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The White Ribbon – Temperate Women on Public Scenes.

In this paper I will introduce my thesis, *Temperate women, educators, entrepreneurs and political agents. The White Ribbon 1900–1930* (2001), in which I study the female Christian temperance organization the White Ribbon, which was founded in Stockholm in 1900.¹ During the first half of the 20th century the White Ribbon was one of the largest female organizations in Sweden.² In those days, it was a well known participator on the political arena. Many of its members were active in political parties, and some were in fact famous politicians. Today, it is an anonymous and forgotten organization, and its members are just as unknown as they once were well-known. It makes you wonder why the largest female political organization of the 20th century is unknown to the general public, and obscure in the history of politics.

In my thesis I show that the White Ribboners were not only participating in politics, I also claim that they were very important participators in the development of welfare and democracy. Like many other female political agents the White Ribboners have not been included in the history of Swedish politics. In fact, women are rarely, or not at all, mentioned in the political history writing. The welfare system and the democratization of Sweden are generally described to have been developed and created by men only. The public and political scenes of the past were male domains, but that does not mean that women were not participating.

When taking a closer look at the popular historical literature on the subject, women are quite invisible. The bookstore's history shelves are dominated by the history of men. When searching for gender and women history studies on the Inter-net bookstores, you will rarely find them in the history tab. Furthermore, after decades of gender research, the history of women is still invisible in the Swedish school's history textbooks. Studies show that textbook authors do not include the fact that women were active in politics and in the public sphere. Newly published schoolbooks exclude female politicians and organizations, the women's movement and women's participation in society in general.³ The Swedish school books of history, therefore, reproduce the view that only men, and not women, were agents in society. Still, despite decades of gender research, the schoolbook authors refuse to include half of the population in the nation's history, and furthermore, they do not question or discuss the gender system of society or of politics.

¹ The organization Woman's Christian Temperance Union, first started in New York in 1874, and became international in 1885. The Swedish founder, Emelie Rathou, chose to call the Swedish branch the White Ribbon since the organization's symbol was a white ribbon tied in a bow around the globe.

² Only the National Association for Women's Franchise was larger until 1921 when it was discontinued.

³ Ohlander, Ann-Sofie. (2010) *Kvinnor, män och jämställdhet i läromedel i historia*. (Translation: *Women, men and equality in educational materials in history*.) SOU 2010:10. (the State Official Investigation 2010,) The Delegation of Equality, Stockholm.

This, of course, raises a question: Why it is so hard to include women? Also, why does gender and women history not reach outside the walls of the (Swedish) university academy? Why are books about women in the past not considered to be history, but rather categorized as gender or feminism? And, concerning the absence of women in politics, I cannot help wondering if one of the problems lies in the definition of politics, as well as the view of where politics is being performed. Politics seems to be defined to be something happening in the national parliament, an arena to which women in the past had no or little access to. When widening the definition of politics and looking outside the national parliament, we can include women, the women's movement and the female organizations.

Next, I will introduce the White Ribbon's political achievements. The following part of this paper is the English summary excerpted from my thesis *Temperate women, educators, entrepreneurs and political agents. The White Ribbon 1900–1930*. The purpose of this summary is to present alternative ways to approach women's political participation and, also to elucidate their participation in the process of democratization. I would also like to accentuate the White Ribboners' religious argumentations for political participation as well as the Christian women's part in the women's movement, which is an often forgotten aspect. Hopefully, my summary will bring forth a discussion of how the individuals and the organizations of the women's movement affected the national politics, process of democratization and the building of the welfare system.

Temperate women, educators, entrepreneurs and political agents.

The White Ribbon 1900-1930⁴

In 1900 Emelie Rathou founded the female Christian temperance organization the White Ribbon in Östermalm in Stockholm. She immediately connected it to the international organization the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union, WWCTU. With financial help from the WWCTU she travelled around Sweden and started new local associations. Soon, the White Ribbon had spread all over the country, becoming the second largest female organization in Sweden. Only the National Association for Women's Franchise was larger, but when this was discontinued in 1921, the White Ribbon became the largest.

