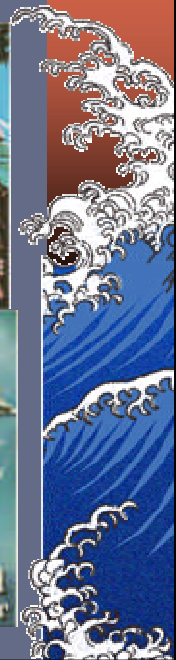
## Suff's travels: early 20C

- ▲ 1902: *Boer war* (Mrs Fawcett and Emily Hobhouse)
- ▲ 1904: *International Congress of Women, Berlin* (Dora Montefiore and Louisa Martindale). Channel.
- ▲ 1906 : *International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) Conference conference in Copenhagen*. North Sea
- ▲ 1908: *IWSA in Amsterdam* . North Sea
- ▲ 1909: *Second Hague peace conference*. North Sea
- ▲ 1911: *6<sup>th</sup> IWSA congress in Stockholm* ( Mrs Fawcett, Margery Corbett Ashby, Chrystal Macmillan and Catherine Marshall.) North Sea
- ▲ 1913 – *7th IWSA congress Budapest*, (Helena Swanwick, Maude Royden, Florence Lockwood) Channel & Danube



## What were women's voyages like?

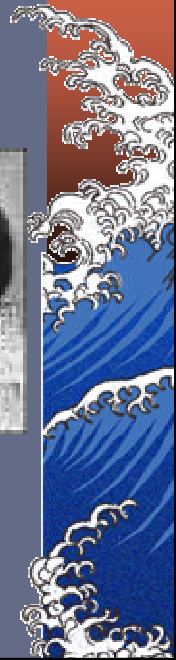
- ▲ *Segregated by gender*
- ▲ *Elite situation*
- ▲ *Reading, resting, writing*
- ▲ *Viewing seascapes & foreign ports*
- ▲ *With some sense of adventure & daring*
- ▲ *Exceptional space, heterotopia*





## The price of travel

- ▶ *Every weekend in 1912 and 1913, Annie Kenney, disguised as a widow, went to confer with Christabel in Paris*
- ▶ *117-mile Channel crossing from Southampton to Havre. Then travelled another 111 miles by train to Paris.*
- ▶ *She hated the sea: 'The very thought of my journeys to Christabel made me feel seasick. How I hated being on water! Each Friday I wished it was Saturday... I would arrive, sick, tired to exhaustion, and each Sunday I yearned for Monday.'*



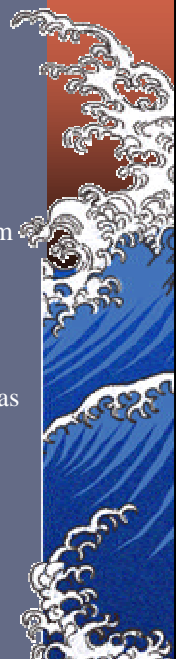
## Suffrage campaigners uses of ships: as billboards

October 1908, *Lusitania* arrived in NY as:

'a full-fledged English Suffragette wearing her colors and the words "Votes for Women" along her side...'

'Mrs. Nora S. Blatch de Forest ... was returning with her husband from England and had hung out the English Suffragette colors from the promenade deck. The letters were white on a purple ground, and caused much interest in the crowd awaiting...'

'It was with the aid of a steward that Mrs. De Forest decorated the *Lusitania*, the Suffragette document remaining in place until she was obliged to leave the ship. The steward confided to her that he was entirely in sympathy with the Suffragettes.'



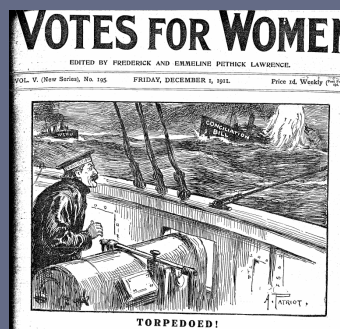
## Sea metaphors used by suffrage campaigners

- ▶ *Competent women (captains, helmswomen) in charge of a storm-tossed ship, evoking the Ship of State.*
- ▶ *Suffrage campaigners propelled by a tide of public opinion. By contrast the male 'anti's' boat is run aground.*



## Sea metaphors used by suffrage movement

- ▶ *December 1911 cartoon in Votes for Women. 'Torpedoed' shows Lloyd George as gunner of the ship HMS Devastation, shooting down the sinking ship Conciliation Bill. The WSPU is a sturdy destroyer, steaming up to cope.*
- ▶ *Emmeline referred to Christabel in Paris as 'free to direct **the ship** [of suffrage campaigning] even from a distance.'*



