

Rethinking the Leaderful Body: The Jujutsuffragettes and the Gentle Art of Yielding

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This paper contributes to the relational and aesthetic turns in leadership studies in which traditional leader-centric concerns with personality, style, charisma and authenticity, have been replaced with critical analyses of discourse, collective practice, intersubjectivity, power, gender, and the body (Cunliffe, 2011; Fairhurst, 2007; Hansen et al, 2007; Mavin and Grandy, 2016; Raelin, 2011; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Sinclair, 2005; 2011; Stead, 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The paper contributes to this growing field by exploring a largely forgotten history which – through its retelling – has potentially radical implications for relationships between gender, ‘leaderful’ bodies, and the heroic. The forgotten history explored is that of the ‘fighting’ or ‘jujutsu’ suffragettes in the United Kingdom during the early years of the 20th century. This was a secret and highly skilled group of female bodyguards trained in the Japanese martial art of jujutsu and tasked with the personal protection of Emmeline Pankhurst and other leading figures of the Votes for Women movement (Williams, 2012; Wolf, 2009). The role of the ‘jujutsuffragettes’ (or ‘The Bodyguard’ as they were also known) involved personal protection of the movement’s leadership, but also served as agitators and decoys to confront and distract the authorities and allow targeted individuals to escape arrest during speeches and demonstrations. This secret group also served another function as instructors in the martial arts providing women with simple, but effective techniques for dealing with male violence and oppression wherever they may encounter it. The most influential figure of this group was Edith Garrud, chief athletics instructor of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) and Women’s Freedom League (WFL) and one of the most proficient female martial artists and martial arts instructors in the UK and Europe at the turn of the 20th century. The paper provides an account of the life of key figures like Garrud and how an interest in the Japanese martial arts intersected with a late Victorian fascination with Japanese culture and particularly with the new Eastern fighting arts (Wingard, 2003) – fighting techniques that privileged softness and precision over brute force and muscular strength. The paper explores how an interest in what was seen as a ‘gentleman’s art’ (Barton-Wright, 1899; Godfrey, 2010; Wolf, 2005) provided the means and method for protecting and facilitating the suffragette movement and how it propelled women like Edith Garrud and her students into popular consciousness as female superheroes of the day with associated myths and legends of their exploits battling police officers and holding public demonstrations of their skill (Looser, 2011). The paper also explores the content and technique of jujutsu itself as practised and taught by Garrud and

others – a martial art whose name loosely translated from Japanese to English means the ‘gentle way of yielding’ – and how it became a powerful practical *and* symbolic tool for opposing the excesses of an aggressive and often violent patriarchal Edwardian society (Godfrey, 2012; Rouse, 2017). As the paper argues, this co-opting of what was perceived as a gentlemanly and hyper-masculine leisure pursuit into a political and feminist ‘gentle way of yielding’ provides an important point of ethico-political intervention; An intervention in which notions of the heroic feminine and collective opposition (Höpfl, 2010; Vachhani and Pullen, 2018) might be re-written and so re-positioned to offer practical, intellectual, and pedagogical counterpoints to established notions of leading and following.

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