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THE SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT AS PORTRAYED IN THE MOVIE *SUFFRAGETTE* (2015)

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

Movies, one of the main media of entertainment, provide an opportunity to bring attention to topics that might otherwise go unnoticed by the public. That, however, presents a certain level of responsibility to anyone who decides to base their narratives on historical topics. There is scholarly debate whether historical films should stay true to facts as much as possible or whether artistic liberties can be taken to convey the larger meaning that the audience can understand better. This is especially important in the case of controversial political events. This Bachelor's thesis studies the portrayal of the suffragette movement in the 2015 dramatic feature film *Suffragette*, directed by Sarah Gavron.

There are gaps both in translating the suffrage movement to screen and scholarly analysis. In order to analyse the movie, the history of the suffrage movement shall be looked into, with a focus on aspects relevant to or appearing in the movie. The years focused on are 1911-1913, corresponding with the height of militancy. This is also the span covered in the film. The literature review section also introduces some theoretical foundation for analysing history to provide a base for the analysis of the movie. The empirical chapter applies the notions from the literature review to the analysis of the film, to identify how the film makers have chosen to represent the events to their audience.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2015 movie *Suffragette*, directed by Sarah Gavron (2015a), is a 1h 46min long historical drama about the women's rights movement in London in the years 1912 and 1913. The movie shows the struggle of the working-class women for the right to vote rather than that of the best-known figureheads, such as Emmeline Pankhurst. Gavron has stated that she wished to focus on the years 1912 and 1913 due to their having been the height of suffragette militancy (Film4 2015).

The term 'suffragette' was at the beginning degrading, coined in 1906 by a journalist, Charles Hands, whose intention was to make it "feminine and small" (Atkinson 2019: 39), reflecting the attitudes of his contemporaries. The women, however, soon adopted the term to describe themselves as somebody who would "'gette' the vote" (Atkinson 2019: 39). Cambridge Dictionary (2020) defines a suffragette as "a woman who campaigned for the right of women to vote, especially a member of the early 20th century British group of activists led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst." Mayhall, on the other hand, differentiates between a 'suffragist' and a 'suffragette', saying that "suffragists continued to assert women's right to citizenship, while suffragettes asserted a right to resist the government and its laws until they were recognized as citizens" (Mayhall 2000: 346).

The women involved in the making of the movie have stated their reasons for getting involved in the project in various interviews. Sarah Gavron said that one of her reasons for making the movie is not having learned much about the topic, despite it changing the course of history. In an interview with Smyth (2015) for *Cineaste* magazine, Gavron said that her journey to the film started ten years prior with individual research until she found her producers and screenwriter, which is when a more serious period of research of six years began. The

screenwriter, Abi Morgan, went as far as calling the suffragette movement an example of buried history (Film4 2015). In a press conference made available by PremiereScene (2015), both Gavron and Morgan admitted to not having been taught anything about it at school and Meryl Streep, who played Mrs Pankhurst in a few short scenes, expressed fears that the younger generation might not even know what the word 'suffragette' means. Carey Mulligan explained in an interview that her impression of the movement came from a textbook picture where very calm women were portrayed and she thought it to be important to tell the militant side of the story due to having learned a "sanitized version of our history" (CBS This Morning 2015). Gavron (2015c), too, said in an article about the making of the movie that her vision of the movement, prior to any deeper research, was that of peaceful campaigning. As such, the women involved with the movie only learned about suffragists and made a movie about suffragettes by Mayhall's (2000) definition.

Suffragette is a story about an a-political working-class woman Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan) who becomes involved with the suffragette movement. While she initially does not consider herself a suffragette, she is proud to be one by the end of the movie. Maud's story binds together the struggles working women faced at home, at work and in political activism. Gavron shows numerous aspects associated with suffragette militancy and includes women who made themselves famous, not to say infamous, such as Emily Davison and Mrs. Pankhurst.

This far, the film has not been researched thoroughly. The majority of the feedback, as can be expected, is in the form of review articles. Despite the apparent wishes of the team involved with the movie to learn and teach more about the subject, there has also been some criticism. Anita (2015) accused the movie of whitewashing and omitting women of colour who were involved with the movement. Gavron admitted to the omission of many details due to having to conform to the format of cinema. Gavron also said in the same response that many

stories can be told about the movement since one single suffrage history does not exist (Gavron 2015b). Smyth reports that while some claim that the movie "marginalizes women of color" (Smyth 2015: 18), Gavron explained that the two Asian women involved with the British movement were aristocrats. Since the movie focuses on working-class women, the middle- and upper-class people were largely excluded from the story told. O'Malley (2015) dislikes the fictionalization used in the film, as it could have focused on real-life heroes, and the exclusion of black women's ongoing struggle even after the enfranchisement in the USA in 1920 that remained uncredited in the end roll of the movie. Seabourne commends the lengths Gavron and Morgan went to ensure historical accuracy in its many aspects, including social, domestic, equality, and law, and argues against the criticism cited above, perhaps unknowingly herself, by stating it to be unrealistic for one movie to "cover all aspects of the story" (Seabourne 2016). Both Bradshaw (2015) and Scott (2015) give a favourable opinion of what and how the movie talks about and Scott goes as far as calling the movie "the best kind of history lesson". Mcdowall (2015) joins the praise by saying that the movie "is no pretty period drama, rather a bleakly coloured expose". Thus it can be seen that the film has been positively received overall and several film critics have also recognised the educational aim of the film. Perhaps it is this aspect that makes some other critics want more, for example, attention to the racial politics of the suffrage movement.

There are relatively few films about the suffragette movement, especially those told through fiction and in the United Kingdom, as Gavron (2015c) noted. The interviewer for *Cineaste*, Smyth (2015: 18), did point out the British television production *Shoulder to Shoulder* about the Pankhursts, which in Gavron's words is "an examination of a woman in power and an exceptional woman," but her vision was to show the struggle of working-class women. The suffragette movement is a broad topic and cannot be covered in full in one film. Despite the

working-class women making “significant contributions” (Frances in Purvis et al 2014: 183) in the movement, little attention is brought to them in research literature. In most papers, the social class is left unmentioned and generalizations about the women are applied.

According to Rosenstone (2018: 25), there is more than one single historical truth, and that factual, narrative, emotional, psychological and symbolic truths are all correct in their own right. To him, the overall vision is more important than the verification of all individual moments (Rosenstone 2018: 43). This thesis follows his position and aims to look at the movie *Suffragette* (2015) and analyse the ways in which the history of the suffragettes is represented in it. As could be seen in the opinions of the filmmakers quoted above, movies can be said to have an educational aim. Since many people nowadays form their understanding of history through films, it is important to study the way in which potentially controversial topics, like the history of women’s rights, appear on screen.

Due to the complexity and length of the movement mentioned, the main focus of the thesis will be on the time frame provided by the director and screenwriter and the representation of suffragette activism. In order to achieve this aim, the literature review section will cover the historical understanding of the suffragette movement and also the adaptation of historical events on the screen. The empirical chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the film, with special attention to the questions covered in the literature review. The discussion will not cover historical fashions and cinematographic execution.

