



Essay

“THE WOMAN QUESTION IN EUROPE” IN EUROPEAN HISTORY¹

By Mineke Bosch

In a letter dated February 15, 1882 Theodore Stanton (1851-1925), the son of the American women's rights pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) invited the prominent Dutch educational reformer, Elise van Calcar (1822-1904), to contribute to his project of compiling an overview of the “women question in Europe.” She probably owed this request to her presence at the International Congress of Women in Paris in 1878.² In his letter, he explained that his mother “qui depuis bien des années s’occupe de la question du droit des femmes,” and two other women were compiling a *History of Woman Suffrage* in the US, the first volume of which had been published in 1881.³ For the second volume they had asked the British suffragist Lydia Becker to write a chapter on “le mouvement des femmes en Angleterre,” and, to make things complete, “on se propose de faire un dernier chapitre où se trouvera un compte-rendu de ce qui a été fait à ce sujet sur le continent.” He had already found some collaborators in Germany, Norway, Sweden, Italy and Belgium and hoped for a contribution by her. About thirty pages would suffice:

“En sommes, le travail proposé serait un résumé des progrès accomplis jusqu’ici dans votre pays quant à la question des femmes, dans les faits, dans les lois, dans les moeurs et dans les idées.”⁴

The large project finally resulted not in two chapters on Great Britain and Continental Europe within volume 3 of *The History of Woman Suffrage*, but in the publication of a separate volume, *The Woman Question in Europe. A series of original essays* in 1884.⁵

-
- 1 Essay on the source: Cobbe, Frances Power: Introduction to “The Woman Question in Europe”. I would like to thank Prof. em. Ute Gerhard for her critical reading of an earlier version of the text.
 - 2 Sikemeier, J.H., Elise van Calcar-Schiotling. Haar leven en omgeving, haar arbeid, haar geestesrichting, Haarlem 1921, p. 567.
 - 3 Stanton, Elizabeth Cady; Anthony, Susan B.; Gage, Matilda Joslyn, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1-3, Salem, New Hampshire, 1881-1886. An abridged version appeared as: Buhle, Mari Jo; Buhle, Paul, (eds.), *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage. Selections from the Classic Work of Stanton, Anthony, Gage and Harper*, Urbana/Chicago 1978. For an informative article on the project: Kelly, Martha, *A Little History of The History of Woman Suffrage*, in: IOBA Standard. The Magazine of the Independent Booksellers Association 5 (2005), <<http://www.ioba.org/newsletter/archive/v15/kelly.php>> (20.11.2009).
 - 4 Sikemeier, Elise van Calcar-Schiotling, pp. 567-568.
 - 5 Stanton, Theodore (ed.), *The Woman Question in Europe. A Series of Original Essays*. New York 1884. Reprint: New York, 1970. Hereafter: WQE. The chapters in *The History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 3, were written by Caroline Ashurst Biggs (Great Britain, pp. 533-594) and Theodore Stanton (Continental Europe, pp. 895-921).

Different from the role that *The History of Woman Suffrage* has been playing in American women's and gender history, its European counterpart does not seem to have set a similar standard or starting point for a collective memory of European feminism. While it was reprinted in 1970 in the US, neither did an abridged version appear in Europe, nor were separate chapters (to my knowledge) ever included in European-based national source books. And although it is widely recognized as a classical source of early feminism, many books on "European feminism" do not even mention it, or do so only fragmentally or superficially. In the recently published quite ambitious *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century, A European Perspective*, for example, the book is cited only once.⁶

One reason for this could be that, until very recently, something like a "European history of women/feminism" or a "history of European women/feminism" has existed only, or predominantly, in Anglo-American historians' eyes, and not always to the satisfaction of all European colleagues. Here, two complaints were brought forward: The first is that "Europe" is often boiled down to Great Britain, France and sometimes a bit of Germany. In the above-mentioned recent collection of essays on women's emancipation movements "in European perspective" the two German-based editors, Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Enker, state as one of their starting points:

*"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 stress British and French developments with the occasional inclusion of German particularities, smaller countries are also included."*⁷

The second complaint, formulated by Ute Gerhard in the same volume, is that even if a country such as Germany is taken into the picture of European history, the source basis is often restricted to English-language literature and sources, while ignoring the rich fruit of German research.⁸

6 Bolt, Christine, *British and American Feminism: Personal, Intellectual, and Practical Connections*, in: Paletschek, Sylvia; Pietrow-Enker, Bianka, *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century, A European Perspective*, Stanford 2004, pp. 283-300, here p. 286. "The Woman Question in Europe" is not mentioned in Evans, Richard, *The Feminists*, London 1977; only once and very short in Bock, Gisela, *Women in European History*, Oxford 2002 (plus a small citation as chapter motto); Karen Offen and Susan Groag Bell twice refer shortly to the book in their collection of sources, and take one paragraph from Frances Hoggan: Offen, Karen; Bell, Susan Groag (eds.), *Women, the Family and Freedom*, Stanford 1983; Bonnie Anderson refers once to Stanton and once to his book in: Anderson, Bonnie S., *Joyous Greetings. The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860*, Oxford 2000. The only author who makes more than a passing reference to the book is McFadden, Maggie, *Golden Cables of Sympathy. The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism*, Kentucky 1999. Also the recent book by Offen, Karen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950. A Political History*, Stanford 2006, contains a few references. A thorough analysis of the book has not yet been conducted.

7 Paletschek; Pietrow-Enker (see footnote 6), p. 4.

8 Cf. Gerhard, Ute, *The Women's Movement in Germany in an International Context*, in: Paletschek; Pietrow-Enker (see footnote 6), p. 103, pec. footnotes 7 and 8. In the original Rationale and goals for the conference, the emphasis was on expanding the standard view to include also eastern and southern countries in Europe, which I criticized: Bosch, Mineke, *History and Historiography of First Wave Feminism in the Netherlands, 1860-1922*, p. 54: "As much as histories from eastern and some southern European countries have been underrepresented in international feminist scholarship, so are the histories of the smaller western and northern European countries. The balance will not be re-

In order to make up for this historiographical imbalance, the editors decided to include countries from “northern, southern, western, eastern and central Europe.”⁹ However, in spite of their claim that the volume aimed to correct the dominant Anglo-American model of an ideal type of feminism that sees “other developments [...] as deviations from the norm,” the volume is very much framed by the ideas of the American scholar of French and European women’s history, Karen Offen. In her classical article “Defining feminism: A comparative historical approach,” Offen intended to correct the Anglo-American bias that defined (real) feminism as focused on individualism and equality of rights.¹⁰ She did so, however, by invoking a European based feminism, which, according to her, differed from Anglo-Saxon feminism in its focus on relational feminism with its “elaborations of womanliness.” She thus lumped together on one side “Anglo-American feminism” and on the other “European feminism” (with a heavy emphasis on French feminism), in the end promoting a more-inclusive definition of feminism, but at the same time leaving the old divisions intact.¹¹ The recent book shows traces of some of the contributors’ struggles with this paradoxical frame in which the good intentions are contradicted by its binary argumentation.

In this article I want to take a closer look at Stanton’s book, and focus on its aims and outline, in order to explore the question why the book seems to have been largely neglected, if not ignored, by European historians of feminism, and/or historians of European feminism. Is this silence an expression of a longtime “European reluctance” to identify as “European,” or is it perhaps a “European answer” to an Anglo-American perception of continental European history?

