Prologue

History, Memory, and Empowerment

The campaign to end women's subordination to men that we call feminism is an ongoing, recurring, enduring political project, with deep roots in the European past. Feminisms, in the plural, can be documented in many European societies, past and present; in some societies they become a central and recurrent feature of political cultures, of European thought and politics. Feminist thought and action do not stand outside—or on the periphery of—the so-called Western tradition; they are integral to it.[1]

That these claims should have to be forcefully stated, that they have not been long acknowledged, reflects the obliteration of an extraordinary struggle, one of continuing importance to women and men today, whether they reside in Europe or far beyond Europe's boundaries. When the history of feminisms is incorporated into the history of European thought and politics, our understanding of the European past—and of its pertinence for our own present and future—is radically altered. Why, then, do we know so little about it? How did this knowledge become lost? Or might it be that we have been denied knowledge of the feminist tradition?

One answer lies in the account we have been handed of "Western thought" and politics, and what and how we have been taught to think Western thought (and politics) *is*. When reconsidered critically, from the perspective of feminist concerns, and with a whole new archive of recovered knowledge, the past looks different. No longer do we see a long, linear sequence of dynasties, wars, conquests, revolutions, or grand, overarching trends, such as the rise of the bourgeoisie, of capitalism, of the nation-state. No longer do we encounter a seamless history of great ideas generated by the grand old men of Western philosophy. What we encounter is far more intriguing—a long, irregular, but significant series of controversies, of debates, of competing factions, of advances, setbacks, defeats, and occasional victories, and not only of the conventionally ac-

cepted kind. Relations between women and men, that is, between the sexes, are not merely a lens through which to reread the past; they lie at the storm center of controversy.

This book, then, concerns a series of political challenges and responses to male dominance or hegemony in Europe, primarily on the European continent, that span the centuries from 1700 to 1950. This sequence of challenges embraces critical thought and political action launched both by women and by sympathetic male allies. It concerns issues of authority and the making of rules—about marriage, education, allocation of property, resources, and labor, political participation, family structures, indeed, even the organization of knowledge itself. Feminist efforts to emancipate women as well as the organized resistance to these efforts are, as the title and content of my book argue, central to our historical understanding of politics in European societies. They also bear on our historical understanding of societies that lie far away from Europe, but that have been deeply touched by Europe, and that continue to carry (or resist) the impress of European cultures. I will not be speaking of these societies here, but the connection must be pointed out.

The history of feminisms in Europe encompasses virtually every "field" of historical inquiry—political, intellectual, social, economic, cultural, religious, and so forth. In spite of its range and scope, historical memory of this multifaceted challenge has remained minimal, to the point that its very existence seemed questionable. The evidence lay, like buried treasure, below the surface of conventional historical accounts, an "unauthorized" aspect of the past.

How wrongheaded this "unauthorization" is! Listen to these voices from the early twentieth century. "The forward march of feminism," wrote the French activist Madame Avril de Sainte-Croix in 1907, "is a fact that no one can deny, a movement that no force can henceforth bring to a halt. Woman . . . has become a factor to be reckoned with."[2] "The women's movement," remarked the British suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1913, "is one of the biggest things that has ever taken place in the history of the world":[3]

> Other movements towards freedom have aimed at raising the status of a comparatively small group or class. But the women's movement aims at nothing less than raising the status of an entire sex—half the human race—to lift it up to the freedom and value of womanhood. It affects more people than any former reform movement, for it spreads over the whole world. It is more deep-seated, for it enters into the home and modifies the personal character.

Or, consider this 1904 assertion by the Swedish writer and mother's advocate Ellen Key: "The struggle that woman is now carrying on is far more far-reaching than any other; and if no diversion occurs, it will finally surpass in fanaticism any war of religion or race."[4] Contemporary readers of this dramatic claim must have sat up and taken notice. We should too.

Despite such attestations as these, despite the vigor and momentum of successive feminist attempts to contest and dismantle male hegemony from the eighteenth century into the early twentieth century, neither the history of feminism—nor for that matter even the history of women, which is a broader, though related project of which the history of feminism is a part—seemed to develop any staying power. "Women," asserted Simone de Beauvoir in her introduction to *The Second Sex* (1949), "lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat."[5] Even in 1949 this was a seriously misleading claim.