The thesis aims to analyse what the movie adds to the understanding of the campaign and, additionally, why a critical analysis of any historical movie might be necessary for the better understanding of our perception of the past. In order to achieve that, the suffragette campaign will first be focused on, explaining the wider picture in which Gavron’s movie is set and then analysing whether any historical inaccuracies can be seen.

THE HISTORY OF THE SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT AND ANALYSING A MOVIE

The History of the Suffragette Movement

The history of the suffrage movement is well-researched and the thesis focuses only on the topics that are also represented in *Suffragette*. In the opening pages of her book, Diane Atkinson (2019) is identified as the consultant for *Suffragette* and television documentaries on the same topic. Her book *Rise Up, Women!* covers the history of the suffrage movement from the Great Reform Act of 1832 until 1918, when the women got what they fought for - the vote. Atkinson's views will be combined with those of other historians (Bearman 2005, Gullickson 2014, Purvis et al 2014, Rosen 2013).

The most prominent political organisation to campaign for women's suffrage using militant techniques was the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It was founded in Manchester, but the largest battle took place in London where the Parliament is (Bearman 2005: 365). Park's analysis of a 1913 collection of suffragette data reveals that "London and the home counties provided more than half of the activists, whereas poorer areas such as the north produced comparatively few" (Park 1988: 154). Emmeline Pankhurst and one of her daughters, Christabel, founded WSPU when they were forbidden from the headquarters of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), despite being a member of the party herself. This led her to found a "woman-only, politically active organisation" in 1903 (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 135). June Purvis (in Purvis et al 2014: 109) calls WSPU "the most notorious of the groupings campaigning in Edwardian Britain for votes for women on equal terms with men." Challenging the status quo and the traditional roles of women led to the women trying both legal and illegal means to achieve their goal (Purvis 2019: 1200-1201). The movement and politics at the time were partly

built upon gaining the favour of the working-class women (Holton in Purvis et al 2014: 20-27). Although the WSPU wanted to be known as an "organization of 'working women'", all women regardless of their "political sympathies and social class" were equally welcome from 1906 (Rosen 2013: 77).

In the early days, the WSPU members tried to achieve their goal through peaceful means, such as "campaigning at socialist and trade union meeting, as well as in outdoor places such as fairground and parks" and engaging in acts of civil disobedience, such as marches, deputations to Parliament (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 136), selling their newspaper in the streets, and heckling (Purvis 2019: 1202). While the motto of the suffragettes was 'Deeds Not Words' (Atkinson 2019: 61), the attitude of Liberal political leaders Herbert Henry Asquith and David Lloyd George was the opposite: words not deeds (Atkinson 2019: 92). Despite the various demonstrations, Asquith did not only refuse to yield to the women's demands "to enter the public, male world and to participate as equal citizens", but also "engaged in repressive treatment of suffragettes" (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 137). He was opposed to the enfranchisement of women due to his belief that "as far as women were concerned, existing social arrangements were natural arrangements; there was no pressing reason to tamper with them" (Rosen 2013: 97).

There were numerous other women's organizations in addition to the WSPU, including the Women's Freedom League (WFL) that supported "reforms in employment, education, marriage and divorce" (Frances in Purvis et al 2014: 181) and recognised the need for transformation of the relationships between men and women to achieve equality. WFL grew out of WSPU in 1907 due to Emmeline and Christabel becoming less democratic, which did not suit the more socialist members of the WSPU. While WSPU members were forbidden from associating with the ILP, WFL kept their links with the party (Frances in Purvis et al 2014: 182-

183). The WFL also participated in militant activism (Mayhall 2000: 344). National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), however, "generally engaged in law-abiding, constitutional activity," and, perhaps in contrast to the later tactics used by the WSPU, can be called "'ladylike'" (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 136). Mayhall (2000: 346) explains that NUWSS differed from the WSPU and the WFL in that while it "continued to confine itself to the assertion of women's right to citizenship, members of numerous other organizations introduced and refined the concept of resistance to illegitimate government as a right also grounded in constitutional principles."

Although WSPU seems to have been the most prominent suffragette organization, Atkinson notes that women had double memberships in WSPU and NUWSS (Atkinson 2019: 87). Park notes that in a data pool of over six hundred women, "at least twenty were active in three or more societies" (Park 1988: 120). Some women, on the other hand, defected from WSPU to WFL due to the increased radicalism of the former (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 138). Although the WSPU did have branches all over the United Kingdom and meetings were held "throughout Scotland, the North, and the Midlands" (Rosen 2013: 95), Bearman calls the campaigning an "urban - or, more strictly speaking – a suburban phenomenon" (Bearman 2005: 372), since almost no incident took place outside city centres or in the "'deep' countryside."

Jihang Park analysed the social composition the *Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* from 1913 that provides information about 692 women and sixty-nine men active in the movement. The social class of only 559 women was identifiable, but 60.6 per cent of them were from upper- or upper-middle class. Only 0.7 per cent of all the women were from the working-class. Park acknowledges the possible presence of bias, especially since "working-class activists were less likely to have a national presence, and thus be documented" (Park 1988: 149). Frances (in Purvis et al 2014: 183) notes that most women were from the middle-class. There is no

information about working-class women in the NUWSS, since "NUWSS attracted women of higher social position" (Park 1988: 159), but of the 124 that affiliated with the WSPU, only three women, that is 2.4 per cent, were from the working-class. Park acknowledges that some women who remained unaccounted for might have been from the working-class, but they would still be in a minority. Overall, only 21.4 per cent of the women can be considered militant. 139 women had received university education and 229 had an occupation, ranging from teachers, journalists and writers to physicians, nurses and business. Sixty-eight out of the sixty-nine men were fathers or husbands, and fifty-six of them were titled. 64.6 per cent of the women were unmarried with average age of forty-two. Such high percentage of unmarried women is notable, since in 1911 78 per cent of women between the ages of thirty-five to forty-four were married. Along organization lines NUWSS had more married women, and WSPU more single women. Although this survey provides insufficient information regarding working women and mainly reflects the statistics of upper-class women with executive positions in the movement (Park 1988: 148-160), Frances (in Purvis et al 2014: 183) notes that working women did play an important role in the movement.

The women escalated to militancy already in 1905, when Christabel Pankhurst and Teresa Billington heckled at a Liberal's meeting, were removed from it (Rosen 2013: 49-50), were imprisoned for "obstructing the public thoroughfare" and Christabel got an additional charge for "assaulting the police" (Rosen 2013: 52). Interrupting the meetings of the Liberal Party was, in fact, the first form of militancy (Mayhall 2000: 341). Purvis (2019: 137) calls the militancy a "'*reactive*' phenomenon" provoked by high-standing politicians. Despite demonstrations and marches, nothing changed. According to Rosen, mild militancy reached its end due to violence having been very one-sided and the women argued that the WSPU's "respect for human safety ought to apply to themselves as well as to everyone else" (Rosen 2013: 132).