## Sea metaphors used by suffrage movement

*C. 1915 . The WFL's journal,  
The Vote.*

*Front page logo of woman on  
beach (presumably the  
Shore of Grounded  
Votelessness)*

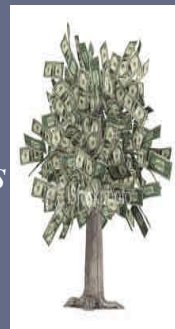
*She is gazing out to sea (the  
freedom of a world into  
which they could venture if  
they had the vote).*

*Framing it were fierce waves  
and a steadying anchor.*



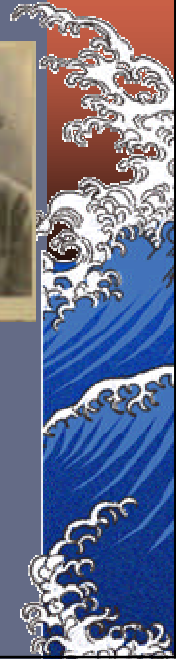
## REAL seas. What impeded suffs' travelling?

- ▲ *Not much*
- ▲ *Money*
- ▲ *Official hindrance, esp. passports*
- ▲ *Domestic responsibilities (seldom mentioned)*
- ▲ *Health*
- ▲ *Under-motility*
- ▲ *Principled dissatisfaction with the principles of conference to be*



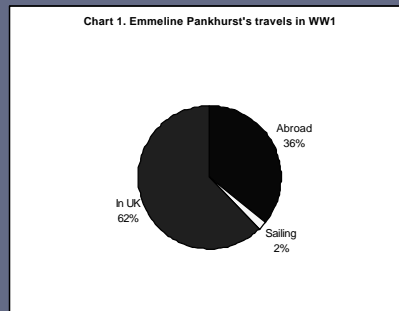
## Sylvia's travels: summary

- ▲ 1910,11, &1912: US
- ▲ 1913: Paris (Dec), disguised as nurse
- ▲ 1914: Dublin (August)
- ▲ 1914: Paris (Dec)
- ▲ 1919 Bologna for Italian Socialist Party congress, then Germany & Amsterdam
- ▲ 1920: Soviet Union, 2<sup>nd</sup> congress of Third International. Stowaway
- ▲ 1934: Rumania
- ▲ 1942: First trip to Ethiopia
- ▲ 1956: To Ethiopia to live



## Comparing other suff's travels to Sylvia's: Mrs P

- ▲ *Publicity for the cause*
- ▲ *Enhanced her status internationally*
- ▲ *Publicity site – media at quayside for VIPs*



E.P. covered at least 14,000 miles by sea in WW1:

- US in 1916 and 1918
- Russia in 1917.



## Comparing other suff's travels to Sylvia's: Jessie Kenny

- ▲ *Trips with Pethick Lawrences*
- ▲ *To Christabel P in Paris c 1912*
- ▲ *With Emmeline P to Russia 1917*
- ▲ *Trained to be ship's Marconi operator 1923*
- ▲ *Became ship's stewardess 1926 - 38. Travelled to Europe*
- ▲ *Best knowledge of seafaring life of any known suff*



Her 1926 passport

## Most famous voyage Sylvia didn't make, 1915.

- ▲ *April 28-30, International Women's Conference for Peace & Freedom, Hague*
- ▲ *Planned 200 suff attendees from UK*



US delegates to the conference aboard the *Noordam*

## Most famous voyage Sylvia didn't make

- Plans wrecked by duplicity by Room 40 Naval Intelligence
- Minister McKenna and 'Blinker' Hall closed North Sea to shipping as bigger ruse.
- But timing impacted on suffs.



This cartoon appeared in *The Daily Express* on April 28th, 1915. Even from the ranks of the super-cranky at the back of the Liberal benches, the paper crowed, 'there rose no champions of the misguided women who have been trying to reach the Hague for an international churrup.'

## Hardest voyage Sylvia made

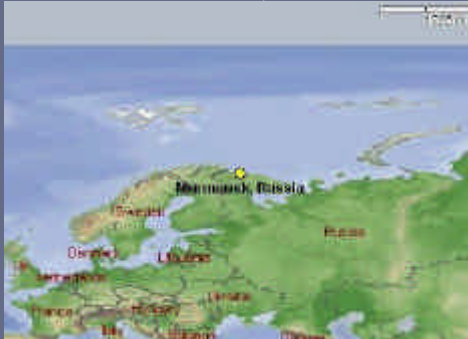
- 1920. Sylvia applied to go to Third International conference. Passports refused by govt.
- Sylvia one of only nine to go from UK, only woman.



