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# European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History

*Karen Offen*

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**European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History** Karen Offen
This ambitious book explores challenges to male hegemony throughout continental Europe. It focuses especially on France, but it also offers comparative material on developments in the German-speaking countries and in the smaller European nations and aspiring nation-states. Spanning 250 years, the sweeping coverage extends from Portugal to Poland, Greece to Finland, Ireland to Ukraine, and Spain to Scandinavia—as well as international and transnational feminist organizations.

The study has several objectives. For general readers and those interested primarily in the historical record, it provides a comprehensive, comparative account of feminist developments in European societies, as well as a rereading of European history from a feminist perspective. By placing gender, or relations between women and men, at the center of European politics, where the author argues that it belongs but from which it has long been marginalized, the book aims to reconfigure our understanding of the European past and to make visible a long but neglected tradition of feminist thought and politics.

On another level, by providing a broad and accurate historical analysis, the book seeks to disentangle some misperceptions and to demystify some confusing contemporary debates about the Enlightenment, reason, nature, equality vs. difference, and public vs. private, among others. The author argues that historical feminisms offer us far more than logical paradoxes and contradictions; feminisms are about sexual politics, not philosophy. Feminist victories are not, strictly speaking, about getting the argument right, nor is gender merely “a useful category of analysis”; sexual difference lies at the heart of human thought and politics.

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