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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karen Offen. *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. xviii + 554 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-3420-2.

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Published on H-Ideas (May, 2001)

A Political Rejoinder to Postmodern Gender History

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Karen Offen has created an impressive and authoritative account of the diversity among feminist positions in modern Europe. Offen seeks to reconfigure the standard narrative of modern European political history from a comparative feminist viewpoint. In doing so, she desires to celebrate the accomplishments and struggles of feminist women and men in effecting real political debate and change. She also assails theoretical perspectives in women's and gender studies offered by such writers as Joan Scott and Judith Butler. In this vein, she pursues an archivist and documentary history that criticizes postmodern genealogical methods, favoring an analysis of public discourse loosely based on the work of Juergen Habermas.

Offen works to rehabilitate the Enlightenment from the postmodernist critique by recontextualizing it from a feminist perspective. Offen develops an exhaustive catalogue and analysis of archival and published sources centered on the critique, analysis and emancipation of women from male control, not about gender performance or the positioning of the term 'woman.' These concerns form the framework for the work, but are not its forte.

The real strength of the book is its comparative work, both in describing the activity of feminist organizations and in debating the differences in theory and practice engendered by different national and regional contexts. Much of the struggle over women's rights and roles was contested on the terrain of ideas, values, images and vocabularies, and Offen demonstrates the variety and depth of these arguments. She effectively highlights the theoretical discussion of women in texts that are not usually introduced into the discussion of feminism: Darwin, Kant, Condorcet, and Proudhon, including them with the usual references to Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Mill and de Beauvoir.

Offen also includes feminist events and ideas from France, Germany and England in addition to Italy, Scandinavia, and Russia. She repeatedly refers to literature as a field of convergence for feminist and antifeminist ideas and dialogue and discusses the role of Catholic and Protestant feminist writers. Offen does not merely pay lip service to the idea of comparative history, she does it. Two entire chapters on the early twentieth century are organized along comparative lines, showing how feminism continued to be a contested idea among female activists of a variety of nationalities and ideological persuasions.

In developing this comparative argument, Offen explicitly rejects certain stereotypically feminist stances. She rejects the discussion of women's oppression, preferring analysis of subordination embodied in law and practice. This facilitates her comparative approach by focusing her work on writings, political movements, and events. She also criticizes the exclusive labeling of only women as feminists, arguing that especially in the early years of feminism, some men were often the leading voices. Lastly, she distances herself from the uncompromising assertion that women must be treated as individuals, as equal instantiations of the universal human. Offen includes those who argued for women's rights from their standpoint as women who brought unique perspectives to social and political issues. This broadens her field of focus and greatly enriches the work.

The result of this comparative work is an argument that there are basically two distinct yet overlapping threads within European feminisms. The first is relational feminism (also referred to as maternalist feminism or maternalism), an emphasis on women's distinctiveness as mothers as the basis for an egalitarian society. The second is the more well-known individualist feminism that stresses universal human rights, autonomy and equality. Her assertion of the plurality of feminisms is an excellent point, especially in an Anglo-American culture that too easily recognizes only the second variant as fem-

inism.

Offen builds a solid case for the inclusion of relational feminism as a legitimate form of European feminism. Critiques of institutional marriage and women's education form the context for the elaboration of the idea of civic motherhood, the argument that women's political rights were best advanced by the specific maternalist values that women could bring to the public sphere. Early feminists' calls for protection of women's trades: flower-selling, needle-work, piece-work done in the home, are firmly tied to the progressive tradition of the Enlightenment that Offen is trying to rescue.

In rewriting political history from a feminist perspective, Offen challenges the dominant male-centered narrative of modern European history through a discussion of feminist arguments that are based on the acceptance of sexual difference stretching back to the Enlightenment and the French revolution. The redefinition of femininity as civic motherhood, of women as mother-educators, would be used by writers such as Condorcet to pursue political rights for women. But these ideas, again and again, would also be put to use by antifeminist writers and organizations as much as by feminist ones, a point that Offen concedes and illustrates effectively.

Offen also addresses a third thread, that of socialist feminism, but does not include this in her list of feminisms. Bluntly stated, feminism that asserts no fundamental differences as well as feminism based on sex difference is feminism for Offen; feminism that prioritizes class differences is not. For example, in her discussion of feminist positions regarding women's work, Offen castigates the socialist position that women should be emancipated from work, not just emancipated from domestic bondage. For Offen, to be emancipated from work is not feminist, yet she fails to show how such demands can be separated from the feminist position supporting civic motherhood and maternalism. The middle-class women who sought liberation from the confines of the domestic sphere are supposed to speak for all women, including working-class women who might be seeking liberation from factory labor.

This bias becomes even clearer in Offen's treatment of such socialist activists and writers as Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai. Middle-class feminists were suspicious of socialist efforts to put the working-class revolution as a pre-condition to female emancipation, and it is to these privileged women that Offen accords the badge of feminist, denying it to working-class women whose interests may have precluded sisterhood with their social betters. Zetkin, Kollontai and other socialist feminists are delegitimated as feminists for their assertion that female emancipation could not occur under the conditions of bourgeois capitalism.

Offen talks of other forms of feminisms in the plural, but privileges a particular form of feminism, that which accepted the bourgeois economic order, in the singular. Her portrayal of socialist feminists is unsympathetic, in distinction to her treatment of more conservatively oriented relational feminists. The fact that bourgeois feminists denied and suppressed class divisions among women is not examined nor critiqued, but accepted at face value as a legitimate expression of feminism, if not the only legitimate expression of feminism. Socialist feminists are characterized as lecturing, possessive, maneuvering, sabotaging, and disruptive, achieving advances only on paper. For Offen, socialist feminism is not a form of feminism, but a competitor for women's allegiance.

The book is a conditional success. Overall, Offen has presented a clear and convincing case that the master narrative of emancipation must be rewritten to include the strenuous and continuing efforts of feminists to challenge male privilege. Her command of the sources and of the analytical methods of traditional history is impressive. Her use of comparative methods is extensive and compelling. For all of these reasons, this is a book that is to be recommended.

Yet this recommendation carries a few caveats. Her effort to defend the narrative of emancipation from postmodern assaults is made more through the weight of her evidence than through the force of her argument. Her sympathies for conservative relational feminism over the socialist feminism of the left demonstrate that her antagonism towards postmodernist feminism is primarily political. If one accepts her theoretical and ideological assumptions, this is a masterful work, but the assumptions themselves are not effectively defended in her argument.

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Citation: Douglas J. Cremer. Review of Offen, Karen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. May, 2001.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5155

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