While the male-dominated part of the temperance movement has been studied and recognized as an important participator in both politics and in the process of democratization of Sweden during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the female activists have been forgotten. Previous research about the temperance movement generates questions whether the White Ribbon was involved in politics and had any political influence like the male-dominated temperance organizations. The aim of my thesis is to investigate the White Ribbon's social and political commitment and its ideological approach during the first three decades of the 20th century. To do so, I have closely studied the organization's journal, by the same name, *The White Ribbon*, with the organization's own history as a supplementary source of facts. I problematize its

⁴ The following text is the English summary excerpted from my thesis (pp 353-362) *Nyktra kvinnor. Folkbildare, företagare och politiska aktörer. Vita Bandet 1900-1930* (2011) Makadam, Gothenburg & Stockholm.

ideological approach and culture in relation to the prevailing and predominant outlook on women, which I call a “domestic” view of women. This view emanated from a Christian and a bourgeois stance, and it advocated that the position of the bourgeois woman was in the private sphere of the family and home, while the public sphere was for men.

I treat the organization as a social movement, and I use a theoretical perspective of social movements as an analytic instrument. A social movement arises when a group unites due to a feeling of alienation and a conflict with those in power and the political establishment. Therefore, by its very nature a social movement can be viewed as always participating in a discursive political field. The Swedish sociologist Håkan Thörn has developed a theoretical and methodological framework for an analysis of a social movement which I found to be a useful. This theory aims to construct the collective identity of the movement by a close reading of the movement’s texts, in this case the journal of the organization. This is done by discussing what the movement identifies as social problems, what it apprehends to be the reasons for these problems, and what strategy the movement chooses to deal with these problems in order to create the prognosticated change. Thereby, I can study both the ideas and the ideological approach of the White Ribbon, as well as the more concrete activities.

The thesis is structured by subject. In order to capture the ideological fundament I start by looking into the background of some of the main characters that appear frequently in the journal. In chapter three I discuss them from a theoretical point of view as *movement intellectuals*. They are the persons who articulate the movement’s ideology, and my analysis of these movement intellectuals exposes the dominating norms and values of the White Ribbon, which identifies some obvious dimensions for the remaining investigation. The study of the movement intellectuals shows that the leading stratum derived from a bourgeois middle class. Most of them had a religious background and most of them were engaged in social policy and participated in public debates. They were all committed to and members of several associations, such as temperance and women’s suffrage organizations, free churches and political parties. Accordingly, they were well familiar with the democratic principles of organizations and they were also part of large social networks.

In chapter four I outline the basic world of ideas. I discuss the religious culture, which is the predominant paradigm both in the structure of the organization’s work and in the White Ribboners’ argumentation and propaganda. The study shows a strong religious heritage that can be traced both to the WCTU and to the revival movement. The White Ribboners argued that a woman was a Christian individual, and therefore should have social, juridical and political rights on same basis as men. In contrast to the more traditional point of view, they claimed that it was the woman’s Christian right, duty and responsibility to act in the public sphere and to participate in politics, in order to create a better and temperate society.

Even though the organization clearly opposed the bourgeois traditional view of where and how women should act, the study shows that a Swedish bourgeois middle-class paradigm still dominated the ideas of the organization. However, this was a male-powered paradigm. Like the male lead temperance unions, the White Ribbon carried and spread the ideal of education and of respectability, which was typical of the bourgeois middle class. These characteristics were, however, associated with men and masculinity. The organization claimed that reading and self-

education were also essential elements for women to become full citizens. The literary and aesthetic culture was important to become a well-informed and well-bred, capable and respectable member of society, just as it was fundamental for the progression of the nation.

The White Ribbon produced a journal by the same name, which was primarily used for propaganda and for spreading political and social information. However, it was also an arena for aesthetic culture. The White Ribboners can be regarded as a kind of cultural agents in a cultural arena. Many of them were authors and poets, and some had journalistic skills. Literature was reviewed and recommended. The organization put together a rentable travelling library for the local associations. The journal also published illustrations of and articles about art. Lyrics, short stories, fiction and articles by both members and other female writers were published. In the journal the White Ribbon showed that both fictional and real women participated in the fight for temperance. When members and women in general were presented, the journal concentrated on their competence and actual participation in the public sphere and in politics. It thereby presented alternative role models that glorified women's public and political appearance, skills, experiences and competence. In other words, the White Ribbon remodeled and launched a different kind of womanhood. Contrary to the traditional domestic ideal, the White Ribbon advocated that the ideal woman should participate in the public sphere and in politics. She was a proper and an educated person with knowledge and experience of politics and of how society worked.