For nearly two years, militancy was suspended until November 1911. The movement became more aggressive after another Bill, that would have provided the rights that the women were seeking, was postponed to the next parliamentary season. That lead the women to an act of mass window-smashing (Rosen 2013: 133, 155-156).

Purvis (2019: 1203) notes that the first window-smashing took place in 1908, but it was unauthorized by the WSPU. The women, in general, used hammers (Atkinson 2019: 292) and rocks (Rosen 2013: 157). Mrs Pankhurst has said that "'the argument of the broken pane of glass is the most valuable argument in modern politics'" (Rosen 2013: 157). Bearman (2005: 365) clarifies that violence was only occasionally used before 1911 and that was directed towards the government and its servants, but after that year the attacks were increasingly directed at "commercial concerns and then at the general public" such as shopkeepers or anyone opposed to the movement. Yet another unauthorized action took place, when the first woman went on a hunger strike in 1909 (Purvis 2019: 2103). Smashing windows or hunger striking still did not yield the result the women wanted and so their tactics then escalated to arson. In 1911, the first letter box was set ablaze by Davison (Rosen 2013: 198). In January 1913, "a concerted campaign of destruction of public and private property" (Rosen 2013: 189) began. Rosen explains that Emily Davison and her unnamed accomplices "wrecked five rooms of a partly-completed house that Lloyd George was having built near Walton Heath, Surrey" (Rosen 2013: 189). Atkinson (2019: 375) also mentions a second bomb that failed to detonate and the police failing to prevent the attack. Despite Mrs. Pankhurst being unaware of the arson attack beforehand, she took all responsibility for it, was arrested (Rosen 2013: 189) and sentenced to three years in prison (Atkinson 2019: 375).

The militancy could carry real consequences for the women. Not only could the women be arrested for their militant political activities, but the women risked losing their children's

custody if they were still married (Vardags 2015). Some of those imprisoned could expect to be bailed out, but not all (Atkinson 2019: 270). Frances (in Purvis et al 2014: 186) suggests that working-class women, in general, risked losing more than their middle-class counterparts did. Between 1905 and 1914, "about 1,000 women (and about 40 men) were imprisoned as a result of various 'deeds'" (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 135-136), the majority of whom were involved with the WSPU. Despite the women being arrested for political activity, the suffragettes were treated more like common criminals, rather than the political prisoners that they were. Unlike political prisoners, the women were forced to strip and wear prison clothing. Atkinson also mentions the mandatory walks around the prison yard (Atkinson 2019: 52-52). She later elaborates on that, saying:

> In the nineteenth century men who were sent to prison for obstructing the police in the course of political campaigning were granted political status, winning the right to serve their sentences in first division cells. They were allowed to wear their own clothes, receive books and letters, have food sent in from outside, enjoy freedom of association with their fellow political prisoners and were not required to do prison work. The suffragettes argued that their campaign was political, demanded political status and denied they were common criminals. The Liberal Government refused to concede that the suffragettes' actions were political, and with very few exceptions the women were convicted and treated as common criminals and held in second and third division cells. (Atkinson 2019: 157)

Atkinson states that all of the women who suffered such fates, got "criminal records because they wanted to vote." In 1909, a new policy was announced by Mrs. Pankhurst in which the WSPU members would not "abide by the ordinary prison rules" until they are recognised as the political prisoners (Atkinson 2019: 125-26).

The prison sentence that the women had to serve could be extended. For example, Vera Wentworth "had to serve an extra day for scratching 'Votes for Women' on the wall of her cell with hairpins" (Atkinson 2019: 88) While some women had to endure longer sentences than the original, others had to serve multiple ones (Atkinson 2019: 117, 120).

Hunger strikes had become the norm by August 1909. The WSPU did not make it mandatory, but it was heavily encouraged. Rosen (2013: 121) states that going on hunger strikes

itself made the women martyrs of a sort, even more so than going to prison for activities related to campaigning. Atkinson (2019: 174) points out that not only did the women in prison go on hunger strikes, but so did those in freedom out of solidarity.

The women who went on hunger strikes while imprisoned were subject to forced feeding. Mary Leigh has described being "fed by nasal tube and stomach tube at the same time" which created considerable suffering:

> 'The sensation is most painful – the drums of the ears seem to be bursting, a horrible pain in the throat and the breast. The tube is pushed down twenty inches. I have to lie on the bed pinned down by wardresses, one doctor stands up on a chair holding the funnel at arm's length, so as to have the funnel end above the level and then the other doctor who is behind forces the other end up the nostrils.' (Atkinson 2019: 167)

Rosen (2013: 124), too, reports on the horrors of the women suffered, saying: "Other prisoners had similar stories of mouths prised open, lacerations, phelgm, pain in various organs, loss of weight, and so on."

According to Rosen (2013: 128), the women tried to equate force feeding, and everything that came along with it, with assault, and such brutality by the authorities helped to attract some support for the women. While the authorities and the court system tried to justify force feeding by keeping the women from committing suicide by starvation, the press used the word 'torture' to describe what was happening to the women. Perhaps another reason for the authorities to keep the women alive was to prevent them from becoming martyrs for the movement. Some doctors, however, condemned the practice of force feeding as inhumane (Atkinson 2019: 169-170, 181). The WSPU tried to fight against the force feedings and their efforts were joined by 116 doctors (Rosen 2013: 124-125).

Even though there was some backlash against the methods used against suffragettes in the press, the public perception of the suffragettes was largely negative. Gullickson (2014) observes that, in general, the women were depicted as being hysterical and their protest was

described as having been caused by their need for husbands and motherhood. Although militancy was meant to gain them the vote, the aftermath of Lloyd George's house bombing led to a "chorus of dismay" by the press, calling the women, among other things, "'mad women'" and "'criminals'" (Rosen 2013: 190). The arson not only led to increased opposition to suffragettes, but also to mob attacks at suffragette meetings (Rosen 2013: 190). The hostility did not come only from the media, but often from inside the household as well. Purvis (2014: 142) notes that the husbands of working-class women often turned against the cause the women were fighting for "if their wives were out too often." It can be assumed that the opposition was not exclusive to one social class.

Due to their wishes for equality being ignored at home and in the media, the suffragettes started providing their own coverage on issues important to them. In 1907, the WSPU started publishing their own newspaper that they named *Votes for Women* (Atkinson 2019: 75). It was launched as a monthly newspaper that was intended to be "the official organ of the WSPU", and later became a weekly (Rosen 2013: 93, 102). As the official mouthpiece of the WSPU, plans for campaigning were published (Rosen 2013: 98) as well as opinion pieces on the harsh treatment and force feeding of women (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 145). In addition, leaflets and pamphlets were handed out and posted to letter boxes in cities (Atkinson 2019: 78). *The Suffragette* was a successor to *Votes for Women* (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 138)

A part of the reason why women turned from mild militancy to a more aggressive one seems to be that they saw no difference between "personal injury" and "damage to panes of glass" if both would, ultimately, yield the same result (Rosen 2013: 131-32). Bearman (2005: 377) points out that the places that were attacked were not those which would bring the most attention or were economically most important, but rather the places that could be most easily accessed. "Militants concentrated their efforts against private houses, haystacks, sports pavilions

and churches because they combined the best chance of success with the least chance of getting caught" (Bearman 2005: 379).

