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Anne Revillard, Laure Bereni. From Grassroots to Institutions: Women's Movements Studies in Europe. Olivier Fillieule; Guya Accornero. Social Movement Studies in Europe: The State of the Art, Berghan books, 2016, 978-1-78533-097-1. halshs-02077844

**HAL Id: halshs-02077844**

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## **From Grassroots to Institutions**

### **Women's Movements Studies in Europe**

**Anne Revillard<sup>1</sup> and Laure Bereni<sup>2</sup>**

*(In Accornero G., Fillieule O. (eds.), Social Movements Studies in Europe: The State of the Art, New York, Berghahn Publishers), 2016<sup>3</sup>.*

The women's movement is commonly seen as one of the major 'new social movements' of the 1970s (Touraine 1982). Indeed, the revival of women's protest was an important component of the political landscape in which social movement scholarship developed in Western democracies. Yet while in the United States the study of women's movements and feminism has been key in building (and challenging) the main social movement paradigms (Freeman 1979; Katzenstein 1998; Taylor and Whittier 1998, 1999; Banaszak 2010), in many European countries women's movements have not received the same scholarly attention. Several factors account for this relative marginality. In France, for example, a late institutionalisation of gender studies and the persistent dominance of class over other power relations in the definition of progressive politics contribute to explaining the late development of scholarship on contemporary women's movements (Bereni and Revillard 2012; Achin and Bereni 2013). A glance, however, at the major sociology and political science publishers and journals in English and French shows that European research on women's movements has witnessed a new dynamism in the last twenty years, particularly in the last decade, as a result of an increasing legitimisation of gender studies, a renewal of feminist protest and a higher visibility of gender issues on government agendas.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/FillieuleSocial>.

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Giving an overview of the major trends of European research on women's movements<sup>1</sup> is a very delicate task. Sociology and political science in Europe are still predominantly structured along national lines, therefore scattered in a variety of methodological perspectives, disciplinary fields and paradigms, and, last but not least, in a number of different languages.<sup>2</sup> As French-speaking sociologists reading scholarship in French and English, we have a limited view of the research actually done on women's movements in European countries. The state of the art offered in this chapter will thus necessarily overestimate the weight of research done in countries where English is the official language or the academic *lingua franca*, as well as research done in transnational European research arenas, which have grown in size in the last decade.<sup>3</sup> While this literature review does not account for the epistemological diversity of European social movement studies, it will reveal some interesting orientations of the most visible part of European scholarship on women's movements. It will also illustrate the ways in which the increasing Europeanisation of research funding as well as academic standards and networks, particularly steady in the field of gender, have shaped the ways in which women's movements are being tackled (in terms of dominant research questions, disciplinary perspectives, and methodological tools).

This situated exploration of research on women's movements in Europe points to European peculiarities. While US literature on women's and other social movements has mainly developed in the field of sociology, European research has grown more steadily within the realm of political science. This disciplinary anchor has resulted in placing political institutions at the centre of the research agenda. Women's movements have often been studied as far as they relate to a diversity of political institutions, such as bureaucracies, parliaments, governments, policy-making, welfare states, parties and unions. Therefore, rather than appearing as an autonomous field of studies, European research on women's movements has often been embedded in a variety of political science subfields.

Other characteristics of the research on women's movements in Europe pertain to political and historical particularities of the European context, such as the weight of Marxist ideology both in the national political arenas and in academic circles; the historical experience of totalitarianism, dictatorships, and the two World Wars on European territory; the long-lasting divide of the continent around the Iron Curtain followed by 'democratic transitions' in post-

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socialist Central and Eastern European countries; the traditional strength of state institutions, yet challenged by the European Union integration process. All these political experiences have shaped the ways in which women's movements have unfolded and been studied in Europe.

Drawing on an exploration of English- and French-speaking literature on women's movements in Europe over the last three decades, this chapter is organised into four sections. The first maps out the founding studies on women's movements in Europe, which provided typologies based on country-specific case studies and cross-country comparisons. The second section examines studies of women's movements' interplay with the state and policy-making. The third section explores the body of literature addressing the relationship between women's movements and party/electoral politics. Finally, the fourth section focuses on recent trends of research, which address the impact of European Union integration on women's advocacy.

