

# Constructing the "militant suffragist" in *The Times*

Kat Gupta

[kat@mixosaurus.co.uk](mailto:kat@mixosaurus.co.uk)

[@mixosaurus](#)



MILITANT SUFFRAGIST (after long and futile efforts to light a fire for her tea-kettle).  
"And to think that only yesterday I burnt two pavilions and a church!"

(June 4, 1913)

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- Subject of historical debate
- Gap in historical research

# The *Times* Digital Archive (TDA)

- <http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/>
- Example:

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*THE WOMAN SUFFRAGISTS.*

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I can no longer keep silence, but must perforce record the deep resentment and anger in the hearts of many, many Englishwomen at the conduct of the suffragette shouters. Thousands of women like myself would be glad of some means to help in putting an end to such unwomanly rowdyism; but we shrink from publicity and can do nothing. I have, however, a strong desire to assure the men of England that there are very many of us who are deeply ashamed of our sex, and that we hope that neither Conservatives nor Liberals will be coerced by violence into giving votes to those who, by their violent and unbalanced behaviour, show how unworthy they are to legislate.

Again, many poor people are beginning to feel much aggrieved at the leniency shown to these law-breakers because they are so-called "ladies," whereas if they were of the very poor classes only, and defied the police and forced their way into people's houses, they would get what they deserved.

I have been chosen to address these few lines as I have much property, and might therefore claim a right to vote; but I am more than content to leave government and law-making in the hands of our Englishmen, whose whole nature and training produces more evenly-balanced minds and judgment.

I enclose my card, but must request you not to print my name, or perhaps my house would be attacked by hysterical females. Your obedient servant,  
Y. Z.

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# The *Suffrage* corpus

- Extracted from xml files provided by TDA
- *suffrag*\*
  - Includes *suffrage, suffrages, suffragist, suffragists, suffragette, suffragettes*
  - Excluded *Suffragan* – ecclesiastical terminology
- 1908 – 1914
- Average of 546 texts per year
- 7,089,889 tokens (running words) in text



# Terminology from historiography

- SUFFRAGIST
  - considered the more inclusive term
  - constitutionalists who campaigned by lobbying Parliament

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- SUFFRAGIST
  - considered the more inclusive term
  - constitutionalists who campaigned by lobbying Parliament
- SUFFRAGETTE
  - originally a pejorative coined by the *Daily Mail*
  - saw the vote as an end unto itself
  - prepared to engage in direct action
  - members of a militant organisation
  - challenged the constitutionalist approach

# Frequencies in Suffrage corpus

|             | <i>suffragist</i> | <i>suffragists</i> | <i>suffragette</i> | <i>suffragettes</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>1908</b> | 165               | 302                | 30                 | 57                  |
| <b>1909</b> | 139               | 311                | 16                 | 35                  |
| <b>1910</b> | 156               | 197                | 9                  | 11                  |
| <b>1911</b> | 81                | 104                | 2                  | 10                  |
| <b>1912</b> | 388               | 502                | 18                 | 30                  |
| <b>1913</b> | 527               | 615                | 34                 | 19                  |
| <b>1914</b> | 263               | 270                | 15                 | 21                  |

*suffragist*\* is the preferred term, even when discussing issues strongly associated with suffragettes and which suffragists rejected e.g. militant direct action

# Methodology

- Mutual Information
  - Measure of collocation strength
  - Both directions
  - "Hunston (2002: 71) proposes an MI score of 3 or higher to be taken as evidence that two items are collocates" (McEnery, Xiao and Tono 2006: 56)
- Functional categories
  - Derived from historiography
  - Corpus-driven

# Categories

- From historical research
  - Constitutionalist vs militant
  - Geography (regional vs London)/places
  - Gender/gender roles
- Corpus-driven categories
  - Direct action
  - Legal and prison
  - Organisational
  - Political
  - Opposition
  - Proper nouns