Despite the majority of attempts having a rather low profile, there was one that captured the attention of not only the Parliament, but the whole world as well. Emily Davison and her flatmate wished to disrupt the King's Derby on June 4th, 1913 by waving their tricolour flags to horses (Rosen 2013: 189-199). They targeted King George V's horse, but it did not go as planned and Emily ran in front of the horse, trying to grab the bridle of the horse to "protest at the lack of progress on women's suffrage in general, and the treatment of Mrs Pankhurst in particular" (Atkinson 2019: 411). She was, however, run over and taken to a hospital. Emily passed away four days after her protest at the derby (Atkinson 2019: 411-413). There was anger due to Davison having ruined the Derby competition. Her protest, however, was filmed and broadcasted all over the Empire, making Emily Davison "a heroine for all women who struggled for equality" (Atkinson 2019: 411-412). Six thousand women marched in Davison's funeral procession, with brass bands playing behind every section. She was escorted "on a white horse dressed as Joan of Arc" (Atkinson 2019: 414-415).

The whole country saw an eruption in militancy in February of 1913, that has been compared to guerrilla-style militancy by Atkinson (2019: 373), after another withdrawal to the Bill that would provide the amendments that the women's suffrage needed (Rosen 2013: 187). The Labour Members of Parliament were thought to have betrayed the women and Lloyd George was considered to be an "enemy in disguise" (Rosen 2013: 187). Due to the increased militancy, a raid was carried out by the Home Office in a WSPU's office on April 30th, 1913, where all five people, who were present and working on the next edition of *The Suffragette*, were arrested (Atkinson 2019: 393).

While Gavron (2015c) states that there is an abundance of material about the movement, Cowman (2005) finds a lot of the material to be male-dominated and partial. Police archives made public in the early 2000s show the surveillance and pressure that the women involved with the movement were under (Film4 2015). Bearman notes that almost no focus has been paid to the violence from the suffrage side and adds that a lot of the historiography is concentrated on the "'personal' issues of the campaign: biographical work on the leaders and membership of the suffrage societies, their motivations, the violence used against them and their sufferings in prison" (Bearman 2005: 366). Such gaps in the written history paint a very one-sided story, and not a comprehensive picture.

Bearman (2005: 366) calls Rosen's *Rise Up Women!* a "national catalogue of the incidents" despite it having "serious deficiencies." Bearman points out that only some incidents were listed by Rosen, excluding the unsuccessful ones and those against works of art. Atkinson's (2019) book seems to follow the same general pattern, but instead of selected attacks, she focuses on the stories of the women and their contribution to the movement.

The women gained the vote through the Representation of the People Act in February of 1918, followed by other suffrage bills (Atkinson 2019: 516-518). While Atkinson and Rosen may leave the impression that getting the vote was a direct result of the militancy by the suffragettes, Bearman (2005: 367) argues that it was more due to what the politicians feared might be the impact of such militancy after the First World War. Purvis, however, adds that a suffrage bill was likely to be added to any "Liberal or Liberal-Labour Government" (Purvis 2019: 32) that would have followed without the interruption of the war. For Bearman (2005: 393) the suffragettes were undoubtedly terrorists since they used "violent and intimidating methods of coercing a government or community'." The relevant question is whether the

terrorism worked. Bearman's, however, argues that it did not, since there was little to no economic damage and the campaign "visibly lacked mass support" (Bearman 2005: 393).

As can be seen above, the suffrage movement has a long and complicated history. The most recognizably suffragette period was in the early twentieth century up until the First World War, when women become more vocal and aggressive trying to achieve their goal. While there are aspects of the movement that can be considered controversial, the overall narrative stays the same. Although there is some information about the working-class women, the information is not as readily available as are many other aspects of the movement and this appears to be one gap that the movie seeks to fill with its storytelling.

Analysing the movie

The historical aspect is important while analysing a movie, but the theoretical part is as important.

For White, any representation of history is historiophoty, "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse" (White 1988: 1193). White considers history on film a supplement rather than a complement to the verbal evidence. White adds that "some information about the past can be provided only by visual images" (White 1988: 1194) White points out that no depiction, be it visual or verbal can be an exact mirror of what really happened. (White 1988: 1193-1197) Therefore, stories and films about the topic have to choose the angle from which to tell the story carefully. The angles chosen are very important as history films have an effect on our vision of the past even if it is known that they provide a "fanciful or ideological rendition of history" (Rosenstone 2018: 4). It is often assumed that books do a better job with conveying historical facts, but Rosenstone stresses that books and

films can do different things and should, therefore, "be judged by different criteria" (Rosenstone 2018: 6). In order to do that the genre where the movie belongs to should be looked at. Rosenstone distinguishes three types of history films: "the mainstream drama /…/, the opposition or innovative history, and the compilation documentary" (Rosenstone 2018: 13-14). Each of them makes different assumptions about what is important for the viewer to know about the past (Rosenstone 2018: 14).

The mainstream drama can "reach a wide audience and sometimes become the focus of public debate about history, a debate that often swirls around the issue of whether or not the film got facts right" (Rosenstone 2018: 14). The mainstream drama aims to get the viewers emotionally invested in the story and make them both feel and experience what is depicted. Since the focus is on either individuals or small groups, mainstream drama can also be close to "biography, micro-history, or popular narrative history" (Rosenstone 2018:15). The story has a beginning, middle, and an end and is likely to include, what Rosenstone calls, a "'strong moral flavour'" (Rosenstone 2018: 15).

According to Rosenstone (2018: 16), documentary films give us a "direct access to history" and the majority of the images shown are "not staged for the camera /…/, but are gathered from museums and from photo and film archives". While documentary films present what was there, or what was meant to be there, Rosenstone finds that this genre has much in common with the fiction film, because some gaps need to be filled. There is also a selection process in where it is decided which facts are included and which are not. Similarly to written history, "the past can be told in a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end," except documentary does not include fiction (Rosenstone 2018: 63).

The opposition or innovative historical films aim to challenge how we view history and are "consciously created to contest the seamless stories of heroes and victims that make up the

mainstream feature and standard documentary" (Rosenstone 2018: 16). He also calls this genre experimental, since it aims to make history "more complex, interrogative, and self-conscious" (Rosenstone 2018: 45).

Rosenstone (2018: 34-35) identifies markers that can be used within the mainstream drama, and should, therefore, be analysed. In addition to 'staging', there are compression or condensation, where multiple events or characters are "collapsed into one"; displacements, where the timeframe of events is altered; alterations, where actions or expressions may have been shifted away from the historical person who said that originally, or they may not have happened at all; and the dialogue by which the viewer is brought to understand the "motivations, situations, particular events and their course, outcomes and impact." Rosenstone points out that even those characters that are based on historical figures become fiction on screen due to the intonation, gesture, movements implemented and probably invented by the actor or actress.