OVERCOMING AMNESIA

By the early 1970s, a new generation of feminists in Europe thought, in good conscience, that they were beginning from "Year Zero." One has to ask how the memory of such a significant movement, such efforts, such challenges in thought and action could be so obliterated and forgotten. How could women and men not know? How could the history of feminism fail to have been treated seriously by professional historians or taught to the young women and men who swarmed into colleges and universities throughout Europe and America during the 1950s and 1960s? Why is it so rarely taught now? Knowledge—as everyone knows—can often be empowering; partial knowledge, or lack of knowledge, can disempower. Indeed, for decades knowledge of feminism's history has been poorly served by both national and international communities of historians, not to mention schoolteachers, and even today it remains an unwelcome intruder.

Not only the long-term, but even more recent developments in the history of feminism were effectively buried, erased, or, indeed, even suppressed, as Dale Spender eloquently pointed out in the 1980s with respect to the continuing feminist activities in 1920s England. "Does it really make any difference to our lives," she asked, "to know that . . .

there was a vigorous and varied women's movement which addressed similar issues and conducted comparable campaigns to those which we have engaged in over the last decade?" Spender's answer was an emphatic "Yes": "To believe that we are on our own, that we have started a protest for which there is no precedent, is to be plagued by doubts, to be vulnerable, to be without models, experience or guidance. . . . Great strength and great joy can be derived from the knowledge that . . . many women felt much the same about male power as many women do today."[6]

The growth of women's history in national contexts and the emergence of feminist scholarship since the 1970s have done much to remedy Dale Spender's discomfort, and even as this work goes to press, scholars and publishers in many countries collaborate to enrich our knowledge of women's history and the history of feminisms at the national level in ways that Beauvoir and her contemporaries could scarcely have imagined. Comparative, cross-national work on Europe, on the other hand, has remained relatively underdeveloped, with the exception of two important early works by Richard J. Evans and Jane Rendall.[7]

Within the field of interdisciplinary women's studies, at least in colleges and universities in North America, students can sometimes study the histories of feminisms in the United States, Britain, or Canada. At the secondary level, such offerings are still exceptional. But even women's studies programs at the university level have tended to shortchange the teaching of the history of feminisms in other parts of the world. Scholars and teachers whose expertise is located in other disciplines rarely feel an obligation to ground themselves in knowledge of women's history, much less the history of feminism, even though they expect their colleagues in history to speak across disciplinary boundaries, and even across cultures and continents. Feminist knowledge, to many today, seems to mean only "feminist theory" or feminist practice since the 1970s; although what "counts" as "knowledge" or as "theory" is continually questioned, the place of history in these matters remains greatly undervalued.[8]

In Europe the situation has been far more difficult; not only has a women's-studies curriculum been difficult to introduce, much less institutionalize, but even women's history—not to speak of the history of feminisms—has encountered serious and sustained resistance from educational authorities in many major state-controlled systems, who smugly defend "general" knowledge from the intrusion of what they see as "separatist" or compartmentalized knowledge.[9] It seems hard to convince such authorities that women's history is not that of a tiny minor-

ity, that indeed women constitute over half the population—and young women in some cultures now comprise a majority of university students—and that feminism is a politics bearing on the most salient relationship in human societies: that between women and men. That students should not be at least exposed to the history of this politics, whose successes and failures have so affected their own lives, seems scandalous!

When, in the early 1970s, I first began to investigate the history of feminisms in Europe, the few available English-language documentaries concerned mostly the debate on the woman question in the United States, sprinkled with a few additional texts from Virginia Woolf, Friedrich Engels, and August Bebel; other collections featured a far larger number of sensationalist antifeminist males, from Aristotle to Nietzsche.[10] One day in 1972, while seeking materials for a course I would co-teach on "Women in Western History," I was prowling in the deepest recesses of the Stanford library stacks, scanning old books on the shelves under the Dewey Decimal category 396—"Women." There I discovered two treasures. The first was Theodore Stanton's compendium *The Woman Question in Europe* (1884), of which more in Chapter 6. The second was *La Femme et le féminisme*, edited by H. J. Mehler, the catalog of the Gerritsen Collection in Women's History, published in 1900. What a revelation! The latter contained vast listings of works on European women's history, feminist periodicals, a treasure trove of references in a variety of European languages, all dating from before 1900. I subsequently learned that early in the twentieth century this magnificent collection of printed materials, constituted by the Dutch physician and suffrage activist Aletta Jacobs, had been acquired by the John Crerar Library in Chicago. The Crerar later sold the collection to the University of Kansas, where it remains today. Its extensive collection of books and periodicals in many European languages has since been microfilmed and is now available to researchers worldwide.