### ***Sorting Out the European Quilt of Feminist Protest***

#### *The 'New Women's Movement' under Scrutiny*

Studies of women's movements first developed within each European country, often evolving from essays by movement intellectuals to more sociologically informed analyses relating to social movement theories. Complementing single-country case studies, cross-country comparisons were key in this first wave of research on European women's movements, and references to the United States were omnipresent. Comparison was sometime integrated in research designs (Jenson 1982; Bouchier 1984; Lovenduski 1986; Gelb 1989; Kaplan 1992) but more often emerged from scholarly exchanges between specialists of single-country cases (Dahlerup 1986; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987).

Like US works from the same period, these early works centred around the 'new women's movements' that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in Western European countries alongside many other 'new' protest movements to the detriment of non-feminist women's mobilisation or the on-going transformations of 'old' women's organisations. These studies also did not engage in building operational categories for a broad-range comparison of women's movements in a variety of cultural contexts, a concern that would become central to subsequent comparative research (Beckwith 2000; Ferree and Mueller 2004). Rather, early research on European feminism focused on the distinctive features of the 'second wave', as opposed to the

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'first wave' of feminism, which centred on political and civil rights. One of their concerns was to sort out the internal heterogeneity of unfolding European feminist movements.

*Making Sense of the Diversity of Women's Movements: The Centrality of Ideology*

The first studies of European second-wave feminisms mostly adopted the threefold distinction between liberal, socialist and radical (Bouchier 1984; Lovenduski 1986; Ferree 1987; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Kaplan 1992). While sharing the goal of improving the position of women in society, these three perspectives disagreed both on the roots of gender inequality and on the strategies that would lead to change. Liberal feminism was defined as advocating equal rights under the law as the means for women's emancipation. Socialist feminism referred to an 'attempt to combine feminist insights with socialist paradigms' (Ferree 1987: 173), pointing to the gender blindness of Marxist orthodoxy while sharing the belief that the oppression of women was structurally linked to the capitalist system. Radical feminism, finally, considered patriarchy as 'the oldest form of dominance' (Lovenduski 1986: 69) and called for a full politicisation of so-called 'private' issues, identifying male violence and the control of women's bodies as the core of their oppression. Unlike socialist feminists, radical feminists put the emphasis on male-female contradiction rather than class unity, and unlike liberal feminists, they sought cultural transformation (through awareness-raising groups and grassroots campaigns for example) rather than legal reform. While liberal feminism dominated the US women's movement as early as the 1960s, it did not gain the same centrality in many European countries at the same time. Socialist feminism was a lively strand in countries where the Marxist tradition historically pervaded social and political movements, especially in Britain, but also in Italy and in France. Yet the most visible strand of the 'new' feminist movement in many European countries was radical feminism: in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy or Greece, radical feminism dominated women's movements in spite of contrasting political institutions and protest histories (Katzenstein and Mueller 1987). With a relative weakness of both radical and socialist wings in the women's movements, the Nordic countries stood out as an exception (Dahlerup 1986). In Sweden for example, gender equality advocates acted within mainstream, social democratic institutions (Gelb 1989), at a time when most other European women's movements were confronting the State and dominant political parties.

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Partly deriving from ideological typologies, organisational classifications marked the first studies on Western second-wave women's movements. Influenced by the resource mobilisation framework (McCarthy and Zald 1977), students of European women's movements first drew a distinction between 'women's rights' and 'women's liberation' (or 'autonomous') groups, a typology that was originally based on the US context (Ferree and Hess 1985) and echoed Freeman's distinction between an 'older' and a 'newer' branch of the US women's movement (Freeman 1979). At one end of the *continuum*, women's rights groups tended to be 'organised along traditional hierarchical lines with formal structures and clearly stated objectives' and to 'work hard to become respected and influential pressure groups'; at the other end, women's liberation groups 'have avoided formal organisational structures, political affiliation and hierarchy', and 'favoured more radical methods of direct action' (Lovenduski 1986: 62). While in the United States the strength of liberal feminism translated from the outset into large women's rights organisations, like the National Organisation for Women (NOW), European women's movements of the 1970s tended to be mostly informal and decentralised, composed of small groups at the grassroots, which refused the principles of hierarchical organisation and political representation. It is not until the 1980s that a growing part of European women's movements entered into a process of organisational formalisation and dialogue with mainstream political institutions, as the latter became more and more open to feminist discourse (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht 2003).