# Direct action

1912

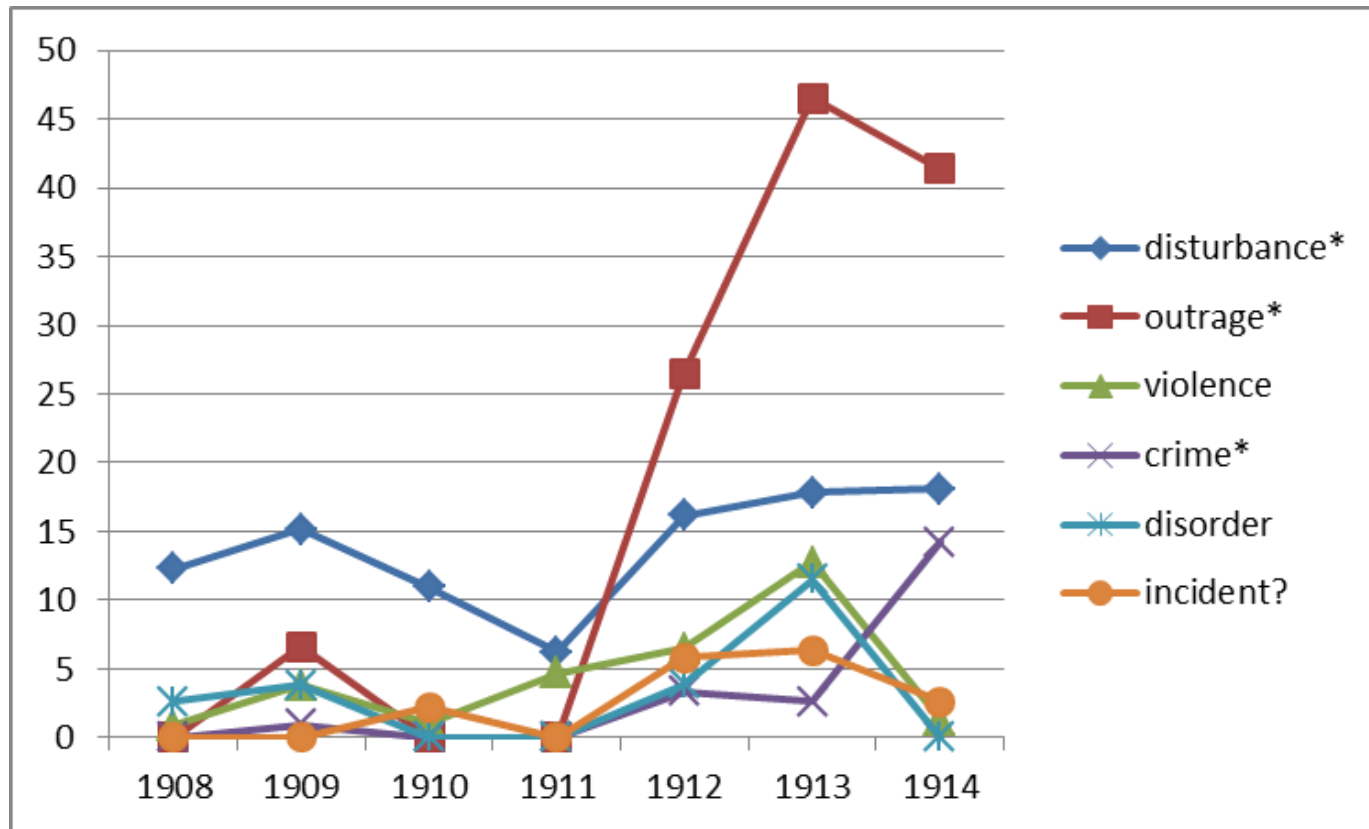
**Suffragette:** a, of

**Suffragettes:** by, have, militant, that, the, to

**Suffragist:** a, after, an, anti, at, by, convicted, **disturbances**, dublin, english, even, every, feeding, forcible, friends, further, **incident**, last, leaders, liberal, london, meeting, militant, miss, movement, mrs, other, out, **outrage**, **outrages**, police, prisoners, recent, released, sentenced, she, speakers, suffragists, tion, treatment, trial, two, up, views, well, who, whole, whom, **window**, woman, women

**Suffragists:** among, anti, are, at, being, believe, both, **breaking**, by, case, constitutional, **damage**, done, dublin, **ejected**, english, extreme, four, have, held, imprisoned, **interrupted**, labour, last, liberal, london, militant, miss, night, non, now, number, out, passed, point, police, political, prison, released, section, set, should, some, support, their, treatment, trial, two, well, were, when, who, **window**, **windows**, woman, women

# Direct action



Frequencies of *suffrag\** collocates normalised to 500 texts

# Direct action

|              | <i>disturbance*</i> | <i>outrage</i> | <i>violence</i> | <i>crime*</i> | <i>disorder</i> | <i>incident?</i> |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <b>1908</b>  | 14                  | 0              | 1               | 0             | 3               | 0                |
| <b>1909</b>  | 16                  | 7              | 4               | 1             | 4               | 0                |
| <b>1910</b>  | 10                  | 0              | 1               | 0             | 0               | 2                |
| <b>1911</b>  | 4                   | 0              | 3               | 0             | 0               | 0                |
| <b>1912</b>  | 25                  | 41             | 10              | 5             | 6               | 9                |
| <b>1913</b>  | 28                  | 73             | 20              | 4             | 18              | 10               |
| <b>1914</b>  | 14                  | 32             | 1               | 11            | 0               | 2                |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>111</b>          | <b>153</b>     | <b>40</b>       | <b>21</b>     | <b>31</b>       | <b>239</b>       |