I was originally interested in French materials, but as an aspiring comparativist, I began to take notes on books, articles, and periodicals in other languages as well. I soon suspected that there must be much more unexcavated material, but when I began collecting and photocopying such texts, I had no idea how extensive would be the yield, how easily it could be located and consulted—or, how exciting it would be to read. My quest led me well beyond the Gerritsen Collection to libraries and archives of all sizes and descriptions throughout Europe and the United States.[11] Hundreds, then thousands of published texts emerged.

What I discovered in American libraries and archives was that—much

like women's history—the history of feminisms has never been accorded a place in existing taxonomies of knowledge. In libraries, for instance, whether under the older Dewey Decimal System or the now hegemonic Library of Congress classification system, there is still no separate classification for feminism, as there has long been for male-dominated sociopolitical movements—socialism, anarchism, communism, and so on.[12] Socialism, for example, is classified under the category "J," for political science, while "women" are lumped together as "HQ," under "H" for social sciences. One can locate books about feminism and other, parallel women's movements scrambled together with a wide range of other studies under the "social science" category "Women," but they also can be found, somewhat randomly, under many and varied rubrics among the humanities (including literature, music, and the arts) and social sciences (sociology, anthropology, psychology), as well as in specialized libraries on law, medicine, biology, business, economics, education, or on war and peace. In short, materials concerning men's sociopolitical movements and issues have been far more deliberately and carefully classified. The same problem characterizes the situation in bookstores, where works about feminism are lumped into women's studies sections, when these exist, or under sociology, rather than under social movements or politics. In some respects, this practice makes it easier for today's interested buyers to locate such books, but all the more difficult for them to integrate their contents and concerns into prevailing compartments of knowledge. However artificial, these compartments continue to shape our understanding of the human sciences, even as women's studies raises complex and important questions about what truly "interdisciplinary" knowledge might mean.

RECOVERING THE PAST

Earlier generations of European feminists understood well that "remembrance of things past" is important for plotting the future. "Study, study our history, Spanish ladies and gentlemen, before accusing a feminist of being foreign," advised María Lejárraga Martínez Sierra in 1917, under the cover of her celebrated dramatist husband's name.[13] Indeed, in the twentieth century, the act of recording and remembering feminism's history and passing it along on behalf of the future has become an increasingly compelling concern to feminists throughout Europe. There is some truth in the sardonic yet extravagant observation made recently by a Czech historian, in response to a tiny glimmer of interest in Czech women's history: "The future is not enough for the feminists; they want

to get hold of the past as well and reinterpret it from a women's point of view."[14] When women ask the questions, the past assumes new shapes. And not only from a woman's point of view, but from a feminist point of view, which encompasses more than efforts to write and teach the history of feminisms and to get women included in "standard accounts." Feminist scholars are also formulating a critique of how and why history has been written and taught by academic professionals, both in Europe and in North America.[15] For feminists, history has important implications, and setting the record straight is only part of the task. In the early 1930s the Polish historian Lucie Charewiczowa argued the case for writing women's history before the International Congress of Historical Sciences, noting that "the feminist movement . . . grows from day to day" and that knowledge of women's and feminist history could serve to overturn "every prejudice and antifeminist superstition that is still rooted in public opinion."[16]