### ***Women's Movements, the State and Policy-Making***

#### *The Invention of State Feminism*

European case studies were foundational in the reflections on feminist intervention within/from the state, or 'state feminism'. The term was first coined in 1983 by Ruth Nielsen in a comparative study of gender equality legislation in Europe (Nielsen 1983), and then applied in 1987 by Helga Hernes who argued that Scandinavian welfare states could be analysed as 'women-friendly' (Hernes 1987). While the state was previously seen as inherently patriarchal, these works envisioned it as a possible site of feminist action. Dorothy McBride and Amy Mazur, who initially worked on the French case (McBride Stetson 1987; Mazur 1995), highly contributed to the diffusion of this idea of 'state feminism' in the 1990s by launching an

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international 'research network on gender politics and the state' (RNGS), which led to several publications in the wake of their 1995 landmark collection (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995). This network focused on the state institutions formally created for the promotion of gender equality, analysing their role in the inclusion of both movement actors and ideas into the policy-making process. While 'institutionalisation' had been commonly envisioned in terms of co-optation and de-radicalisation, these studies called attention to the sustainable development of feminist ideas in some areas of the state. It should be noted that the broad comparative framework of the RNGS has tended to favour macro-level and positivist approaches<sup>4</sup> while other studies of feminist activism within the state, especially in Australia and in the US, have developed a more micro-sociological and constructivist perspective, notably focusing on the experience of individual 'femocrats' (Sawer 1990; Eisenstein 1996; Banaszak 2010).

#### *Questioning the Divide between the State and 'Civil Society'*

Reflections on feminism and policy-making led to new conceptualisations of women's movements interactions with institutional actors. Working on the Norwegian case in the early 1990s, Haalsa argued that women's achievements in Norwegian public policies could be partly accounted for by the emergence of 'strategic partnership' between women politicians, women bureaucrats and women activists (Haalsa 1998). Her conceptualisations were subsequently re-worked by other feminist political scholars, such as Vargas and Wieringa (1998) and Woodward (2003). For example, focusing on the network of women advocates at the level of European institutions, Woodward coined the expression 'velvet triangles' to refer to the strategic connections between women coming from political parties, the bureaucracy, civil society organisations and universities/consultancies.

Shedding light on the connections between feminist mobilisation within civil society and institutional actors, these works have paved the way for rethinking the definition of (feminist) protest politics, although they have been conducted within a public policy perspective rather than a social movement framework. Combining the insights of this body of feminist policy-making scholarship and social movement theory (Katzenstein 1998; Banaszak 2010), recent works on France, for example, have challenged the traditional definition on women's movements as being



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located *outside* mainstream institutions (Bereni and Revillard 2012; Bereni 2015; Revillard forthcoming).

It should be stressed that these conceptualisations have drawn on the experiences of European liberal democracies. Recent studies on Central and Eastern European countries under communist regimes have cast a different light on 'state feminism'. While autonomous civic organisations had often been quite active in the first half of the twentieth century (de Haan, Daskalova and Loutfi 2006), the state socialist regimes prohibited women's autonomous groups, restricting the public expression of women's advocacy to hierarchical, party-controlled mass organisations (Fuszara 2005).

### ***Women's Movements Facing Party and Electoral Politics***

Taking place within the rising field of studies on gender and politics, a great deal of research done on European women's movements in the last two decades has focused on their relationship to political parties and electoral politics. While a first set of research has addressed in broad terms the interplay between women's movements and political parties, more recent works have focused on the promotion of gender quotas.