Rosenstone distinguishes between macro- and micro-data in historical films. The macro-data looks at the bigger picture, while micro-data looks into a smaller section more closely. It is not important to Rosenstone that the individual moments are verifiable, but whether they can say anything meaningful out the past. To him, history on film is "an evocation of the past and a commentary on the topic evoked" (Rosenstone 2018: 60). He sees film as "a different way of seeing and representing the world" (Rosenstone 2018: 60). Rosenstone also uses the term "slice of life" to describe focusing on the shorter period. (Rosenstone 2018: 43, 66, 91)

Rosenstone calls film-makers historians who make "meaning (in whatever medium) out of the past" (Rosenstone 2018: 105) To him, there are three ways to show the past: the vision, contest or revision it. Visioning history means representing realistic situations from the past in a dramatized form to allow the viewers to be emotionally engaged with what the past has to offer. By contesting history, one challenges the traditional interpretation of historical characters

and events. Revisioning history means mixing different genres and modes that might violate more traditional and realistic ways of talking about the past in order to show “the past in new and unexpected ways” (Rosenstone 2018: 105).

As has been shown above, the history of the suffrage movement is complex with several developments that influenced the course of the rest of the movement. Rosenstone’s terminology provides a baseline for the analysis of the movie and the employment of the various actions of the suffragettes and those against them. Not only does Rosenstone provide the terminology, but he also helps to understand the value of any movie that is based on historical topics might have.

THE REPRESENTATION OF SUFFRAGETTES IN *SUFFRAGETTE*

In order to understand the significance of the tools that Gavron used in her movie, a general overview shall be provided first, using Rosenstone's terminology, starting from genres and moving to the smaller aspects such as specific markers like compression or condensation, alterations, displacements, and dialogues. After providing a more general understanding about how *Suffragette* fits into Rosenstone's theory, various aspects of the movie shall be discussed, including how the suffrage movement is portrayed, connections to specific organizations, and any topics that have been wholly unmentioned by the historical sources such as domestic troubles, predatory behaviours, and other smaller details that provide more depth to the movie.

The *Suffragette* starts as it ends – with white-on-black text, the opening providing brief history of the movement, Mrs. Pankhurst, and the start of civil disobedience. *Suffragette* follows the story of Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan), a working-class woman who is initially apolitical and becomes involved with the suffragette campaign through her co-worker Violet Miller (Anne-Marie Duff). The viewer follows Maud's experience of becoming more politically active, and the loss of her son Georgie (Adam Michael Dodd) and marital happiness with Sonny Watts (Ben Whishaw) in exchange for the hope for the vote. Maud meets Edith and Hugh Ellyn (Helena Bonham Carter and Finbar Lynch), a married couple who organize events undercover, despite being watched by the police. Through her connection with Violet, Maud meets Emily Wilding Davison (Natalie Press). Through her acquaintance with the Ellyns, Maud not only sees Mrs Pankhurst (Meryl Streep) speak, but meets her for a few short moments. Maud's involvement in civil disobedience gives her a first-hand experience of how the women are treated in the prison system. The movie concludes with the Davison incident at the derby and

the immediate aftermath, with an acknowledgement of when various countries gave the women the right to vote on white on black text just before the end credits.

Gavron (2015c) calls her movie a work of fiction, which gives her more freedom in telling her story: she does not have to abide by historical facts so strictly, despite being heavily inspired by history, and, as has been shown above, the movie did generate some debate around its historical accuracy. *Suffragette* heavily encourages emotional connection with Maud. It depicts a version of micro-history — we see a slice of Maud's life in a very limited period of her life. There is a beginning, middle and an end to her initiation story. While being allowed to witness how Maud gets involved with and what her role is within the suffrage movement, the overall message stresses the righteousness of their battle. Thus, *Suffragette* matches all of Rosenstone's (2018) criteria for a fictional movie.

The fiction seems to use some elements of a documentary. For example, in the very last scenes, the viewer is shown what seems to be archival footage of Davison's funeral procession. The black-and-white visual and the characters of the movie not making an appearance imply that archival footage was used, although this is never clarified. The usage of aspects from other genres does not warrant the label of the genre that makes an appearance for such a short time, but it helps in creating a stronger sense of historical accuracy.

The movie follows the general historical narrative that the women got the right to vote due to their militancy, although there are contrary opinions and evidence to this. Although *Suffragette* displays some aspects that go counter to the scholarly consensus, they are not as extensive as to consider the film oppositional or innovative.

Although the chosen genre establishes how the story is told, the characters give it life. While there are characters that are inspired by historical figures in the movement, there are also characters who Rosenstone (2018) calls 'compressed' or 'condensated'. Gavron has mentioned

some of the real-life historic people whose stories inspired and influenced the creation of the characters that can be seen on screen. For example, Maud is based on Hannah Mitchell, Annie Kenney and Annie Barnes (Smyth 2015: 18) and the Ellyns were based on three couples that were both supportive of each other and the movement (Gavron 2015c). In contrast to the Ellyns, Alice Haughton (Romola Garai) is a suffragist and the wife of an MP, but is not supported by her husband, much like Maud, except there is a difference of social class.

As has been established in the previous chapter, the majority of the movement consisted of middle-class women, despite the working-class being vital to the revival of the movement (Holton in Purvis et al 2014: 27). Maud and Violet, who are two out of the three women we see on screen most often, are working-class women. Edith, being a physician, should fall into the middle-class and Alice Haughton represents the upper-class. In the multiple mass scenes of protest and gatherings, it is impossible to distinguish the social class of the numerous women shown, but not introduced. Although the representation and contribution of all classes is present, the focus of the story is on the working-class Maud.

Since Maud is another example of a 'compressed' character, nearly everything that she does may be called an alteration even if the interactions with real-life suffragettes are excluded. Maud portrays the struggles and actions that the real-life women experienced at work, at home or while being involved with the suffrage movement. Even the historical figures turn partly fictitious due to their interactions with other compressed or entirely fictional characters. For example, while Davison was involved in the arson of Lloyd George's house both in real life and the fictional world, in the movie she is accompanied by fictional characters, Maud and the Ellyns; and Maud meeting and having a brief conversation with Mrs. Pankhurst after a secret meeting and speech. The use of real historical figures allows the film-makers to create historical

credibility, while at the same time also giving them freedom to create emotional connection through the fictional characters in whose case they are not bound to facts.

Not only can the characters be altered, but also the timeline. In the first scenes of the movie, text on screen states that the time and location is “London, 1912”. The changing of dates is never updated visibly, nor can the change of seasons be detected clearly. The only indication is the passage of days that can be seen, as there are scenes that take place during the day and during the night. For two seconds, a June 3, 1913 issue of *The Daily Mirror* can be seen on screen at 1:26:21 with the derby on the cover. The shot of the newspaper goes by so quickly that the fact that the date and the year have changed is hard to notice without pausing the movie. Without knowing the history, it may be hard to know that Emily Davison died at the Derby in 1913 (Atkinson 2019: xiii), and not 1912 as the movie may make it seem. Although it is not a concrete evidence of displacement, or altering the timeframe, it very much seems so, as it is hard to see every detail of the newspaper in two seconds in the first viewing.