The White Ribboners themselves were indeed active citizens. They participated in politics and in different fields of the public sphere. Each local association worked independently in the local area, but in order to organize the nationwide activities and politics, the White Ribbon had different departments, led by a movement intellectual, that concentrated on specific fields. The organization's program was wide and not limited to the work of temperance. In chapter five I look into the department formed in 1907 to focus on morality and social purity. This department worked to promote high morals, to abolish the licensing of prostitutes, and to prevent the use of contraceptives as well as prostitution. The White Ribboners arranged sexual education, courses, public information meetings and lectures. They published educational booklets; they proposed political motions and wrote petitions demanding reforms and change. Their ambition was to bring about legislation that placed women on a par with men. They demanded, for example, matrimonial juridical equality between the sexes, but they also insisted that sexual education should be a mandatory school subject. Sexual education and knowledge of reproduction would, according to the White Ribboners, make women independent and in control of their body and was therefore a more efficient way of improving morality and equality. The White Ribboners found it important to mold public opinion and to change people's attitudes, and get rid of the predominant double standard of morality that allowed men to live by other rules than women, that is, to have extramarital relations.

In chapter six I analyze the White Ribbon's commitment to changing the environment of a female group of stevedores. A department was founded in 1905, and I explain in detail how it worked to influence public opinion and those in authority. The White Ribbon was critical of the low morality and intemperance at the female stevedores' workplace. The organization initiated a public debate, arranged public meetings, and pressured involved parties by official letters,

criticizing the low morality and use of alcohol as well as the sexual exploitation of girls in the harbors. The White Ribboners successfully put forward suggestions for new legislation concerning the female stevedores, and also raised the question of establishing a female Labor Inspectorate. They argued that a female inspector should be appointed to look out for non-industrial female workers, such as the female stevedores. Their demands were implemented and the stevedores' work was eventually regulated according to law and came under the jurisdiction and supervision of the female Labor Inspectorate.

The White Ribbon criticized women's low, unequal wages and lack of vacations, as well as women's general situation on the labor market, but primarily their work was concentrated on the implementation of new female professions such as the female Labor Inspectorate. They also took an active part in introducing the new profession of female police officers. The leader of the morality department investigated the American system of female police officers, and her investigation was used as a basis when introducing the Swedish equivalent.

In chapter seven I discuss how another department concentrated on the working-class women on a more private basis. As part of the temperance work, the White Ribboners found the sense of togetherness important, and their aim was to attract working women to their organization by offering the working-class women the solidarity of temperance and a Christian worldview. They also worked to change the female worker's personal life situation. In the early twentieth century the organization started rest-and-holiday homes for working women all over the country. The White Ribboners argued that working-class women needed a proper rest from both work and household chores. With their rest-and-holiday homes the White Ribbon was breaking ground for a general debate that later included holidays for housewives, which was introduced in the 1930s.

The White Ribbon also started educational courses, the most popular of which were cooking and sewing courses, but other more traditional subjects like arithmetic and social studies were also common subjects. The course activities must be understood as a form of adult education. The White Ribbon arranged series of educational lectures and their education activities developed alongside the temperance and labor adult education institutions, which have been studied and found important for the democratic development of the country despite the fact that they were organized by men and concentrated on male pupils, and therefore were by no means democratic in their form. The White Ribbon's educational activities included people that otherwise were excluded by the other educational institutions. Their courses were particularly an answer to insufficient education for women.

