CHAPTER 1

Concepts and Issues

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The following essays are the culmination of an international conference which was financed by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, and the University of Tübingen. The participants, from twelve different European countries and the USA, were concerned with the origins and development of women's emancipation movements in Europe in the long nineteenth century. This anthology, along with Karen Offen's recently published monograph, is the first book to treat the beginnings of the women's movements from a broader European perspective.[1]

The so-called first wave of the women's emancipation movements and their forerunners covers the period from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution to the First World War. For many European countries, however, it is possible to speak of a continuous organization only from the end of the nineteenth century. Between about 1890 and the First World War, women's emancipation organizations existed in all European countries, although they evidenced various degrees of development.

From the turn of the century most European women's movements fought for women's suffrage. In most countries this goal was achieved quickly, within the first two decades of the twentieth century, aided by the fact that women were able to point to their services during the war and that many political systems changed after the war. New forces such as social democratic and liberal parties became influential and took up feminist demands for women's suffrage. The First World War was thus a turning point for the majority of European women's emancipation movements. Once women had achieved the franchise, many leading feminists became active in political parties and women who wanted to be involved in politics were no longer restricted to

women's organizations to the same degree as before. As a result, according to recent research, in most European countries a certain stagnation in the feminist movements set in after 1918.[2] In some countries this standstill was reinforced by authoritarian and restorative political regimes in the period between the wars.

This anthology includes chapters on the British, French, German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Czech, Hungarian, Greek, and Spanish women's emancipation movements. These countries, which were selected for a synopsis, represent as far as possible the national, social, cultural, political, and religious diversity of Europe in the nineteenth century. Countries from northern, southern, western, eastern, and central Europe have been included. In contrast to the usual practice of comparative work on European history, which tends to focus only on the larger western European countries and usually stresses British and French developments with the occasional inclusion of German particularities, smaller countries are also included. Nevertheless, this book does not cover the entirety of European women's emancipation movements, although we have done our best to provide the broadest possible coverage. The movements which have been selected will have to stand for those which have not been treated here. Inherent circumstances, in particular the limited number and availability of specialists for the preparatory conference, were decisive when we made our selection.[3] A systematic elaboration which, for example, could have dealt with the relationships between European and non-European women's movements was therefore not possible. As one instance of such interconnections, however, the ties between the American and British women's movements have been included, because the American women's movement had a great influence on the international feminist movement.

In selecting the different national women's movements we have taken up the historiographical tradition of using the nation-state as a spatial frame of reference in recording history. With this there is a tendency to level regional differences within the feminist movements in a nation and to place the accent on nationwide parent organizations. In some cases the existence of a national women's movement is assumed at a point in time where a modern nation-state did not yet even exist and the national movement was itself in the stage of inception.[4] There are, however, reasons for using the nation-state as a frame of reference when writing about the history of women's movements in the nineteenth century. At that time there was in some cases

a very close connection among nation, national movements, and the women's movements, in particular in those nations which were not independent and had no unified nation-state. The point in time in which organized women's emancipation movements evolved coincides with the formation of the modern nation-state. Gender and national identity were intertwined.[5]

Is it at all meaningful to choose Europe as a spatial unit and a frame of reference when making comparisons among women's emancipation movements in the nineteenth century? One can start from the fact that in spite of all the diversity of political, economic, social, religious, and cultural developments within the European states there was an important measure of closeness, of common interests and mutual influence in the course of their social development. Therefore, in spite of its heterogeneity, from a global perspective one can speak of a European culture which has been shaped since the Middle Ages by common religious, economic, and political traditions. In the nineteenth century all European states were confronted by the challenges of economic, social, and political modernization. The European women's movements were an important part of this process of radical change. A comparative look at developments in neighboring European countries provides the outlines of the conditions under which the women's movements arose and developed. This broadly based search for common denominators in the development of feminist movements in Europe may correct the dominant perceptions of an ideal type. For a long time the Anglo-American model has been considered axiomatic and exemplary while other developments have been seen as deviations from the norm.