The only indication of location is, again, in the first scene where “London, 1912” is stated. There are, however, three other indicators of concrete location, in addition the numerous scenes in undisclosed locations of the laundry house, Maud’s home, temporary housing, streets in London, a park etc. One is a panoramic view on the Palace of Westminster, or the Houses of Parliament, with the Big Ben, in which also some scenes were shot. The second one is first named, and then taken to – Lloyd George’s house at Walton-on-the-Hill in Surrey. The third is first shown to be the place in which Maud sleeps and then named by police informant to be St. Paul’s Church. While London has changed in more than one hundred years, such staging still provides important locations not only for the storyline, but also familiar places for the viewer to recognise.

Gavron is proud to be the director of the first movie that got the right to film in the Houses of Parliament (BBC 2014). The location provides the first scenes of Maud's direct initiation and the reasoning for the conflicts and eruption of militancy to come. Despite it never being clarified what legislation the women are trying justify, the fight seems to be over the Conciliation Bill that was postponed multiple times around 1911 (Rosen 2013: 146-155). As the hopes for the Bill and the disturbance that followed the loss of it, is delayed a few months to a year into 1912, it is a minor example of a displacement in the timeframe of real-life events. Losing their hope for the legal rights as equals, the women become more militant.

Suffragette shows many aspects of the suffragettes' civil disobedience. Maud witnesses organized women throwing rocks into windows, but is yet not involved with the campaign herself. Her first direct encounter with the movement that is shown is when she listens to Alice Haughton, the MPs wife, call for women to testify in front of Lloyd George, which due to Violet being assaulted by her husband, led Maud to give an account of her and her co-workers working conditions in front of the Parliament and how it compares to those of men in the same company. Maud also participates in non-violent protest on the suffragette side that leads to her first arrest.

The protest begins after the decision of the Prime Minister Asquith is announced, but as changes to the Suffrage Bill were rejected, the women, who had gathered there, including Maud, Violet, Edith, and Alice, started shouting, and the police tried to dissolve the crowd. As the suffragettes were unresponsive to the police commands, the police became violent rather quickly. It even seems that the police's escalation to violence was relatively unprovoked as they did not wait for any response by the suffragettes, but started to punch and beat them with batons on foot and on horseback. Although the women did not respond to the commands immediately, they did not use violence themselves and that makes the use of violence by the police seem excessive as many women are shown to be injured and bloody. Not only were women present at the

disappointing announcement, but at least one man is shown to be displeased with the decision of the politicians as well. This seems to reflect the events of 'Black Friday' of November 1909 when the policemen used "exceptional brutality" (Purvis in Purvis et al 2014: 122) against the women, thus providing another example of displacement. It is possible, however, that any other protest that ended in similar results and was closer to the timeline of the movie might have been the source for the event portrayed in the movie.

After her disappointment with the politicians and her first encounter with the police, Maud becomes involved with the arson of pillar boxes and the cutting of telegraph wires that leads her to be an accomplice for the arson of Lloyd George's house. Gavron has added a housekeeper who could have been killed, had the attack been delayed just a few minutes, who was mentioned in none of the historical sources. The purpose seems to have been to emphasize the delicate balance of not harming even one person, which might have been compromised with the unauthorised actions of Maud and her accomplices.

While many acts are only touched upon briefly, the movie manages to show the variety of the campaigners' actions, the secrecy involved, including meetings in the dark, and the police surveillance and pressure that the women associated with the known active members were under. A secret meeting takes place, where Mrs Pankhurst appears on the screen only for a few scenes to give an encouraging speech. Despite being wanted by the police, she appears on a balcony, gives the speech to a large group of women, and is then quickly escorted away, while the police arrests those attending the meeting and tries to arrest Mrs. Pankhurst, but are stopped by the attendees. It is hinted multiple times previously that Mrs. Pankhurst, and her daughters, are on the run. The closest reference to this comes from 1912, when they are known to have been in Boulogne, France, but Atkinson (2019: 347) argues that they are not so much evading the British police as vacationing. In Gavron's movie, the police seemed to be well aware of the women

being led by Mrs. Pankhurst, but according to Atkinson (2019: 369), it only became clear in January 1913. The displacement of Mrs. Pankhurst movements and speeches may have been shifted in order to achieve a more dramatic effect.

Not all suffragettes were imprisoned, as the more privileged could be bailed out like the MP's wife, Alice. The less fortunate, or those whose unsupportive husbands refused to contribute to the wife's efforts, had to serve their sentences. The prison life is introduced through the newcomer Maud, being supported by Mrs. Edith Ellyn who is seemingly familiar with how everything works, signalling that it is not her first imprisonment. While Edith demands her rights as political prisoner, Maud embodies the shock and humiliation. Released the first time, she was arrested twice more, and imprisoned once. The second time in prison, Maud continues her fight for the right to vote through hunger striking that leads to her being force fed. Atkinson (2019: 155) has used a poster from 1910 that depicts force feeding. In it, a woman is being held down in a chair by multiple people, while the doctor tries feed her through the nose with a tube and a funnel. The woman being held down shows signs of extreme discomfort, refusing to sit down properly. The picture is brought to life in the movie by creating a scene in which nurses and doctors do the same with Maud, with three women holding her down, while Maud struggles unsuccessfully to be released from their grip and the feeding. The worries about the brutality of such behaviour by the authorities as well as the unwillingness to give the campaign a martyr are echoed in the dialogue in the subsequent scenes.

> STEED [an inspector played by Brendan Gleeson]: Treatment of them grows increasingly barbaric, Sir.
> BENEDICT [a man from the Home Office played by Samuel West]: What is the alternative? They will not hold us to ransom with their threats.
> STEED: My fear is they won't break, Sir. If one of them dies then we'll have blood on our hands and they'll have their martyr.
> BENEDICT stops, turns to STEED, with barely contained agitation.
> BENEDICT: That must not happen. Or Mrs Pankhurst will have won. (Scripts 2020: 53)

Although the majority of the men, including the police, were anti-suffrage and are portrayed as such, the dialogue conveys the doubts that some might have in relation to the treatment of the women. Inspector Steed portrays that mentality as he is torn between two sides – the opinion he should hold on the opposing side, but he also seems sympathetic to the suffering of the imprisoned suffragettes. While Steed's words echo the sentiments of the women who fought against the force feeding and the 116 doctors that supported their cause, it is difficult to determine whether it is a direct alteration through shifting somebody else's words onto Steed or not. Even so, the emotional truth of it is important as Steed shows that not all the people that were seemingly on the opposite side were entirely insensitive to their sufferings.

Several other aspects of prison life are portrayed, such as the humiliation of being stripped of their own clothing, wearing the attire of common criminals, the woman more experienced in being prisoners demanding their rights as political prisoners, the mandatory walks in the prison yard, and being handed flowers and a rosette on your first release. There is also a scene that implies that Maud scratched 'deeds not words' into her cell's wall, which might be inspired by Vera Wentworth's similar action, providing another 'alteration' in the movie. Maud being a fictional character, all of the experiences are alterations, but Maud, as a 'compressed' character, could be seen as the embodiment of all the working-class women who went through the prison system.