In chapter eight, I discuss the rest-and-holiday homes and the educational courses as philanthropic institutions. Likewise, the activities for children and young people, children's homes and homes for outcast women, must also be understood as filling a philanthropic purpose. Other researchers claim that female philanthropists organized institutions on the basis of their gender. My analysis proves differently. My study shows that the White Ribbon's philanthropy rather emanated from a social political interest and with the aim of creating a social welfare system that included women and girls in need. The organization ran philanthropic institutions for fallen women, young girls who had gone astray, women with alcohol addiction, and for poor and single women who had recently become mothers. The White Ribboners expressed a social

commitment to women who had problems supporting their illegitimate children, and they argued that society had to force the fathers to take responsibility. They considered parenthood to be important for the wealth of nation. The unwed mothers should not alone bear the consequences of the relationship. Instead of being disgraced, the single mothers should, according to the White Ribboners, be highly praised for taking responsibility. The White Ribbon's aid was intended to give these mothers a second chance and new start in life.

The philanthropic activities were answers to what the White Ribboners regarded as social problems, and their institutions were models of solutions to deal with these problems. This commitment must be understood as a reaction to the absence of political solutions, rather than an effect of femininity. The philanthropic institutions quite clearly filled a gap with regard to social interventions for women and girls, and several of these institutions were later taken over by the authorities and are today taken for granted as parts of the current welfare system.

The White Ribboners called their philanthropic institutes "social companies", which leads to the conclusion that they very much saw themselves as entrepreneurs. I discuss their companies as political innovations to deal with social problems in order to develop an equal society, which is an important dimension in the process of democratization. Furthermore, these institutions must also be regarded as companies and businesses that provided for the growing demand for particular social services. All over the country the organization also ran non-alcohol restaurants, which are discussed in chapter nine. Here I show how the White Ribboners could evade the law that prevented married women, who were in fact incapacitated by marriage, from owning property by running their company as a cooperative undertaking. Instead of loans and outside investors in the form of banking financiers, they were able to sell share certificates within the social network of the temperance movement.

In Sweden restaurants serving alcohol were regarded as places of high culture, while the non-alcoholic ones were considered to be second-rate and associated with the working class. The White Ribboners regarded their non-alcohol serving restaurants as a sanitary tool to change the alcohol culture in general. The ambition was to create alternative temperate and high-culture public places. Since many women actually worked in restaurants, the White Ribboners considered the non-alcoholic alternative to be an improved working environment. Here, the waitresses and the female guests would not have to meet drunken men, and all the unpleasantness and immoral behavior that alcohol and drunkenness entailed. The non-alcoholic restaurants were therefore an instrument for creating a morally decent labor market and a healthy and temperate nation.

The primary track to a temperate society was women's participation in the public sphere. Particularly important was female suffrage. In chapter ten, I discuss how the organization argued that suffrage and political participation was not only a national, but mainly a human and a Christian right and duty. Suffrage meant participation in parliament and legislation, through which the temperate society could take shape. In political historiography, women are rarely included as political actors since they were not allowed into parliament until 1921 and since married women were incapacitated. However, many women were politically active on a local basis, and several White Ribboners had in fact been politically engaged and had positions in local government and councils since the implementation of the election reform in 1909, which allowed both married and unmarried women to vote and be elected to local councils.

The White Ribbon was politically neutral, and the neutrality was a strategy that made it possible for the members to pursue the policy of temperance in all political wings. Many of the organization's members were in fact active in political parties, mainly the Liberal Party. When the local female franchise was improved in 1909, and then fully implemented in 1918, much of the journal's propaganda was directed to making women realize the importance of being politically conscious and politically active. In order to inspire the female audience, the journal presented the politically active members as role models and encouraged women to join political parties in order to pursue women's liberation, suffrage, temperance and morality. The suffrage campaign was in fact about influencing and convincing women, not only of their rights but mainly of their duty and responsibilities in society. In order to improve the situation for family, children and home, women had to participate in politics and act in society's public sphere. It was a mother's duty to use her right to vote in order to contribute to the well-being of her family and to the progression of the nation.

In chapter eleven, I discuss how the White Ribboners considered women's lack of political commitment and insufficient participation in the elections to be a serious problem. Even after women became political citizens and universal female suffrage was implemented in 1921, the White Ribbon continued influencing and persuading women to become active political citizens. However, it was also a fight to end discrimination against women on a high level. Women were constantly reduced in politics, and a silent strategy to separate them from influence was applied by male politicians and decision makers. This strategy eventually became explicit in the referendum about alcohol prohibition in 1922 when it was decided that the ballot papers were to be gender-marked and that the female electorate could not be counted if they constituted the majority in favor of prohibition; women were not to decide whether men could drink or not.