Already in the early twentieth century feminists in Europe recognized the need for "a history of their own," and they began to organize initiatives to establish archives for the women's movement. One of the first initiatives was that of Eliska Vincent, in Paris, who already by the 1890s had accumulated a vast archive (estimated to include some 600,000 documents). Unfortunately, her legacy of these materials to the Musée Social was refused in 1919, despite the best efforts of her testamentary executors, Marguerite Durand and Maria Vérone, and the materials were lost.[17] This disaster did not go unnoticed by Durand and by Marie-Louise Bouglé, both of whom subsequently assembled collections that have found more secure institutional homes in Paris at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand and in the Bouglé collection at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris. By the mid-1980s the Durand library, established fifty years earlier as an auxiliary to the Paris Municipal Library in the fifth arrondissement—facing the Pantheon (where famous Frenchmen are buried)—had grown to the point where it had to relocate in a larger facility located in the thirteenth arrondissement. Recently there has been talk of merging the Durand and Bouglé collections.

In England, the materials that provided the core of what later became the Fawcett Library were deposited in 1926 at the library of the London Society for Women's Service. After a series of difficult skirmishes to relocate and maintain it, the library found a home in a basement at London Guildhall University (formerly the City of London Polytechnic). In 1998 plans for a new National Library for Women, funded by a £4.2 million grant from the British National Lottery, were announced to house and secure the collection, which contains the Josephine Butler Society col-

lection as well as many papers and publications of the several women's suffrage societies, the Six Point Group, and St. Joan's International Alliance, among others.

In Germany, following the dissolution of the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine in face of Nazi threats to take it over in 1933, the papers of the German women's movement and a number of its affiliated organizations were subsequently deposited (in 1935) in the Helene Lange Stiftung, in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. In 1934, the last president of the BDF, Agnes von Zahn–Harnack copublished (with Hans Sveistrup) an 800-page annotated bibliography, compiled between 1927 and 1932, on "The Woman Question in Germany," as a muted parting salvo against the Nazi regime, which had decreed the dissolution of all non–Nazi affiliated societies and organizations.[18] This work became a fundamental reference source for subsequent scholars of the German feminist movement. Since that time archives of the women's movement and of women's history have been established in several locations, including Kassel, home of the Archiv der deutschen Frauenbewegung (Archive of the German Women's Movement).[19]

In the Netherlands, the ambitious Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging (International Archive for the Women's Movement, or IAV) was established in 1935 by a small group of Dutch feminists, including Rosa Manus and Willemijn Hendrika Posthumus–van der Goot. Only barely begun when the Nazis occupied the Netherlands, the entire archive was seized and hauled away by the Nazi invaders. In 1948, as the Dutch throne passed from Queen Wilhelmina to her daughter Juliana, and in spite of the archival disaster, Posthumus–van der Goot and her associates researched and published *Van Moeder op Dochter* (From Mother to Daughter: History of the Women of Holland from 1798 till 1948) to commemorate their history. In the interim the archive organizers attempted to rebuild the collections of the IAV, operating until the late 1980s in the shadow of the International Archive for Social History in Amsterdam. One part of the original IAV archives, long believed destroyed, has recently resurfaced, intact by some miracle, in Moscow, presumably taken there by the Red Army, which had in turn captured the materials from the Nazis. The post-1989 Russian government has proved unwilling to release the materials to the reconstituted IAV, although it has allowed some microfilming of the papers.[20]

Other earlier collectors were less successful in their attempts to establish an independent archival existence. The ambitious project to establish a World Center for Women's Archives, initiated in the United States in late 1935 by the Hungarian suffragist Rozsika Schwimmer and

promoted by the American historian and feminist Mary Beard, had to be aborted in 1940, in the shadow of the war, when adequate funding could not be obtained. The massive Schwimmer papers are now lodged in several collections, one at the New York Public Library and another at Swarthmore College. An extensive selection of European materials can also be found in the Sophia Smith College Collection at Smith College, in Massachusetts. Meanwhile, the archives of the International Council of Women (ICW) were seized by the Nazis when they occupied Brussels in 1940, and only in the 1960s, in conjunction with the publication of their own history, *Women in a Changing World*, did the ICW make efforts to reconstitute copies of the missing materials in a variety of locations. In 1955 the International Alliance of Women (IAW), whose archives had survived, published its own history, *Journey Toward Freedom*. Its publications, along with the Colorado-based papers and publications of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), are now available on microfilm.[21]

