

---

H-France Review Vol. 5 (March 2005), No. 31

Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, Eds., *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. ix + 448 pp. Acknowledgements, contributors, notes, supplementary bibliography, and index of names. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0804747644.

Review by Sara L. Kimble, University of Northern Iowa.

---

The impetus for this collection of essays was an international conference held in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1995, which was organized to discuss the origins and development of European women's rights movements during the long nineteenth century. Scholars from eleven countries contributed studies on the early years of women's emancipation within national contexts organized geographically. The national studies begin with Britain, the Netherlands, France, and Germany, then look north to Norway and Sweden, then east to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and finally south to Spain and Greece. The authors carefully situate the movements in historical context thus illustrating the prevalence of feminist ideas concurrent with the growth of liberalism, nationalism, and republicanism. Comparative views are provided by Karen Offen, who focuses on challenges to "male hegemony" from the French Revolution to 1860, and Christine Bolt, who connects the British and American feminist movements during the second half of the nineteenth century. The editors, Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, introduce the goals and concepts of this anthology and conclude with a concise synthesis of the broad historical trends. This book is a valuable contribution to a field that has benefited recently from the publication of Karen Offen's *European Feminisms, 1700-1950* (2000) and the *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women* (2003) edited by Christine Fauré. [1]

Although the development of women's emancipation movements is partly unique to each nation's history, the editors propose that a four-phased chronology is generally applicable Europe-wide. The first phase began in the Enlightenment and continued to the end of the French Revolution as networks of publications and small circles of friends endeavored to improve women's education and legal status under civil law. With the implementation of the Napoleonic Civil Code in 1804, gains made during the Revolution were overturned and new codifications constrained women with vehemence. With these formal obstacles in place, the second phase of the movement was primarily literary and frequently aligned with nationalism in central, eastern, and southern Europe from the 1810s to the 1860s. In France, the early socialist movements of the 1830s and 1840s, especially among the followers of Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon, incorporated gender equality into their platforms for change. The reactionary phase which followed the 1848 revolutions detrimentally affected these early efforts. The period of the 1850s to 1890 constitutes the third phase of development which was marked by sustained organization of the women's rights movements. In this period, reforms were simultaneously demanded in a variety of areas including education, employment, civil rights, double moral standards, and temperance. The fourth phase began in 1890 from which point most European movements experienced their peak levels of national and international organizing until the First World War interrupted these expressions of feminist solidarity.

One of the particular successes achieved by this volume is the inclusion of lesser-known histories of nineteenth-century women's movements from southern, eastern, and central Europe. Eleni Varikas highlights the Greek feminist *Ladies' Newspaper* which fought for women's educational and professional access as well as civil and political rights. This periodical enjoyed a weekly circulation of 5,000 copies and maintained continuous publication over twenty years (1887-1907). From Mary Nash's contribution,

the leading Spanish feminist Concepción Arenal materializes as a prolific, energetic force behind social change, most notably in education, which she saw as the crucial component in the “woman question.” The women’s movement in Poland contended with the forces of police repression and the pervasiveness of anti-feminist publications. The organizers scaled back their ambitions out of concern of offending public opinion according to co-authors Bogna Lorence-Kot and Adam Winiarz. Larger political questions often influenced the fate of feminist issues, as in the Hungarian case where women were granted the right to vote not as a result of the considerable dedicated activism by leaders such as Rószza BÉdy-Schwimmer but rather by fiat at the 1920 Peace Conference.

With questions of politics and the state in mind, Florence Rochefort illuminates the important relationship between French feminism and republicanism from an organizational watershed moment in 1868. Indeed, the strength of feminists’ dedication to the republic suppressed their willingness to engage in rebellious activity against the state (p. 86). Rochefort highlights the influence of feminist journalism in her discussion of various newspapers including the Saint-Simonian *La Femme libre* (est. 1833), Léon Richer and Maria Deraismes’s *Le Droit des femmes* (est. 1869), the unpretentious *La Femme de France* (est. 1879), Hubertine Auclert’s *La Citoyenne* (est. 1881), the Catholic-feminist *Le Féminisme chrétien* (est. 1896), and Marguerite Durand’s exclusively female-run daily, *La Fronde* (est. 1897). The “woman question” received considerable attention in the mainstream press and from major publishing houses, resulting in widespread public awareness of women’s inequality. Engaging with the individualist versus relational debate, Rochefort asserts that French feminism was “not any less individualistic than feminism in Protestant countries,” and the “individualist and rationalist foundation” of the movement in the late-1860s was “never lost” in spite of a later shift to a maternalist orientation (p. 83). Although the French movement was highly heterogeneous with its multitudinous organizations and arguments, Rochefort sees coherence in the program of action pivoting on women’s integration into the republic.[2]

Embedded in these essays are reminders that earlier generations attempted to preserve feminist accomplishments in archives, encyclopedias, and publications. In this light, historians’ claims about the supposed inadequacy of institutional support for research in women’s history in contemporary Europe seem all the more regrettable. Although Amsterdam’s International Archives for the Women’s Movement (now IIAV) was established in 1935 to preserve a record of the movement from 1789, Mineke Bosch laments that the Dutch women’s rights movement has not received more than a “sideways glance” in recent historiography, and she fears that many aspects of this history have already been lost (pp. 71-72). Sadly, no synthetic history of the Dutch women’s suffrage movement exists. In the study of Polish history, work is underway to reconstruct the women’s movement but current scholarship has yet to establish the periodization of events (p. 208). While women’s history is not yet as well-developed in eastern and southern Europe as it is in the west and north, this collection brings useful attention and visibility to the available historiography.[3]