### ***Women's Movements and Party Politics***

The first studies conducted on the relationships between women's movements and conventional politics have focused on their (complicated) relationship with political parties. These studies explored the influence of women's movements on political parties and, in turn, the ways in which political parties have shaped movement demands and tactics over time. Beyond their diversity, European political parties have been identified as particularly centralised and organised along ideological lines, compared to US parties. Although in most European countries emerging women's movements asserted their 'autonomy' *against* political institutions, including political parties, feminist and left-wing party activism frequently overlapped<sup>5</sup>. This was particularly the case in Italy (Della Porta 2003). After a few years of confrontation with autonomous feminist groups, the political organisations of the 'old left', notably the Italian Communist party, became increasingly open to feminist demands. Collaboration between autonomous groups and the women active in left-wing parties or trade unions was observable at the local level. Della Porta emphasises the influence of the left-wing organisations on the

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feminist movement: in ideological terms, this translated into a mix of 'post-materialist' claims for 'liberation' with traditional demands for socioeconomic equality. In organisational terms, the movement 'combined the decentralised structure typical of new social movements with resources for coordination provided by the parties of the Old and New Left and the trade unions' (Della Porta 2003: 61).

In France, the relationships between the new 'women's liberation movement' and major left-wing organisations appeared even more complicated and ambivalent. French political organisations of the Left had long been marked by an anti-feminist tradition, endorsing a 'universalist' conception of equality that left no room for representing women's specific interests (Jenson 1984). During its first years of development, the new feminist movement developed a confrontational relationship with the old left organisations. However, there was a strong 'class-struggle' component within the women's liberation movement from the beginning, engaging both in the autonomous women's movement and in left-wing organisations, and attempting to combine the insights of feminism and socialism. These discrete mobilisations within left-wing organisations, both unions and political parties, accounted for a gradual opening of the latter to feminist demands. By the early 1980s, the French Socialist party newly in office had endorsed feminism and pushed for new gender equality reforms, asserting a major 'symbolic' change in the party's history—yet with little impact on the position of women within the party (Appleton and Mazur 1993; Jenson and Sineau 1995; Bereni 2006).

As well as studies on State feminism, these works on women's mobilisation within political parties (and trade unions) have participated in pointing to the continuity of the women's movement over time and provided an insightful critique of the dominant model of life cycles of social movement, in line with Verta Taylor's notion of 'abeyance structures' (Taylor 1989). Against the idea of the failure and disappearance of feminist protest, these analyses have showed how feminist activism has relocated within mainstream institutions (Katzenstein 1998).

### *Women's Movements and Gender Quotas*

Another body of research has focused on women's organised efforts to increase women's political representation, both inside and outside political parties. In Nordic countries, access to formal political power appeared on the agenda of the women's movement as early as the 1970s.

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In the case of Norway, Bystydzienski showed that 'establishment women' (representing traditional women's organisations) and 'new feminists' joined their efforts to get more women into politics (Bystydzienski 1988). In other European women's movements of the time, the demand for a higher representation of women in political office remained very marginal. It is not until the 1980s, as 'autonomous' women's movements gradually shifted from a dominant anti-institutional stance to collaborating with mainstream institutions, that this demand became increasingly central in several countries. Lovenduski particularly explored the extent to which a 'strong' women's movement could account for the adoption of party strategies to promote women (Lovenduski 1997). She found that 'the strongest effects were in the parties in which women organised to pressure the parties from the inside' (1997: 202). By the turn of the 1990s in these two countries, mainstream progressive parties had set a gender quota system to bring more women among party candidates, resulting in a substantial rise in women MPs. By contrast, studies of the French case emphasised that the campaign for 'gender parity' took place in the 1990s mainly outside political parties, after the failure of organised women's pressures from the inside in the 1980s, partly because of the absence of strong internal women's organisations (Opello 2006; Lépinard 2007; Bereni 2015).

Over the last decade, the interplay between European women's movements and electoral politics has increasingly been studied within the rising field of comparative research on the adoption and implementation of gender quotas, following their dissemination across the globe (Caul Kittilson 2006; Dahlerup 2006; Lépinard 2007; Krook 2009). The dominant research question has been to account for quota adoption and make sense of a variety of quota systems. Women's organised mobilisations for quotas have been identified as one causal factor, along with strategic anticipations from political elites, alignment with dominant conceptions of equality in domestic settings and existing international norms supporting gender quotas (Krook 2006).