More archives were founded following World War II. Swedish scholars established a women's-history archive at the University of Göteborg in the 1950s. Other archives came into being subsequently, such as the Women's History Collection at Aarhus, whose holdings include precious papers from the early Danish women's-rights movement. Records of the Swiss women's movement are preserved at the Gosteli Foundation Archive near Bern, thanks to the efforts and financial commitment of the women's-rights activist Marthe Gosteli.[22]

Lest one fetishize the development of archives for unpublished materials, however, I want to insist here on the riches of the published record, much of which is also preserved in these archives as well as in major library collections. Historians of European feminisms can glean extraordinary material, as I have done for this book, from the abundance of society publications, congress proceedings, newsletters, pamphlets, and other printed sources produced by feminists and feminist organizations—and by their opponents—during the last two centuries. Many such publications have been acquired and preserved, often quite incidentally, by American libraries, and many have been subsequently microfilmed, not only in the Gerritsen Collection but also in the complementary research collection microfilmed during the 1970s by the Connecticut-based Research Publications, Inc. (now known as Primary Source Media). Others can be traced through the magnificent National Union Pre-1956 Imprints Catalog and acquired through interlibrary loan.

"When a woman learned to read," wrote the celebrated Austrian writer Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach in 1880, "the woman question

arose in the world."[23] And indeed, feminism has developed a historical record as much by a published political record as by a private one. The account readers will find in this book is derived primarily from this mass of recuperated print material.

The history of feminisms in Europe is not a new undertaking, peculiar to academically trained historians. As the remarks by Lejárraga and Charewiczowa, cited above, attest, many publications by feminist activists strongly underscored their continuing concern about combatting rampant misinformation among the general public; others worried about the prospect of memory loss among their potential successors, particularly after feminists had achieved major goals such as the vote in representative or parliamentary governments. This issue was certainly on the mind of Eleanor Rathbone in 1934: "Do the young women of to-day who can say 'but we are free-born' often remember or even know their debt to these pioneers?"[24] Already in 1928, the year political citizenship became a reality for all English women, commemorative efforts began. One important example is Millicent Garrett Fawcett's tribute *Josephine Butler: Her Work and Principles, and Their Meaning for the Twentieth Century* (1927) honoring the centennial birthday of the great organizer of the pan-European campaign against state-regulated prostitution. As one reviewer put it, Butler's work and principles "wrought a change in social ethics, not only in her own country, but in the whole world greater perhaps than that effected by any other single person in recent times."[25] Fawcett's book was accompanied by Ray Strachey's *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (1928). Again, a reviewer pointed to its significance:[26]

> Those of us who read with enough knowledge of the old order to realise what opposition women met with, and who perhaps from that deep realisation are sometimes tempted to groan in spirit at the opposition they know is still arrayed against "equal status," cannot but take heart at this chart of the track of a miraculous comet. What! has this bright thing moved so far and so fast?

In 1953 Vera Brittain's *Lady into Woman: A History of Women from Victoria to Elizabeth II* celebrated—and underscored for the benefit of posterity—the monumental changes that had taken place in English women's status in the fifty years since Queen Victoria's death in 1901.

ENCOUNTERING OBSTRUCTIONS

What happened to this history on the European continent? One thing seems certain: in virtually every political culture, it encountered strong

opposition not only, as one might expect, on the Right, but also on the Left. The opposition of the political Right, still composed primarily of authoritarian, religiously affiliated, male-dominated groups, comes as no surprise. Opposition on the political Left seems more problematic. Already by 1900 the Marxist-socialists of the Second International Workingmen's Association viewed feminism as a rival enterprise and attempted to counter its attractiveness by smear and counterclaim, by allegations that feminism was irremediably "bourgeois," that capitalism was the bigger problem, that class conflict was the motor of history, and that only socialism could resolve the "woman question"—but only after the victory of the proletariat. Socialist women's intransigent and enduring refusal to cooperate with feminists has been amply documented since the 1970s.