Debates on how to pursue the field of women’s history occur throughout this volume with particular attention to distinguishing between women’s movements and feminist movements, and theorizing about activists’ claims in terms of equality versus difference. Editors Paletschek and Pietrow-Ennker deploy the phrase “women’s emancipation movements” in the book title to mean “the fight for self-determination and improvements in the legal, social, cultural, and political positions of women” (p. 6). They chose not to use the term “feminism” because this word was not generally introduced into European discourse until the 1890s, and they reason that the general phrase translates more effectively across languages and can be applied more readily to earlier developments. By contrast, Offen advocates reclaiming the term “feminism” to describe organized political movements designed to “challenge and overturn one or more aspects of male hegemony” (pp. 22-23). Offen encourages researchers to look deeper into the past to unveil the evidence of feminists’ political arguments and “sophisticated

understandings of gender” in the early modern period (p. 15). She also urges all scholars of European history to weigh the profound impact of women’s rights activism during the French Revolution and the subsequent counterrevolutionary backlash concomitant with new (and reasserted) arguments about women’s inferiority (p. 20). Jane Rendall’s contribution to this collection highlights the fruitfulness of looking for “lost political cultures” in Britain between the 1850s and the 1890s while also suggesting a future research agenda. Rendall argues that to understand the arenas where the women’s rights movements developed, researchers should thoroughly investigate how various factors shaping identity such as economics, religion or atheism, and relations to formal political parties influenced participants’ ideologies and actions.

Several authors usefully explore the complexity of gender identity by elucidating the rich fluidity of the gender debates within political culture. Many women’s emancipation organizations effectively capitalized on gender difference by embracing, in Ida Blom’s words, “the idea that women’s first and foremost task was that of wife and mother, and that men’s first duty was to provide for their families and protect the nation” (p. 150). Nevertheless, some Swedish feminists envisioned a person who transcended gender norms, a “new kind of human being” who participated in both private and social life as a “mature, active, and responsible” and “less gendered” individual (p. 158). Analyses of prescriptive gender roles by male and female women’s rights advocates appear intriguingly but briefly in a number of the essays. Although the peak of the European emancipation movements presented herein roughly coincided with the rise of the figure of the “new woman,” a discussion of the relationship between these two developments is absent.[4]

There is room in this volume for greater attention to the role of imperialism, the history of international cooperation, and social constructions of gender. The subject of religion receives only minor attention; some essayists do note that the established Christian churches regularly formed a bulwark of the opposition, and that membership in minority or dissenting religious groups, such as the Protestants in France and the Jews in Hungary, often catalyzed political consciousness. Overall, this book makes significant contributions to the project of understanding the history of the socio-political movements to improve women’s condition in Europe as well as making a persuasive argument for the centrality of this history in the portrait of the Continent in the nineteenth century.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, “Concepts and Issues”
- Karen Offen, “Challenging Male Hegemony: Feminist Criticism and the Context for Women’s Movements in the Age of European Revolutions and Counterrevolutions, 1789-1860”
- Jane Rendall, “Recovering Lost Political Cultures: British Feminisms, 1860-1900”
- Mineke Bosch, “History and Historiography of First-Wave Feminism in the Netherlands, 1860-1922”
- Florence Rochefort, “The French Feminist Movement and Republicanism, 1868-1914”
- Ute Gerhard, “The Women’s Movement in Germany in an International Context”
- Ida Blom, “Modernity and the Norwegian Women’s Movement from the 1880s to 1914: Changes and Continuities”
- Ulla Manns, “Gender and Feminism in Sweden: The Fredrika Bremer Association”
- Jitka Malecková, “The Emancipation of Women for the Benefit of the Nation: The Czech Women’s Movement”
- Judith Szapor, “Sisters or Foes: The Shifting Front Lines of the Hungarian Women’s Movements, 1896-1918”
- Bogna Lorence-Kot and Adam Winiarz, “The Polish Women’s Movement to 1914”

- Linda Edmondson, "Feminism and Equality in an Authoritarian State: The Politics of Women's Liberation in Late Imperial Russia"
- Mary Nash, "The Rise of the Women's Movement in Nineteenth-Century Spain"
- Eleni Varikas, "National and Gender Identity in Turn-of-the-Century Greece"
- Christine Bolt, "British and American Feminism: Personal, Intellectual, and Practical Connections"
- Sylvia Patelschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, "Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century: Conclusions"

---

## NOTES

[1] Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) and Christine Fauré, ed., *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[2] In addition to her monograph with Laurence Klejman, *Egalité en Marche: Le féminisme sous la troisième République* (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1989), Florence Rochefort has written an excellent introduction to feminism with a useful bibliography in "From Women's Rights to Feminism in Europe, 1860-1914," in Christine Fauré, ed., *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women*, pp. 315-26.

[3] Fortunately, there are positive signs that conservation efforts are underway. In France, for example, the Centre des Archives du Féminisme (CAF) has been established at Christine Bard's initiative at the Université d'Angers. The CAF houses the records of the Conseil national des femmes françaises and continues to receive documentation on twentieth-century feminist history, making it an important complement to the Parisian archival collections compiled earlier by Louise Bouglé and Marguerite Durand.

[4] For recent work on the "new woman" in the French context, see Jean Elisabeth Pedersen, *Legislating the French Family: Feminism, Theater, and Republican Politics: 1870-1920* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Sara L. Kimble  
University of Northern Iowa  
sara.kimble@uni.edu

Copyright © 2005 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. ISSN 1553-9172