Theodore Stanton and Family, and the American Start of a European Book Project

In the preface to *The Woman Question in Europe* Theodore Stanton declares that he began collecting material for this volume in the winter of 1880-1881. It must have been shortly after his return to Paris where he fell in love and married Margu rite Berry, who grew up in a progressive milieu of freethinkers and education reformers. Before the big

dressed by the introduction of a division between western and eastern-southern feminism. From a Dutch (and I think any European national) perspective the ‘European experience’ is something almost metaphysical, and by definition multiple.” Nevertheless I do recognize the asymmetry between Western and Eastern/Southern European scholarship to make ourselves heard internationally.

9 Paletschek; Pietrow-Ennker (see footnote 6), p. 4.

10 Offen, Karen, *Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach*, in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14/1 (1988), pp. 119- 157.

11 See for criticisms of Karen Offen’s article: Dubois, Ellen; Cott, Nancy, *Comment on Karen Offen’s “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical perspective”*, in: *Signs: Journal of women in Culture and Society* 15/1 (1989), pp. 195-197; 203-205. Rendall, Jane, *Nineteenth Century Feminism and the Separation of Spheres: Reflections on the Public/Private Dichotomy*, in: Andreasen, Tayo et al. (eds.), *Moving On: New Perspectives on the Women’s Movement*, Aarhus 1990, pp. 17-37, pec. p. 24; Bosch, Mineke, *History and Historiography of First-Wave Feminism in the Netherlands, 1860-1922*, in: Paletschek; Pietrow-Ennker (see footnote 6), pp. 34-54, and Bosch, Mineke, *Feminismus als historischer Begriff: zwischen Suchkonzept und Schablone*, in: *Querelles. Jahrbuch f r Frauenforschung: die europ ischen Querelles des Femmes. Geschlechterdebatten seit dem 15. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1997, pp. 362-366. Interestingly, Offen reacts to several criticisms in her introductory chapter of the book edited by Paletschek and Pietrow-Enker. She does not explicitly address my critical contribution to the book.

day, on May 19, 1881, his feminist mother sent him a letter (dated April 21, 1881) full of admonitions not to behave like men generally did towards women:

“Now, in starting in life, make the character for yourself to always speak kindly and tenderly of women; never join in that common coarse sneering way of berating ‘the sex.’ Weak and frivolous women have been made so by false education, customs and conventionalisms; think of all the disadvantages they have had to contend with. You will see enough of this as you read our History page by page to make any just man indignant.”¹²

After their marriage the couple crossed the Atlantic where they found Elizabeth Cady Stanton just having seen the first volume of *The History of Woman Suffrage* in print.¹³ Her close friend and co-worker Susan B. Anthony took the initiative on this project that intended to preserve the memory of the American women’s rights movement. The aim was to document all the activities, personal recollections, speeches and declarations from its beginning in Seneca Falls in 1848, when a Declaration of Sentiments had been issued that had been drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The work, however, was far from finished, and when Theodore Stanton and his young wife sailed back to France on August 31, 1881, it was with the assignment to collect information for the chapter that would appear in the third (not the second) volume of the History series, on “Continental Europe.” As his mother wrote a few weeks later to a friend:

“My son Theodore sailed for Europe the last of August & took with him 50 volumes bound in calf to send to the writers in the different countries who are preparing something for our second volume, Madame de Barrau my son and daughter Hattie are all busy translating for our second volume.”¹⁴

Between then and the summer of 1882, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton was visiting the couple and her first grandchild, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, at the country estate of Theodore’s in-laws in Jacournassy, his plans must have changed. Thus, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote in her autobiography:

12 Letter Elizabeth Cady Stanton (ECS) to Theodore Stanton (TS), 21 April 1881, in: Gordon, Ann D. (ed.), *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony, Volume IV: When Clowns Make Laws for Queens 1880–1887*, New Brunswick, NJ, 2006, p. 63.

13 For Stanton’s reaction to her daughter in law, see Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, *Eighty Years & More: Reminiscences 1815–1897*. Boston 1993, pp. 331-332.