Following the Russian Revolution and the advent of communist single-party states, first in the Soviet Union and later in Eastern Europe, socialist and communist antagonism to feminism continued. Communist claims to have found the unique solution to the "woman question" were convincingly and repeatedly restated well into the 1950s, when the leadership of the communist-dominated Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and its member national organizations effectively coopted the feminist program, while repudiating its name and effacing its memory. From a feminist perspective, organized socialism in Europe—and, more broadly, the social-democratic left—has a lot to answer for, not only in terms of stigmatizing and trivializing feminism, or portraying feminists as a "special interest group," but also in terms of actively suppressing feminist activists and impulses and, given the opportunity, appropriating selected aspects of feminist history as well.[27] Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that what Heidi Hartmann once called the "unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism" was never a marriage, and certainly never a relationship made in heaven, even at the outset; "fatal attraction" might be a more appropriate term.[28] And the apparent fatality of the Party line was feminism.

Despite this lethal relationship, in France and Italy particularly, important scholarly initiatives and historical contributions concerning historical feminism have emerged from Communist Party commemorations, which, however politically motivated at the outset, inadvertently provided a forum for incipient feminist scholarship. The centennial of the revolutions of 1848 (and subsequently women's activism in the Paris Commune, 1871) furnished one postwar springboard for such work, particularly in studies by the historian Edith Thomas, *Les Femmes de 1848* (1948), *Pauline Roland: Socialisme et féminisme au XIXe siècle* (1956),

and subsequently her *Les Pétroleuses* (1963; in English as *The Women Incendiaries* [1966]) and *Louise Michel, ou La Velléda de l'anarchie* (1971).[29] But socialism stood in a tense relationship with feminism in most of these histories, in accordance with the political priorities of the postwar period. If Beauvoir claimed that women "had no past, no history," and "no solidarity," Olga Wormser's *Les Femmes dans l'histoire* (1952) raised the question as to whether women constituted a "feminine class," and whether the historical action of women might have a special character. Other non–Communist affiliated scholar-activists, such as Evelyne Sullerot, became particularly fascinated by the long history of the French women's press, including the extraordinary run of short-lived early feminist periodicals.[30]

Italian inquiries began not long after, and not surprisingly histories of feminism in Italy began to percolate to the surface in conjunction with the centennial commemoration of Italian unification in 1861. In 1962 the Humanitarian Society (Società Umanitaria) published its landmark collection *L'Emancipazione femminile in Italia: Un Secolo di discussioni, 1861–1961* following a conference sponsored by a number of reactivated feminist organizations. The subsequent studies by Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, beginning with *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia, 1848–1892* (1963), helped to unearth a buried Italian feminist past.[31] Two journals devoted to feminist scholarship, *Memoria* and *DonnaWomanFemme*, published pathbreaking articles on the history of Italian feminism.

Commemorative events have since released a torrent of publications on the history of feminisms throughout Europe. The bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989 provided exemplary proof of the way in which feminist historians and historians of feminism could seize an occasion and make it their own.[32] Commemorations of the revolutions of 1848 confirm the point.[33] Studies of women in the antifascist Resistance at the thirty- and fifty-year turning points have similarly turned attention toward the analysis of European women's activism and resurgent feminist questioning in specific sociocultural settings.

There is demonstrably material for many histories of European feminisms, or—more concretely—of the many varieties of feminisms that have manifested themselves in particular societies at particular moments across the centuries. This book is concerned with reconstructing and interpreting the feminisms that developed in Europe during the 250 years 1700–1950. It is far from exhaustive, though I have tried to be as comprehensive as extant materials and my own energy and language skills would permit; it does attempt to lay out a chronology and se-

quence, and to reconstruct long-forgotten debates and controversies that have profoundly shaped the history of women and men in European states and nations. It attempts to raise important issues for consideration by readers, particularly concerning the integral character of feminist demands to European history, the character of the antifeminist oppositions, and the relationship of feminism to socialism and to a broad assortment of nation-building efforts and nationalisms.