After careful consideration we have chosen "women's emancipation movements" for the title of this book. Our original title, "women's movements in Europe," reflected, among other things, the German tradition of usage. Also, this title seemed too nebulous given the international discussion and the now broad diversity of research on nonfeminist women's organizations. The term "feminism" came into common usage only at the beginning of the twentieth century, when women's emancipation movements reached a peak in some European countries. Therefore, with respect to the time period under investigation, we decided to use the term "women's emancipation movement" because it includes the preparatory, organizational, and peak phases of the movement. "Women's emancipation" was also a term that had been in use since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Women's emancipation is understood to mean the fight for self-determination and improvements in the legal, social, cultural, and political positions of women. Subsumed under this term are feminist as well as potential feminist discourses. Nor is it only women who are included in the terms "women's emancipation movement" and "feminist movement," but also men who were engaged in the cause of women's emancipation. Thus the term is broad enough to encompass the first indications of feminist demands, many of which originated within the area of male-dominated social, religious, or political movements.

During the 1970s, researchers characteristically defined women's emancipation movements or feminist movements as the organized efforts of women to achieve legal and political equality.[6] A broader concept of "women's emancipation movement," which was often used synonymously with the term "women's movement," became generally accepted in the 1980s. It stood for the "different historical and contemporary expressions of women's activities, social needs, and efforts in feminism and in policies concerning women."[7] The advantage of this more comprehensive concept is that today's definition of feminism does not obstruct historical perception, limiting our attention to the political demands of women. The disadvantage is that such a broad concept becomes diffuse and includes the entire range of women's organizations irrespective of their goals. Thus conservative and antifeminist women's associations are also included. This conceptual diffuseness reflects the fact that, historically speaking, there was a broad range of transitional areas among collective actions of women and those activities which were aimed at women's emancipation. For example, women who had been involved in benevolent associations could in the long run come to realize that the plight of poor women was caused by discrimination against women under existing civil and matrimonial laws as well as being due to their low levels of education and employment opportunities. This, in turn, could lead to the realization that basic improvements could only be achieved through the fight for women's emancipation. At the same time the organizational experience gained within such associations provided women with political and social skills which could then be effectively applied in seeking women's rights.

If one wisely adheres to a broad definition of the women's movement, then it is necessary also to be more precise and to make certain differentiations, to distinguish among feminist, potential feminist, and nonfeminist movements. The boundaries are often quite fluid. "Feminist" would de-

scribe a movement whose members are involved in emancipating women from social subordination and male dominance and who are trying to achieve a change in gender relations in the sense of expanding the leeway for action and the right of self-determination. Potential feminist movements are those in which feminist involvement could germinate and which could lead to feminist awareness.

Recently Karen Offen has vehemently supported the use of the term feminism to describe the women's emancipation movements of the nineteenth century: "What I am proposing here is that 'women's movements' in nineteenth-century Europe include an important subset of feminist and potential feminist movements. I am arguing that these movements, even before the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' go into circulation, but especially after, in the 1880s and 1890s, are integral to the history of feminism—the history, if you will, of challenges to male hegemony and authority."[8] The use of the term feminism makes it easier to distinguish and differentiate within the women's movements. It serves to give contour to a feminist tradition. The natural use of this term can contribute to freeing feminism from the negative connotations given by those who oppose emancipation and the women's movement.[9] The pragmatic advantages offered by this term, however, do not eradicate the problems which are associated with it.

The use of the term "feminist" to describe women's emancipation movements in the nineteenth century is disputed in research for several reasons. There is the risk that feminism will be defined in terms of our current understanding and that feminist action in other historical forms will not be recognized.[10] It is only since the 1890s that the term "feminist," originating in France, gradually came to be used self-descriptively in the women's emancipation movement.[11] As the chapters in this book will show, the term was naturally used in France, Britain, the U.S.A., Hungary, Spain, and Greece where, in fact, it was used by circles within the women's movement which ranged from the radical to the conservative Christian. The term nevertheless did not gain acceptance with many European women's movements. In central, eastern, and northern Europe it was not taken up, or if so, then only hesitantly. For example, in Germany the terms *Frauenrechtlerin* ("suffragette") or *Emanzipierte* ("emancipated woman") were used instead. In contrast to Anglo-American usage, the term "feminist" still carries a somewhat pejorative connotation today in Germany and some countries of eastern and northern Europe. It has the connotation of being "radical" and "antimale,"

thus giving it a somewhat different contextual meaning than the Anglo-American one.[12]

In this anthology the methodological approaches are reflected in the choice of terminology. Also, the chapters show the nationally different usage of terms which have evolved historically. The procedural approach of using terms in their historical sense has been complicated by the fact that these chapters are all in English. This translation problem extends beyond the matter of how the women's emancipation movements named themselves. The names of newspapers and organizations are also affected. Therefore, wherever it is necessary, the original term will be given along with the English translation.