14 Gordon, *Selected papers*, IV, pp. 118-119. The letter continues: ‘I think you better send your book to Madame Caroline de Barrau, rue de Varennes, Paris, France, as she intends to publish an abridged edition of our History in France.’ Caroline Françoise Coulomb de Barrau de Muratel (1828-1888) became interested in the education for girls and women while raising her own daughters, for whom she created a school in Paris. She also turned her attention to the conditions women were facing in Paris, investigating the wages and the migration of girls from the country, studying prostitution, improving women’s prisons and aiding abandoned children. She was active in the international campaign against licensing prostitutes, and she attended the International Congress of Women in Paris in 1878. Theodore met her in 1878. When not in Paris, where she shared a house with Theodore’s in-laws, the Berry’s, Caroline de Barrau lived on an estate near Sorèze in the south of France. ‘Hattie’ refers to his sister, Harriot Stanton Blatch. For her relationship to Theodore: Dubois, Ellen Carol, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage*, New Haven 1997.

*“One of the sources of amusement, during my sojourn at Jacournassy, was of a literary nature. My son Theodore was then busy collecting the materials for his book entitled: ‘The Woman question in Europe,’ and every post brought in manuscripts and letters from all parts of the continent, written in almost every tongue known to Babel. So just what I came abroad to avoid, I found on the very threshold where I came to rest. We had good linguists at the château, and every document finally came forth in English dress, which, however, often needed much altering and polishing. This was my part of the work. So, away off in the heart of France, high up in the Black Mountains, surrounded with French-speaking relatives and patois-speaking peasants, I found myself once more putting bad English into the best I could command, just as I had so often done in America, when editor of *The Revolution* or when arranging manuscript for ‘*The History of Woman Suffrage.*’ But it was labor in the cause of my sex; it was aiding in the creation of ‘*The Woman Question in Europe*’, and so my pen did not grow slack nor my hand weary.”¹⁵*

When in London that same autumn, with her son Theodore, she called on “Mrs. Grey, Miss Jessie Boucherett, and Dr. Hoggan, who had all written essays for ‘*The Woman Question in Europe.*’”¹⁶

Given the close connection with his mother and her work for the *History of Woman Suffrage*, the conception of the European book may well be seen as a fully fledged offspring from an American undertaking, be it in the broader sense of the American women’s rights movement, or in a narrower sense of an American extended family business. Its successful outcome may have been at least supported by the example that the authors gave in the volume of the *History of Woman Suffrage* that many of them received with the request of their cooperation, or during the process of compiling their part. Thus, in Van Calcar’s richly documented biography, a picture of the first page of the copy she received with an elaborate dedication by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, is included.¹⁷ Perhaps some authors even received two volumes. Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes that among the loads of trunks and satchels, she brought “a box of ‘*The History of Woman Suffrage*’ for foreign libraries” to France.¹⁸ She meant the second volume that had been finished just before her departure.

With this network of family and friends, it comes as no surprise that among the authors and the persons who Theodore Stanton gratefully mentions in the preface to his book are old acquaintances of his mother, such as the Reverend W.H. Channing, an old family friend of the Stantons who wedded Harriot Stanton and Harry Blatch in November 1882 in London, and also (extended) family members, such as Agnes Blatch, a sister-in-law of Theodore’s sister Harriot, Mrs. Stanton-Blatch (Harriot) herself, Mme Caroline de Barrau, the best friend of his mother in law, and last in the list, but not least: his mother.