This book will tell a story of feminisms, not as a "recurring critical operation" in theory but as a story of political struggle, of setbacks and some successes. I am less interested than many earlier historians in providing a "winner's account." To the extent that feminists in Europe "won" anything between 1700 and 1950, they did so in rather unconventional ways, and through convincing others, mostly men in positions of authority, that their cause was just and that dramatic changes would have to be made in the laws, institutions, and practices that governed relations between the sexes. With only a few significant exceptions—violence against property during the British suffragette campaigns for the vote—feminists foreswore physically violent means of achieving their ends; throughout the period we are examining reason and persuasive eloquence, not muscle and mechanized weaponry, were their primary tools. The fact is that in Europe, as elsewhere in the Western world, feminists managed to achieve many of their pre-1950 objectives, despite severe antifeminist opposition in some quarters, and despite sustained attempts to co-opt, subordinate, and absorb their programs in others. The difficulties feminists faced in realizing their goals in European societies cannot be overestimated. And yet, in spite of male fear that women would end up "in charge," in spite of repeated waves of antifeminist backlash, sometimes feminists succeeded brilliantly. Because of the feminists, much changed for the better in the situation of women in European societies between 1700 and 1950. Much more has changed since then. Yet significant challenges remain, and once again today there is much for feminists to accomplish and to monitor in the emerging new Europe.

Unlike other political movements, feminism never aspired to authority in its own right. Its adherents sought a redress of grievances, but not to take power; instead they wished to share power, and to change their societies for the better by exercising what political theorist Kathleen Jones has since termed "compassionate authority."[34] Perhaps this is why feminism has never found its rightful classification among political movements.

CELEBRATING THE FEMINIST PAST

But there is more. Those who seek more information about my personal itinerary into history and feminism will be able to find it elsewhere.[35] But here, perhaps, is the place for my confession of personal enthusiasm for my topic and my subjects. I am weary of historical accounts that treat persons as "sites of analysis," that skewer individual lives and group efforts on pins so they can be subjected, writhing, wriggling, and resistant, to "scientific" analysis through distorting theoretical lenses of various thicknesses and opacities and from various critical distances. I think this practice is dehumanizing and not to be tolerated. People's lives and their efforts to change the conditions under which they live, within particular political and cultural contexts, have an integrity that should be respected, especially by feminist scholars.

I consider myself a feminist, and my form of activism, in addition to raising two daughters, running a household, supporting women's rights organizations (I was a founding member of NOW and a charter subscriber to *MS Magazine* as well as to *Signs*), and pressing for women's history and women's space in the historical profession, both in the United States and around the world, is to write about women's history and the comparative history of feminism. But with all due respect to the dreams of utopians or other naive idealists who ardently yearn for a "gender-free" world, I do not see that happening or even as necessarily desirable. With the French I say, "Vive la différence!" As long as there are two sexes, with differing bodies and roles in reproduction, and differing degrees of physical strength, it seems to me that there will be sexual politics, though the forms they take may vary. As long as women are the ones who menstruate, who conceive, who bear children and who nurse them (either potentially or in fact), their lives will be differently structured than those of men, who occupy a different physiological, psychic, and sociopolitical space. This commonality is not, I think, reductive; charges of "essentialism" have to do with philosophical arguments about a common "nature" of "woman," not with the physiological realities that I am discussing here. "Biology" may not be destiny, and indeed, it may also be socially constructed, but physicality does pose constraints as well as opportunities. Difference does not, of necessity, imply dominance—or subordination.

Gender is not only about performance, as Judith Butler would have it, although performance is by no means a negligible factor. Because of women's differences from men, both physiological and socially constructed, achieving justice for women in societies where men seek dom-

inance is a complex, difficult matter, and neither freedom nor equality can ever be satisfactorily constructed without due acknowledgment of these differences. This is where our European counterparts have been cleverer than we Americans, who sometimes mistake "equality" for "sameness" and advocate a freedom beyond gender "to be you and me." The differing vision that most Europeans share is undoubtedly more complex, more "relational" and less legalistic; it is also, in my view, more realistic.

In short, I do not think that feminist concerns about structures of male dominance are going to evaporate. Sexual politics is embedded in the human condition, and the struggles that it engenders will probably have to be refought with each generation. Patriarchy, as Judith Bennett and others keep reminding us, is a remarkably resilient thing. So let us learn from history, if nothing else, to be realistic in our expectations, even as we continue the struggle. Like Albert Camus's Sisyphus, we will need to keep pushing that boulder uphill and finding our pleasure in the act of pushing. Sharing our knowledge of the struggle will perhaps make that onerous task more tolerable, and maybe a bit easier, even as it enhances our happiness.