As is already evident from the titles of the individual chapters, the authors have mostly chosen to use the terms "feminist movement" or "women's movement," depending on their native language and the historical name of the particular movement they are concerned with. In the chapters the terms "women's movement," "women's emancipation movement," and "feminist movement" are often used synonymously. However, they are sometimes also distinguished in order to describe the progression of a movement. Thus, for example, Jane Rendall calls her chapter "British Feminisms, 1860–1900" although she starts with the fact that the British women's movement "for the first time could claim the label 'feminist'"[13] between the turn of the century and World War I. Although Ute Gerhard describes the program of the General German Women's Association as "feminist," she generally uses the term "women's movement," which was preferred by nineteenth-century contemporaries in Germany. Mary Nash talks about the Spanish "women's movement" and simultaneously about the activists as "feminists." At the beginning of her chapter she warns about using a universal definition of feminism as she sees the danger in a perception that there are "'proper' paths to women's emancipation and 'correct' modes in the historical development of feminism." Feminism which did not fit into the pattern was labeled "backward, underdeveloped, or discordant with 'correct' patterns of feminism." Therefore, she says, definitions of feminism must be developed within the context of national and international historiography.[14] In the following we also use these terms synonymously in some cases. As in the chapters of this book, the meaning and definition of the terms used are only clear from their respective contexts.

We have organized the essays in this book according to chronological-spatial criteria. Karen Offen's chapter is the first in the book because she

treats the conditions at the beginning of the women's movements in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The women's emancipation movement was first consolidated in Britain and in western and central Europe. Chronologically, the formation of women's movements radiated in concentric circles from western and central Europe to include northern, eastern, and southern Europe. Following the chronological-spatial pattern in which the movement spread, the chapters have been presented in this geographical order.

In order to attempt a systematic comparison of the situation of women's emancipation movements in Europe up until the First World War, the specialists were given a list of questions upon which they were to base their case studies. The catalog includes (1) dividing the women's emancipation movement into periods based on the social history of the respective countries; the main focus should be on the peak phase of the movement; (2) supporters of the women's emancipation movement including the categories gender, class, religion, region of origin, age, and family status; (3) the demands of the women's movements as well as their strategies in the individual historical phases, taking the self-perception of the movements and the concept of feminism into special consideration; (4) the different trends within the women's emancipation movements during the different phases; (5) the coalition partners; here it is also of interest to see which reform movements the women's movements were associated with, what role the women played within such movements, and what kind of opposition there was; and (6) the interplay between social change and the women's emancipation movements; of special interest here is whether or not there was a particular social development which marked the respective women's emancipation movements and resulted in peculiarly "national" characteristics. This questionnaire provided a structural working basis for the conference, though it became clear at the conference that it was often impossible, given the current state of research, to give a systematic answer on all points. The way in which the authors structured their chapters and placed their emphases was closely related to the different national historiographic traditions in women's research, although the methodological influence of the wide-ranging Anglo-American research on women and gender contributed a common point of reference.

At the conclusion of the chapters on selected women's emancipation movements, the editors offer a synthetic evaluation from a comparative per-

spective which is broken down into the following main points: history as an argument, division into periods, social supporters, fields of activity and goals, strategies, and women's emancipation movements within the context of social development. This concluding essay can be only a preliminary attempt at synthesis. Along with the chapters making up this anthology, it should provide a synopsis of research up to now on the subject and offer an incentive for more detailed and more intensive comparative examinations.[15] Such a study would need to include more countries and compare specific aspects systematically: demands for legal reforms, educational policies, the suffrage movement, strategies of legitimacy, self-perception, bilateral and international relations of the women's movements, the creation of traditions, and the importance of the nation for the women's movements of Europe.[16]

Our study of selected women's emancipation movements suggests the route for future research. These movements were situated in the context of sociocultural change in the long nineteenth century. Through their varied activities feminists helped to break down traditional hierarchies and promote the emergence of structures appropriate to a civil society. Over the long term, the women's emancipation movements did as much to transform society as such other major movements of the time as the labor movement or the various nationalist movements.