# Direct action

| Year         | <i>disturbance*</i> | <i>outrage</i> | <i>violence</i> | <i>crime*</i> | <i>disorder</i> | <i>incident?</i> |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1908         | 14                  | 0              | 1               | 0             | 3               | 0                |
| 1909         | 16                  | 7              | 4               | 1             | 4               | 0                |
| 1910         | 10                  | 0              | 1               | 0             | 0               | 2                |
| 1911         | 4                   | 0              | 3               | 0             | 0               | 0                |
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# Frequencies of *suffragist disturbance*\*

|             | <i>suffragist disturbance*</i> | <i>suffragette disturbance*</i> | <i>suffrage disturbance*</i> |
|-------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>1908</b> | 9                              | 0                               | 0                            |
| <b>1909</b> | 7                              | 0                               | 2                            |
| <b>1910</b> | 7                              | 0                               | 3                            |
| <b>1911</b> | 3                              | 0                               | 1                            |
| <b>1912</b> | 12                             | 2                               | 6                            |
| <b>1913</b> | 11                             | 0                               | 0                            |
| <b>1914</b> | 3                              | 0                               | 0                            |

# *suffrag\* disturbance\* in 1913*

1        been forced to obtain access. DISTURBANCES AT MEETINGS. The  
2        cence.. There were again noisy disturbances at suffragist me  
3        of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. DISTURBANCE BY SUFFRAGISTS. T  
4        lowed by a militant suffragist disturbance in WWhitelhall. M  
5        s .. Suffragists and the King; Disturbance at Covent Garden;  
6        SUFFRAGISTS AND THE KING. DISTURBANCE AT COVENT GARDEN.  
7        the incident did not cause any disturbance. Suffragists who  
8        MEETING BROKEN U.P AT OXFORD. Disturbance took place in Oxf  
9        ome News: Suffragist Yiolence: Disturbance in Parila- inet S  
10        . GOVERNMENT OFFICES ATTACKED. DISTURBANCE IN PARLIAMENT-  
11        ICE COURTS. As a result of the disturbance created by wwoman  
12        n the course of the suffragist disturbance outside the Pavil  
14        were several woman suffragist disturbances at Westminster y  
15        d yesterday as the result of a disturbance which followed a  
16        f England 13 .. The Suffragist Disturbance . . . 13 Parliame  
17        everybody else. THE SUFFRAGIST DISTURBANCE. Mr. WEDGWOOD (Ne  
18        ovember, 1911, when suffragist disturbances had caused consi  
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# Places

- Women suffragists created a disturbance during the morning service at St. Paul's Cathedral yesterday by interjecting in the prayers an appeal to the Church to interfere with the forcible feeding of women, while others prayed for Mary Richardson and Annie Kenney.

(OFFO-1913-OCT20-008-005.txt)

- DISTURBANCES AT THEATRES. Militant suffragists last night visited practically every theatre in the West-end and caused what appeared to be organized disturbances by attempting to address the audiences or by scattering handbills relative to "the torture of women."

(OFFO-1914-JUN13-009-010.txt)

# *suffrag\* disturbance\**

- *suffrag\* disturbance\** overwhelmingly associated with direct action
- *disturbance\** is used to describe non-property damaging activities
- The targeted locations suggest that the suffrage campaigners were deeply aware of the different kinds of power indexed by such sites and chose them accordingly to make an impact; this is reflected in the press attention given to them in *The Times'* reporting.

# Direct action terms

- *disturbance*\*
  - Relatively high frequency, non-specific
  - Most frequent term before 1912
- *outrage*\*
  - Relatively high frequency, non-specific
  - Most frequent term after 1912
- *violence*
  - Low frequency, specific
- *crime*\*
  - Low frequency, specific
- *disorder*
  - Used when suffrage campaigners encounter non-suffrage supporters, especially hostile crowds
- *incident?*
  - Used when suffrage campaigners attempt to attract the attention of authority figures



# What do the collocations tell us?

- Direct action terms have different patterns of use
  - Used at different times
  - Used to describe different activities
- Preference for *suffragist*\* + direct action term than for *suffragette*\* + direct action term
  - Association of *suffragist* with terms that more closely reflect suffragette activities
  - Reducing the diversity of suffrage movement

# Conclusion

- Triangulation of corpus linguistic approaches, critical discourse analysis and historiography
- An analysis that does not take into account the historical context – the political, social and cultural world of the suffrage movement – cannot adequately account for the complexities of the suffrage movement.

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