This book is a work of scholarship. It is also—unashamedly—an act of affirmation, a work born of engagement and passion, and executed with the intention of transmitting a once-lost legacy. Susan Stanford Friedman expresses my idea exactly when she says: "The loss of collective memories, of myriad stories about the past, has contributed greatly to the ongoing subordination of women. The unending, cumulative building of broadly-defined histories of women, including histories of feminism, is a critical component of resistance and change."[36]

As I have worked during the last twenty-five years at gathering the documentation for what has become this account of European feminisms, I have been profoundly moved by the immensity of the task of rediscovery and remembrance, but also by the compelling power of the project and of the women and men I have met, however vicariously, through this historical work. I have laughed at their cleverness and frowned at the indignities inflicted on them; I have drawn strength from their strength and courage from their courage, and have tried to learn from their weaknesses. I can be critical of them when the occasion demands, and from the perspective of the late twentieth century, I can acknowledge that they were not always perfect on every issue that some might think they should have attended to. I do not for one moment believe either that, *pace* Joan Scott, they were entangled in paradoxes, or that, *pace* other claimants, feminism is—or should be—"a movement

that challenges all injustices."[37] It is, instead, a theory and a practice that challenges *one* injustice; it is first and foremost about challenging male hegemony, about obtaining justice for women, whatever their other descriptors or concerns—nationality, religion, class, ethnicity, and so on. It is not about making women the same as men, but rather about empowering women to realize their full potential as women without encumbrance. Feminism joins hands with other causes, to the degree that women are also disadvantaged by other causes, but I think it cannot be blended into other causes, confused with, merged into, or subordinated to other causes, irrespective of their merit. Feminism addresses a central issue that has implications for all the others, a point I will elaborate on when I offer a historically based definition of feminism in Chapter 1.

I confess to finding the feminist cause—as I now understand it historically—not only fascinating but inspiring, wholly worthy of a lifetime of work. The historical feminisms of Europe have been a revelation, and the individual speakers—both women and men—are so articulate, so brave, so splendid. The cautious feminists usually had good reasons for speaking cautiously, and the brave ones are simply magnificent! They state the case for women's emancipation so eloquently that it is difficult not to quote them at great length (a temptation I have not always resisted, though my publisher continues to remind me that *this* book, unlike its predecessors, is not a documentary). It does not bother me to find that some of these feminists were occasionally less than "politically correct" on all the issues now dear to late twentieth-century liberationists. That is asking too much.

I feel proud to have encountered these earlier feminists, both female and male. I have been deeply moved by their struggles. Like Margaret Camester and Jo Vellacott, I still weep to find that "so many fine things were said so long ago; it is shocking that they disappeared for so many years."[38] So many excellent ideas were expressed and so many brave acts performed by these European feminists, in the period from 1700 to 1950, as they tried in myriad ways to topple the structures of male domination in European societies. In many respects they did succeed, to the benefit of us all. They deserve not only to be recognized and remembered, but to be applauded and celebrated. Their ideas and initiatives should be claimed by feminists today and tomorrow, both as a precious heritage and as a well-stocked toolshed. Although Audre Lorde has asserted, in a much-quoted line, that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," it seems important to qualify her statement in several respects. Not only is language—words and ideas—supple and available to all users, but the tools and methods of sound historical research, analy-

sis, and synthesis can also serve varied ends. These days, neither language nor the tools and methods of research can be restricted to the master's use.[39]

Feminists from 1700 to 1950—even in France—did not need a new way of writing and thinking (*écriture féminine*, in Hélène Cixous's phrase) to make an incisive case for political change in sexual relations. They spoke very clearly about what they wanted, in whatever European language they used. They did not see linguistic phallocentrism as a problem, nor did their arguments require elaborate deconstruction. Indeed, aided by rising literacy and education, feminists throughout Europe assembled an impressive arsenal of ideological weaponry (to choose a very fitting military metaphor) of their own, the proof of which is this contextual account of a long-buried record of feminist thought and action. Amnesia, not lack of history, is feminism's worst enemy today. Let us then refresh our memory.