In addition to the women's experience in prison, from 1:20:39 to 1:20:45, a document is shown on the table of Inspector Arthur Steed that records the names of the prisoners, including Emmeline Pankhurst, Emily Wilding Davison, Maud Watts and many women whose stories are not told in the movie, the manner of their infringement, either damage or disorder, the length of their sentence, 3 or 5 days and other comments, such as 'hunger strike', 'force fed' or 'sol. confinement'. Although the Inspector does appear somewhat uneasy in his role of subjecting the

women to such sentences, the documents shows how common the prison sentences were and that Maud's story is in no way extraordinary.

Not only are the police shown in some scenes trying to identify and prevent any further acts of civil disobedience, but Inspector Steed tries to gain some advantage over the suffragettes by trying to recruit Maud as an informant in return for no charges against her for the attack she committed on her former employer. This provides a moral dilemma for Maud until she realizes that the fight at hand is bigger than any personal discomfort, thus echoing the suffragette mentality.

In the first introduction to the prison system, Emily is introduced to Maud by Violet and Edith as someone inspirational for the movement. Nowhere during the film is it stated how they are acquainted or, indeed, which organization, if any, Violet, Emily or the Ellyns are a part of. At around 1:22:51, however, we can see a façade of a house that displays the letters WSPU and 'Votes for Women' in capital letters. What the letters of WSPU stand for is never clarified during the movie. The WSPU building is later shown to contain the office for the organization as well as the production site of the newspaper *Votes for Women*. Since Edith seems to hold a senior position there, it can be assumed that the women are all members of the WSPU. Through Maud's connection to them, it can be assumed that Maud might have become a member at some point, although it is never shown on screen. Before attending Davison's funeral procession, however, Maud is attired in the same clothes and wearing the WSPU colours and merchandise like the other women. It remains unclear whether the director and/or screenwriter thought that the organization is well-known enough, or that, whilst it is important in the macroscopic history, in the micro-data approach to the slice of Maud's life, the organization itself was not as important and only provided historical credibility.

Much like in real life as told by Atkinson, the police raided WSPU's office in Gavron's story as well. There is, however, a shift from raiding *The Suffragette* to raiding *Votes for Women*, changing a historical truth, but leaving in one of suffragettes' catch phrases and providing a symbolic truth. The police did not only arrest six people, as opposed to the five that Atkinson (2019: 393) suggested, but, in the movie, the police had also searched the office, leaving scattered papers all over the room, which was not mentioned by Atkinson. The timeframe of the raid fits approximately right into the movement timeframe, thus not providing an example of displacement, but the reaction scene about the raid is definitely an alteration as fictional characters interact with the aftermath in the WSPU's office. Mixing historical truths with symbolic and emotional truths makes it easier for the viewer to further establish the emotional connection that has been the focus throughout the movie. In addition to the focus on the connection with the characters, the scene provides colours and life to documented incidents, despite never showing the raid itself, and thus bringing history closer to the viewer.

While the women are shown to publish their own newspaper, some other newspaper covers are also shown, mainly *The Daily Mirror*. The coverage shown does not imply that the press supports the suffrage cause. The reasoning for the lack of support is given by Benedict from Home Office who remarks that: "The press can only be tamed so long. They grow more and more interested in these damned women whilst we in government must try and quash every new story" (Scripts 2020: 50). While the reason for press silence and lack of reporting on the attacks committed by the suffragettes is presented, the women's concerns about the lack of publicity is also provided. For example, from 1:05:49 to 1:05:59, an exchange between Violet and Edith takes place:

> EDITH: What are you saying? This is not the time to stand down. No, we push on. Capitalise on the press interest.
> VIOLET: The press do nothing but scorn and mock us.

EDITH: They scorn and mock us because they feel our threat. (Scripts 2020: 45)

This is one of the examples that, from the perspective of Edith's character development, shows the reason for the escalation of militancy, and the scorn of the press. Another front cover of *The Daily Mirror* is shown, however, that was accompanied by dialogue between Maud and Edith from 1:36:38 to 1:37:0. The suffragettes are satisfied with supportive press coverage that has finally arrived, and not only in one newspaper, but every one of them. The dialogues present not only historical and factual truth, but also that of narrative truth.

On the one hand, Maud's liberation takes place through her activism and her involvement with the WSPU; on the other hand, she still struggles with her role as a mother. Thrown out of her home, not allowed to visit her son, even though she is shown the be a very involved and loving mother, unlike her husband, she has no rights over her son. Unable to care for his son, Georgie, Maud's husband Sonny gives Georgie to middle-class adoptive parents, with no permission required from Maud. Since Maud is being kept away from her son and as she has no custody rights, it leaves the impression that this is what leads her to more extreme militancy, like the arson examples given above. This is an attempt by the film-makers to provide psychological reasoning for militancy, but it also reduces the level of personal political commitment of the activists. This is probably done to increase audience engagement with the characters and sympathy for otherwise problematic violence.

Maud is not the only one who has to struggle at home - so does Violet. Although the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 (Parliament of the UK 2020) should protect Violet from the domestic violence she experienced, it does not. It might be assumed that the violence, which Violet suffered, is used to emphasize the need for the vote for women as it would provide some liberation. In addition to domestic violence, Violet already has multiple children and another

pregnancy leads her to distance herself from the militant movement, echoing the separation of the WFL from the WSPU.

There are implications that Maud was sexually assaulted by her employer on a regular basis when she was younger and that he has now moved onto Violet's eldest daughter, who seems to be early teenager. The friendship between Maud and Violet leads to Maud saving Violet's daughter from the rapist employer and gets the adolescent girl employment with the MP's wife Alice, saving the young girl from the trauma Maud seems to struggle with. Again, these fictional additions are intended to build audience's sympathy with the women and, in some regards, further villainizes the anti-suffrage men.

Although many things are hinted at through conversation, movies are supposed to 'show, not tell.' Translating written words into something to be viewed leads to the use of a lot of symbolism, for example colours. One example, the tricolour combination of green, white and purple was used on sashes, ribbons and badges (Atkinson 2019: 105) worn by campaigning women. Atkinson (2019: 95) remarks that the black and white photographs of the period do not convey the importance of colours that we can see in the film. The tricolour merchandise can be seen throughout the movie, worn by women in the background, but not Maud. The book *Dreams* by a feminist author of the time, Olive Schreiner, is also featured as an important item for the women, although it is shown only briefly and the author's name can barely be read. Women such as E. Pankhurst, Edith Ellyn and Emily Wilding Davison have written their names into it, to mark their previous ownership before it is passed onto Maud to read. This choice creates historical credibility, while also adding emotional connection, with its focus on women's solidarity.