# How did Sylvia get to Moscow?

## Outward

1. UK to Norway - stowed away on Norwegian ship (600 miles)
2. Norway to Murmansk on small fishing boat, was warned against it (others drowned) (1,125 miles)
3. Murmansk to Moscow: (1,000 miles overland)



# How did Sylvia get to Moscow?

## Homeward

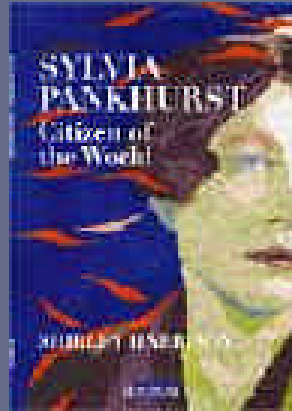
(UK govt asked Norway to detain her on arrival)

1. Russia to Norway
2. Smuggled onto tiny fishing boat to Denmark, drenched
3. Big ship, masqueraded as stewardess. Hostility and crew attempted rape?
4. Another ship, harrowing.



## What outcomes did such mobility produce in suffs such as Sylvia?

- ▶ *Wider perspective*
- ▶ *International solidarity*
- ▶ *Sense of personal empowerment?*
- ▶ *Greater sense of motility (social as well as geographical?)*



## Sylvia – catalyst for international mobility (in sense of communication and imaginative travel too)

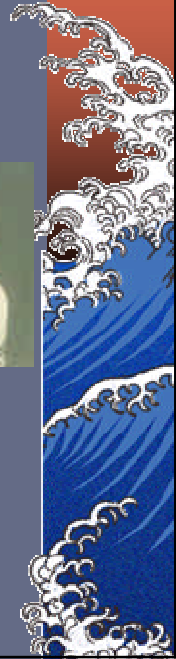
- ▶ *Correspondence and connections with other countries, incl USSR and Spain*
- ▶ *Italy: lover Sylvio Corio from 1917-54 and activism 1920s-30s*
- ▶ *Friendships with black seafarers Claude McKay & Reuben Samuels*
- ▶ *Wrote India & the earthly paradise 1926*
- ▶ *1927 advocated Interlingua , not Esperanto*
- ▶ *Involvement in Ethiopia from 1934 -60 (see pic)*





## Sylvia's significance in mobilities history

- ▶ One of many mobile and motile suffrage campaigners post-1880
- ▶ Truly internationalist thinker
- ▶ Aware of operations of class, gender and race – incl at sea and in docks (Via ELFS/WSF)
- ▶ Significant in the (gendered, classed and racialised) history of mobilities because so well recorded as someone whose interest and concern for other countries ignored barriers such as the sea and passport controls.



Next book: *Risk! Women on the wartime seas* (Yale UP, 2012)



Email: [j\\_v\\_stanley@hotmail.com](mailto:j_v_stanley@hotmail.com)

Website: [http:// www. jostanley. biz](http://www.jostanley.biz)

Blog: [http:// gendered seas. blogspot.com](http://genderedseas.blogspot.com)



## Sylvia gets a 'passport' 1914

- ▶ *Christmas 1914: Sylvia & Nora Smythe went to Paris*
- ▶ *No passports then, until spring 1915 when spying fears grew. People got 'exit permits' instead*
- ▶ *Sylvia surprised to find that 'the business of obtaining permission to go to France in wartime is not so formidable as one might expect. One has to go first with one's photograph to the Foreign Office to get the passport, then to the French Consulate to have the passport countersigned.'*



## Sylvia faces gendered segregation at borders

*.The porter took their luggage; they waited in queue for just a few minutes.*

*'Then someone called "ladies this way" and a passage was made for us into a little temporary wooden waiting room ...*

*[t]here a lady who was unmistakably English said "Vous etes British?" and we answered "Yes"....*

*At each barrier we civilians were again made to show our passports and repeat the assurance that we were carrying no letters.*

*Hence I was forced to undergo the satisfaction of posting some copy for the Dreadnought which I had written on the [train] journey.'*

## Sylvia goes to Moscow

- ▲ 1920. Sylvia applied to go to Third International conference.
- ▲ Head of CID Basil Thomson (pic) was told on July 16 **‘that passports should not be given to these persons and asks for the views of Home Secretary.’**
- ▲ strategy to justify refusal; **‘stick to our statement that they are going to Russia to get money [then] .... a refusal of the passports would be justified.’**. Cabinet matter.
- ▲ Sylvia one of only nine to go from UK.



## Sylvia and sailor's wives

- 1913: established East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELF), and *The Women's Dreadnought*.
- Right-hand helper*: Had support of dock workers.
- Campaigned for soldiers and sailors wives (special conditions: ‘lone’ mothers so heads of household; tricky access to husband’s unreliable income; married to men in v dangerous profession
- 1914: “We set up a League of Rights for Soldiers' and Sailors' Wives and Relatives to strive for better pensions and allowances.”