### ***Women's Movements and European Union Integration***

While early studies of women's movements in Europe mainly developed at the national level or in a cross-national perspective, scholarly attention was more recently drawn to the impact of the EU on women's mobilisation, with questions such as: how do women's movements mobilise and lobby at the EU level, in interaction with EU gender equality policy-

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making? How do domestic movements make use of EU regulations in order to promote reforms at national level? How does European integration affect feminist mobilisation within new member states?

### *Women's Movements and Multilevel Governance*

In recent years, students of feminist activism within the EU have increasingly addressed the complexities of multilevel governance—political authority stemming from a growing number of instances, from the local to the supra-national levels. Drawing on Keck and Sikkink's insights (1998), a sub-field of research has focused on the development of transnational advocacy at the EU level and on the strategies adopted by domestic movements to take advantage of these multiple levels of governance.

The growing popularity of the concept of 'transnational advocacy networks' partly reflected the rise of women's transnational organising at the European level: the most prominent umbrella organisation is the European Women's Lobby, created in 1990 in order to coordinate women's advocacy at the level of European institutions. Other networks focus on specific regions or issues, such as KARAT (Coalition for Gender Equality), a coalition of women's NGOs from Eastern and Central Europe created in 1997 (Fuszara 2005; Lang 2009). While these transnational organisations have contributed to the development of gender equality policy-making at the EU level, European institutions have reciprocally supported their development, as the involvement of 'civil society' has become a new cornerstone of EU governance (Montoya 2008; Jacquot 2010, 2015).

The institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in the EU provides a case in point of such interactions between transnational networks and gender equality policy-making. Defined as a strategy according to which gender equality concerns should be included at all stages of policy-making in all policy domains, gender mainstreaming had been promoted in the 1990s by transnational advocacy networks at the international level, in order to obtain its inclusion in the 1995 Beijing platform (True and Mintrom 2005). European NGOs then fought in favour of its adoption at the EU level, and the institutionalisation of this policy tool later affected women's NGOs in several aspects, since they were asked to monitor programs, to serve as experts and

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sometimes to play a more active role in implementation, while the strategy was at the same time increasingly questioned by feminist advocates (Lang 2009; Jacquot 2010, 2015).

Analysing how women's movements navigate between these different levels of governance has been another important focus of recent studies, as well as a source of conceptual innovation (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht 2003). For example, studying mobilisations and policies against sexual harassment in the EU, Zippel expands on Keck and Sikkink's analysis of 'boomerang' patterns of mobilisation by using the 'ping-pong' metaphor to refer to the fact that 'policy action often cycles back and forth between the EU and national levels, with each influencing the other' (Zippel 2004: 59). In the case of sexual harassment, while feminists faced hostility in many member states, the EU innovated in the turn of the 1990s with the enactment of soft-law measures in the absence of member-state legislations. In the 1990s, women's rights advocates used this soft law as a leverage to promote legislation at the domestic level, which in turn favoured the enactment of a more comprehensive and repressive piece of regulation at the EU level in the form of a directive passed in 2002.

Finally, this situation of multilevel governance provides a particularly stimulating context to explore women's movements' litigation strategies, which are still relatively understudied in Europe compared to the US (Bereni, Debauche et al. 2010; Anagnostou and Millns 2013; Cichowski 2013).

#### *EU Integration and Its Effects on Feminist Advocacy in the New Member States*

The study of the unfolding of women's mobilising in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries during the 'democratic transition', and later during the EU accession period, has provided significant contributions to scholarship on social mobilisations, notably regarding the influence of international/supra-national dynamics on domestic activism (Cîrstocea 2006).

When freedom of association was again possible after years of authoritarian rule, the rebirth of women's activism within civil society took place in a context characterised by a general reluctance towards the concept of 'feminism' because of its association with communism (Einhorn 1993), as well as by an important role played by foreign funding. Indeed, soon after 1989, US and international aid flowed into Central and Eastern Europe countries, some of it— notably coming from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the

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Ford Foundation, the Soros Institute and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)—being channelled to women's NGOs. External funding accelerated the 'NGOisation' of feminism (Lang 1997): women's groups increasingly adopted formal organisational structures, professionalisation increased and organisations tended to be more pragmatic and issue-specific. While some scholars criticised this influence of foreign funding as a form of pressure exerted on activists to adhere to a Western vision of feminism (Roth 2007), others saw in a more positive light the effect of this input of international funding, stressing how it contributed to the rebirth of a civil society (Sloat 2005).