Not all of the symbolism in the movie is visual, but comes from dialogues, in arguments with the antagonists such as the police, and monologues. The first monologue comes from

antagonistic politicians at the beginning of the movie when the historical background is being provided, urging women to have "the balance of mind" (Scripts 2020: 1) as well as conveying other anti-suffrage sentiments. The second one comes from Maud just prior to Davison's funeral procession, where she reads from the book *Dreams*. The quote not only poses a philosophical question for the viewer, but also explains Maud's motivations as an aftermath, now that all of the battles that the viewer is privy to, are over, although the battle for the vote went on after the end credits. Although Maud's story has a fixed timeframe, the over-arching story does not, and thus can echo the issues women face today, including that of the #MeToo movement. Maud's narration does not only echo her journey, but it can be considered to be a motivation for any women struggling in the current day to keep on going.

Gavron uses compression create characters with whom emotional connection can be established without having to adhere strictly to the biography of real women in the movement, thus altering such characters more than she could have changed Davison or Mrs. Pankhurst. While some minor displacement happened, this technique provides, together with the compression and alteration of characters, a better flow and storytelling in the movie. Instead of jumping from one action to another, Maud's steady increase in militancy and involvement with the movement is shown to make her relatable to the audience. All things taken into consideration, Gavron provides as comprehensive story as she can within the medium she has chosen to tell the story in. Even with the alterations she has taken liberty to implement, the movie provides a basis to start a discussion from, be it about the detail-oriented accuracy or the stories of the women that, until Gavron, did not reach the wider public

CONCLUSION

Despite the suffrage movement being thoroughly researched, it not has been comprehensively taught to the generations that followed the movement outside the academic sphere. While some members of the cast were more familiar with the movement prior to becoming involved with the production, they, too, expressed concerns of the sacrifice of many women approximately a century ago becoming forgotten in time. According to the women making the movie, the suffragist narrative is retold more often than that of the suffragettes and their sacrifices. The movie *Suffragette* aims to enlighten the public about this aspect of the fight for the vote.

In order to better analyse the movie, this thesis uses Rosenstone's definitions and characteristics to different genres as well as visioning, revisioning and contesting history. He also brings out markers, such as compression, alteration, displacement and dialogue. All of these are used to identify what and how has been changed in telling about the suffrage movement in *Suffragette*. Additionally, Rosenstone's arguments about the value of inaccuracy of detail and the director's status as a historian are considered.

The suffrage movement has a long history, but the methods became more intense in the early 20th century amongst the members of the WSPU, which is best known for its militancy. Although such acts were committed without the approval from the leaders, the acts of disobedience, such as window-smashing, hunger striking, and arson, became common amongst other members of the movement.

Gavron used numerous incidents from the suffrage movement in her movie, but, due to the time constraints of her chosen medium, applied each instance only once or twice, instead of showing how common the attacks by the suffragettes were. The battle that the women fought

was not only political, but could also extend into the domestic sphere. Although the parallel struggles are not as well recorded in the historical data about the suffrage movement, Gavron also worked in topics such as repeated rape of minors by men in power, domestic violence and the lack of maternal rights. These issues are topical to this day and help to make the suffering of the characters close to contemporary audiences.

Although the characters, through whom such incidents are shown or implied, are fictitious and thus the events are factually incorrect, the emotional and symbolic truth that the characters try to convey should matter just as much as the characters were inspired by women living in that era. While the movie is about a slice of Maud's life that spans approximately a year and the catalyst for her awakened political involvement is a chance meeting with a suffragette, being politically active is not the only justification for Maud's continued involvement with the movement. Maud's militancy might be explained by her need for equal parental rights that could be become a reality if women were recognized as equals to men. At the same time, the focus on emotional connection with Maud might shadow the understanding of the severity of the attacks committed by the suffragettes.

Through being privy to Maud's struggles on many fronts at the same time, the possible reality of many working-class women comes alive, thus helping to fill a gap in historical research. As the working-class women and their contributions have largely been written out of the historic narrative, Gavron's movie seems to be an attempt to not only bring more attention to the militancy, but also those whose struggles have remained uncredited.

Despite being a dramatic feature film, *Suffragette* still falls under historiophoty as it represents a micro-history. Although Gavron modified recorded history, she can be viewed as a historian of a sort who spent considerable time on researching and creating the world that Maud lives and acts in. Not only did Gavron touch upon the variety of civil disobedience, difference

of consequences deriving social class difference, and domestic situation, but also managed to bind the personal story of Maud with a perspective of the recent historical research.

Gavron's following of the accepted narrative means that she neither contests or revisions history, but that she visions it, providing lifelike dramatized events, people to identify with and making the situation feel not only like past, but also as if it was present (Rosenstone 2018:105). The fiction genre provides Gavron with enough leeway to alter the narrative just enough to be able to provide an interesting story to follow instead of having to get every biographical detail correct. Her movie suggests that the suffragettes got the vote due to their militancy, however, is contrary to academic opinions, thus displaying an element of contesting history. Due to being made for a different medium, however, *Suffragette* cannot be judged by the exact same standards as academic papers are, since they have different aims and produce different results.

Despite being a fictional period drama with some alterations, *Suffragette* should not be disregarded as a valuable source. It provides a story that has not been told before to the wider public. However, using it in any educational context requires that additional explanatory information should be used in order not to leave a false impression about the historical accuracy. This, however, does not reduce the value of *Suffragette* as means of teaching the audience about the movement. As it was the case with this thesis, it might be a starting point to become better acquainted with the history that was left untold previously.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Karmen Floren
The Suffragette Movement as Portrayed in the movie *Suffragette* (2015)
Sufražettide liikumise kujutamine filmis "*Suffragette*" (2015)
Bakalaureusetöö
2020
Lehekülgede arv: 42

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärgiks on võrrelda 2015. aasta filmi "*Suffragette*" kattuvust ajalooliste allikatega, et tuvastada kui tõetruu pildi film loob 20. sajandi alguses toimunud sufražettide liikumisest.

Töö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kahest peatükist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatuses käsitletakse naisõiguslasi puudutavat terminoloogilat ja filmi retseptsiooni arvustuste näol. Kirjanduse ülevaates tuuakse välja sufražettide liikumise areng, eelkõige aastatel 1911-1913. Samuti tutvustatakse teooriat, mida kasutatakse ajalool põhineva filmi analüüsimiseks. Empiirilises analüüsis on välja toodud millised sufražettide liikumise osad leiavad kajastust filmis ning millised lahknevused kirjapandud ajaloost muudavad selle mängufilmiks.

Bakalaureusetööst selgub analüüsi tulemusena, et olenemata filmi jaoks loodud tegelastest ning osaliselt fiktiivsest tegevusest, on filmi siiski koondatud piisavalt palju elemente sufražettide liikumisest selle kõige sõjakamal perioodil, et seda võiks väärtustada ühe allikana naisõiguslaste liikumise tundaõppimisel ja õpetamisel. Kuna tegemist on aga siiski mängufilmiga, siis on soovitav lugeda lisaks teaduslikult valiidseid ajaloolisi allikaid.

Märksõnad:
Briti ajalugu, sufražettide liikumine, naisõiguslus, filmi analüüs, mängufilm, ajalooline draama, Sarah Gavron.

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Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

[Juhendaja allkiri]

Raili Marling

Tartus, 26.05.2020