Previous researchers have described the White Ribbon's participation in this debate as weak and non-existent. My study proves the opposite. Two years before the decision to mark the ballot papers, the organization started frantic activity to convince the politicians that that gender-marked ballots were not only unjust, but also inhuman, arbitrary and, particularly, undemocratic. The White Ribbon ran an energetic campaign for the prohibition and against the gender-marked ballot papers. It arranged a large conference to unite women from other associations, and at this congress a new, long-lasting union was set up. The fact that the Swedish parliament decided that women's votes should not determine men's access to alcohol proves how weak the support for democracy actually was when it came to those in authority.

At the same time, the inadequate turnout in elections, as well as women's vote by proxy, also proves that the idea of democracy had not yet caught on. Nor had the principles of democracy been intended for women. My study points out that the White Ribbon's suffrage campaigns for female suffrage and fight against the gender-marked ballots was very much a promotion of democratic ideas. The aspect of establishing an attitude of democracy is an important, but sometimes forgotten, part of the process of democratization.

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At the end of each chapter is a concluding theoretical discussion and a more profound theoretical analysis is concentrated in the final twelfth chapter. The analysis demonstrates that even if the

White Ribboners considered that the existing social problems in general were caused by economic difficulties, housing problems, immorality and alcohol, the White Ribbon identified the predominant gender system as a primary social problem. The general attitude, as well as the current gender system, was dominated by the idea of the subordination of women and of the double moral standard. According to this idea, women were not to participate in the public sphere.

The diagnosis, or strategy, to create a change that would cause a temperate society was mainly to eliminate the patriarchal order of the gender system and to change the attitude of people through education, information and persuasion, but also by demanding impartial reforms promoting equality, by increasing the possibilities for adult education and providing social protection for poor, fallen and alcohol-addicted women and girls gone astray. The utopian vision prognosticated an equal, democratic and temperate society, in which the Christian world view and respectability and educational bourgeois ideals dominated.

The result of the theoretical analysis reconstructs the collective identity of the White Ribbon, which can be described as a temperate, Christian and political citizen, which was quite opposite to the traditional female ideal and the traditional Christian and bourgeois view of women. The domestic ideal was not one that the White Ribboners could relate to. My study shows that the organization, like the individual members, was in fact active in politics and participated in different public arenas. However, the ideas and activities were in line with the bourgeois middle-class male paradigm concerning respectability and education, entrepreneurship, as well as social and political commitment and participation.

The White Ribbon's ideas and practical activities were critical of and thereby also challenged the order of gender, which means that the White Ribboners in fact were feminists and mainly argued and worked according to an ideological feminist approach. According to the organization, women were cultural, political and public agents, participating in the development of society, and therefore also political citizens.

With the aim of creating a temperate society, the organization was in line with the overall temperance movement's political point of view, and therefore had the acceptance of the general public at large. The White Ribboners did not only regard themselves as, but were in fact political agents acting in a political field. The study shows that the organization was a political lobbyist and a public debater, just like their male equivalents. It hosted large public meetings, and worked continuously to influence public opinion and politicians. The White Ribboners participated in public debates, they wrote official letters, petitions and proposals for political motions. They were also active in political parties, in which they could work for the White Ribbon's cause. I have shown that the White Ribbon in fact did have political influence on issues regarding labor market and women's work environment.

Furthermore, my study also shows that that the philanthropic institutions emanated from an interest in social policy and can be understood as political innovations to solve social problems. Their social and political commitment concentrated not only on temperance but also on achieving equality between women and men in general. In an age when women were rarely welcome in political parties or in trade unions, nor regarded as part of the people or invited to

participate in adult education, in politics or in decision making, the White Ribbon offered a forum through which women could participate in public spheres. The organization did in fact have an influence on decision making, and it must be understood to be a political actor during the first three decades of the twentieth century, just like the other male-dominated temperance organizations. Even if the pronounced aim was a temperate society, my thesis shows that this endeavor also included equality and democracy. My study has not only elucidated the White Ribboners' ambitions and work to change the gender system, but also the social, economic and political structure, which in my opinion must not only be seen as a fight for democratization, but also as a step towards democracy.