



Kimble, Sara L. & Röwekamp, Marion (eds.): *New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History*. New York & London, Routledge, 2017. 452 pp.

'The women's question is [...] first and foremost [...] a legal question because only upon the foundation of warranted rights [...] can a definite solution even be thought about' (p. 246). This declaration of the German legal expert Anita Augspurg (1857-1943) neatly sums up the importance of the work edited by Sara Kimble and Marion Röwekamp. This collection of essays consists of three main parts: the first focuses on transformations in gender relations and family rights in various European countries; the second offers an overview regarding the insertion of women in the legal profession; and the third is centered on the connections between the national movements dedicated to women's rights. Nearly all of the chapters deal with the period that ranges from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thereby providing a far-ranging focus on the transformation in the legal situation of women, whether in terms of advances or setbacks. Indeed, this is one of the many virtues of this collection, which shows that the struggle for women's rights was far from a linear process, being shaped in large measure by the interaction between the women's groups, opposition from within the existing political systems, and a number of other collectives.

As Dr Röwekamp concludes in her chapter on Germany, women throughout Europe had to unleash a ferocious campaign in order to achieve their legal rights. For a woman to reach the highest legal positions, such as a judge, was to conquer a key position in both real and symbolic terms in the endeavour to overthrow legal inequalities, some of which are still pending today (p. 265). A key to understanding the persistence of gender inequalities in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe is the Napoleonic Civil Code, which is referenced throughout the book.

Another salient virtue of *New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History* is the inclusion of traditional case-studies –those on Great Britain, France and Germany– alongside those of countries which are normally excluded in a history of Europe. Yet without the latter it is impossible to regard such a study as dealing with 'Europe', as opposed to the most 'advanced' nations of Western Europe. I am referring here to the inclusion of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland from eastern and central Europe; Finland and Belgium from the north, and Portugal, Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria from the south and the Mediterranean region. Further, all of these studies adopt a wide-ranging perspective insofar as they offer an overview of the situation of women and gender relations, in addition to dealing with the access of women to the legal professions. For example, Professor Gloria Nielfa offers an exceptional synthesis regarding the Spanish case, managing to bring together all the key elements of the extensive period covered in her chapter (1868-1950). This constitutes an invaluable introduction for students, scholars, and anyone else who is interested in the Spanish case. The same can be said of the other chapters in this section. The Czech and Greek chapters, for instance, offer syntheses which represent

exemplary starting points for an exploration of the specialised studies cited.

The second part concerns the access of women to the legal professions. This places the latter within a broad context in an effort to explore the changes in gender relations. For example, Gordana Stojaković's chapter on the first female lawyers and attorneys covers a series of organisations that defended women's rights. Her analysis underlines once again the complexity of the European women's movements. Thus in Yugoslavia various organisations came together in 1919 in order to form the National Women's Alliance of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. That same year, a socialist women's group was established, while nine years later female students founded their own organisation, the Yugoslav Federation of University Women. In other words, women activists in Yugoslavia followed a similar path to that of women in other European countries, such as Spain.

The second part also challenges long-established narratives in the history of feminism thanks to a focus on certain pioneers in the legal field. Accordingly, Anne Logan, in her study of what she defines as the 'feminist-criminal-justice reform network', shows how British feminism did not enter into a state of suspense in 1918, reappearing only with the 'Second Wave of Feminism'. On the contrary, she argues, it did not disappear at all, but simply became more diverse in terms of its objectives and struggles. Indeed, Mia Korpiola judges that obtaining the vote for women was only the beginning of the struggle for genuine equality, not the end. Contrary to what is often thought, the struggle for equality is still going on, even in countries such as Finland, and further monographic studies of its many aspects are still required.

Finally, attention must be drawn to the third part of *New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History* for taking a supra-national approach that dissects the networks and other means of connection between the women's movements. Key themes are dealt with here, such as the struggle for equal rights between husband and wife or that for international laws concerning women's work. Susan Zimmermann, for example, looks at the initiatives of organisations such as the hitherto little-researched *The Open Door International*, the forum that was established to combat the gender-specific labour law promoted by the International Labour Organisation. She also examines the impact of the latter's labour laws in relation to working-class women in the light of ethnicity. Moreover, there are case studies with a transnational focus that highlight the need to take these connections into account when assessing the development of women's organisations within a national context, as shown by Anne Cova in the case of Portugal.

Perhaps the only criticism that can be made of this excellent collection is the title. From my point of view, this does not do justice to the scope and richness of the book, as it gives the impression of being of interest only to specialists in law. In reality, this collection constitutes essential reading for anyone interested in the history of gender relations in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, whether they are an academic or not; that is to say, this book is for anyone who is interested in the lives of the men and women who have made up the history of Europe over the last century.

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