15 Stanton, *Eighty Years*, p. 344.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 357.

17 Sikemeier, *Elise van Calcar-Schiotling*, p. 570.

18 Stanton, *Eighty years*, p. 338.

A 19th-Century American Perspective on “The European Movement for Women”

The aim of the *History of Woman Suffrage* was to preserve the memory of the women’s rights movement, or, as we would now say, the formation of a collective memory of the movement for women’s political rights from 1848 until 1880. Remembrance, however, does never exist without a contemporary context or a future purpose. In this case, it helped to publicize the main women activists, the issues and arguments, and the organizations that were central in what was once called the women’s rights or emancipation movement, and was now evolving into the single-issue woman suffrage movement. But it did something else as well. Though probably not intentionally, it helped to formulate the women’s rights movement as an integral part of America and the American dream. Inherent in that complex of ideas, was the conviction that America was leading in the evolutionary civilization ladder that informed all thinking about nations and nationalism in the nineteenth century in terms of “race” or “ethnos.”¹⁹

Feminism was not an exception to this kind of racial or ethnic civilization discourse, as Gail Bederman (among many others) has shown in her close reading of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s work.²⁰ But whereas Bederman’s focus is predominantly on civilization theory in terms of white versus black racism, it is also interesting to see Perkins Gilman sing praise especially of “the Anglo-Saxon blood” running through American veins as compared to other “white races”:

“The Anglo-Saxon blood, that English mixture of which Tennyson sings, – ‘Saxon and Norman and Dane though we be,’ – is the most powerful expression of the latest current of fresh racial life from the north, – from those sturdy races where the women were more like men, and the men no less manly because of it. The strong, fresh spirit of religious revolt in the new church that protested against and broke loose from the old, woke and stirred the soul of woman as well as the soul of man, and in the equality of martyrdom the sexes learned to stand side by side. Then, in the daring and exposure, the strenuous labor and bitter hardship of the pioneer life of the early settlers, woman’s very presence was at a premium; and her labor had a high economic value. Sex-dependence was almost unfelt. She who moulded the bullets, and loaded the guns while the men fired them, was co-defender of the home and young. She who carded and dyed and wove and spun was co-provider for the family. Men and women prayed together, worked together, and fought together in comparative equality. More than all, the development of democracy has brought to us the fullest individualization that the world has ever seen. Although politically expressed by men alone, the character it has produced is inherited by their daughters. The Federal Democracy in its organic union, reacting upon individuals, has so strengthened, freed, emboldened, the human soul in America that we have

19 Bederman, Gail, *Manliness and Civilization. A cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Chicago 1995.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 121-169.

thrown off slavery, and with the same impulse have set in motion the long struggle toward securing woman's fuller equality before the law."²¹

For the American standard to be set, it was not only necessary to express its specific descent from Puritans and pioneers, but also to constantly compare and contrast it implicitly or explicitly to other "civilizations," as happened, for instance, whenever the term New or Old World was used. One of the functions, therefore, of the two final chapters of the third volume of *The History of Woman Suffrage*, on "Great Britain" and "Continental Europe," the chapters Theodore Stanton initially was asked to do from his European station, can be interpreted as doing just that: strengthening the idea that America's vigorous young democracy was showing the Old World the way in respect of women's rights.

Against this background, and knowing that Stanton aimed the book at an American public, it becomes easier to understand the main frame of *The Woman Question in Europe* as firmly set in the nineteenth century mode of "racial" or "ethnological" difference.²² And again, it is not so much despite its feminist content, but because of it, that such differences were stressed. Evolutionary theories of national or cultural difference, which contributed to the racial thinking that was so fundamental to the nineteenth century western mindset, all hinged on (often vague) ideas of gender. The two mottos that were printed on the title page of *The Woman Question in Europe* are good examples of such gendered reasoning about cultural difference: "If you would know the political and moral status of a people, demand what place its women occupy." (from L. Aimé Martin, *On the education of mothers*, etc.); and, "There is nothing, I think, which marks more decidedly the character of men or of nation, than the manner in which they treat women." (from Herder, *Philosophy of History*, etc.).