Based on a study of activism in the Czech Republic, Hašková argues that it was only during the Czech Republic's preparation to access the EU that external funding really started to constrain activism, shaping activist agendas, accelerating professionalisation and excluding organisations that did not fit in, be it organisationally or ideologically (Hašková 2005). She shows that the first wave of international funding that entered the Czech Republic in the first half of the 1990s broadly aimed at the 'development' of women's civic organisations, and was rather unconditional. It favoured the expansion of a broad range of organisations and the first steps of their professionalisation. By contrast, in the EU accession period, this source of funding dried up and was replaced by EU and domestic funding, which were much more constraining and indeed had a significant effect on the shape of women's advocacy in the Czech Republic (Hašková 2005).

### ***Conclusion***

Current studies on women's movements in Europe make up a dynamic, albeit scattered, field of research. Its strong anchoring within political science, combined with the specificities and diversity of the European political context, has undoubtedly led to original questions and important conceptual innovations. The movements' relationship to the state, to political parties, as well as the interactions between women's advocacy and policy-making processes, have been major subjects of investigation.

Yet this increasing positioning of Anglophone women's movement research in Europe within political science, and within a certain form of political science (valuing positivist, macro-level studies) also raises several theoretical and methodological issues. The development of these

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studies within the framework of political science paradoxically led to a decentring of scholarly attention from women's movements as such. Indeed, the focus on the interactions between women's movements and various political institutions results in movements being taken into account only to the extent that they affect institutional dynamics, notably the shape and orientations of political parties, and the content of public policies. Indeed, our knowledge of movement impact has increased thanks to this body of research. But today this seems to be to the detriment of other aspects of activism which remain under-investigated, or whose analysis does not get the same visibility. These include the ideological and organisational diversity of women's movements, grassroots organisations with few connections to formal political institutions, non-mainstream women's movements (be they conservative or leftist), the dynamics of individual militancy in women's organisations, as well as historical perspectives on women's mobilising. In other words, the classical anchoring of women's movement studies within social movement theory, with its foundational questions around resource mobilisation, organisations, framing or repertoires of contention, seems to have been partly lost in the way.

This growing inscription of women's movements studies within the framework of mainstream political science, as well as the increasing influence of EU-level research funding on the ways in which research is conducted and published, also have potentially preoccupying methodological implications. The general evolution of mainstream Anglophone political science publications reveals a dominance of research frameworks operating at a predominantly macro level, with comparative devices that tend to sacrifice the depth of empirical investigation to the number of countries included in the project. The mobilisation of quantitative data (which does not necessarily mean a rigorous use of quantitative methods leading to significant causal inferences), tends to be valued over ethnographic and historical methods (Bereni forthcoming). Yet the theoretical fruitfulness of in-depth qualitative investigation has been proven by many studies on women's movements, particularly in the United States (Staggenborg 1998). We can only hope that this perspective becomes more visible in the English-speaking field of 'European research' on women's movements.

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## Notes

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1. This chapter focuses on the literature on women's movements, i.e., on mobilising on behalf of and/or for the advancement of women. It does not address the large body of studies on gender and social movement, which tackles the ways in which gender structures a diversity of collective protests (Fillieule and Roux, 2009). The two fields have developed quite distinctly, particularly in Europe, where studies on women's movements have tended to take place in political science rather than in the field of social movements studies.
2. Although scholars are increasingly encouraged to read and write in English, a substantial part of European research in social science is written in languages other than English, and it is very rare that scholars mobilise research done in another language than their own or English.
3. These transnational research arenas are structured around European social sciences associations (like the European Consortium of Political Science Research, ECPR) and *ad hoc* scientific networks funded by European Research Institutions.
4. For example, evaluating—in order to eventually quantify—the impact of women's movements in the policy-making process, with women's policy agencies being considered as an 'intervening variable'.
5. In several European countries there was also an important overlap between feminist and union activism. The relationship between women's movements and unions—oscillating between confrontation and integration—has been particularly documented in the British case (Kirton 2006).