This mindset then explains why Stanton declares in the editor's preface that he strove "to observe an ethnological order":

*"First comes Anglo-Saxon England, followed by the Teutonic countries – Germany, Holland and Austria; then Scandinavia, embracing Norway, Sweden and Denmark; next Latin nations – France, Italy, Spain and Portugal; then Latin-Teutonic Belgium and Switzerland; afterward the Slavonic States – Russia, Poland and Bohemia; and, finally, the Orient."*²³

In line with the cited mottos of the book, the ethnological order of appearance of the national contributions reflected the status of women in the particular countries, that is to say, the way in which "the woman question" had progressed. On top of this "emancipation ladder" were countries in which the women's movement had evolved towards a movement that demanded political rights or women's suffrage, which always came after the struggle for a broader set of social reforms:

21 Gilman, C. Perkins, *Women and Economics*. The Economic Factor between men and women as a factor in social evolution, ed. with an introduction by Degler, Carl, New York 1966 (original [1898]). Also: <<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/gilman/economics/economics.html>> (20.11.2009).

22 Cf. Nederveen Pieterse, Jan, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, New Haven 1992, pec. p. 49: "In general, the term 'race', 'nation', and 'people' were synonymous in European discourse until the 1930s."

23 Stanton, Theodore, Editor's Preface, in: WQE, pp. v-x, quotation p. vi.

*“It will be noticed that England has the first place and the lion’s share of the volume. But, as it is in Great Britain of all Europe that, on the whole, the most marked progress has been made, especially in the direction of political rights, the summum bonum of the age, the largest space and the post of honor justly belong to the Mother Country.”*²⁴

The English publicist Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), who is known for her ethical and feminist writings and her struggle against vivisection, had the honorable task of writing an introduction to the book.²⁵ Although her own work was more on social and moral issues than women’s suffrage, she stressed that “the crown and the completion of the progress must be the attainment of the Political Franchise in every country wherein representative government prevails.”²⁶ Her greatest worry, however, was the too-easy adoption of representative government in countries untrained in self-government such as Greece, Italy, France and Spain, and also the

*“culpable recklessness on the part of those who, to serve party interests, have, in England, thrown open the gates of our sacred ‘polis’ to a rabble of ‘illiterates,’ and in America have admitted hordes of immigrants to the ballot-box, before it was possible for them to acquaint themselves with American politics, or to imbibe American principles.”*²⁷

Women and their advocates only had to insist on the difference, between their demands and those of “the dregs of a population,” “between proposals to admit aliens of another race, and those to admit the mothers, daughters and sisters of the men who already exercise it [...]”²⁸ Indeed, women (in England) were naturally the first citizens to be admitted to full citizenship, if only the men would see.

The ethnological scheme prescribed not only the order of a nation’s appearance, but also more or less the amount of pages that were allotted to different nations and number of subsections they were allowed. Great Britain alone signed up for 138 (of 472) pages, which were divided into five chapters written by five different authors. Germany followed suit with 14 pages subdivided in two chapters, followed by Holland (14 p.), Austria (14 p.), Norway (10 p.), Sweden (22 p.), Denmark (13 p.), France (by the editor himself) (76 p.), Italy (20 p.), Spain (24 p.), Portugal (10 p.), Belgium (10 p.), Switzerland (16 p.), Russia (34 p.), Poland (22 p.), Bohemia (11 p.), and lastly, The Orient (15 p.). The last chapter was certainly a mixed bag according to the author due to the lack of homogeneity. She had therefore been

24 Ibid.

25 At first, Frances Power Cobbe declined Stanton’s invitation to “join in on Mrs. Stanton’s great work. Copy of her admirable book lies on my table – lent me by our mutual friend Mr Channing –“, and she referred him to Lydia Becker as the woman best equipped to write such an overview. She also mentioned names for the separate chapters of the contribution on Great Britain. Letter Frances Power Cobbe (FPC) to TS, December 1 [1881] in Rutgers University, Mabel Smith Douglass Library, Theodore Stanton Collection of E.C. Stanton Papers, Box 5, F350. It is probably due to the visit his mother paid Cobbe in the winter of 1882, that Cobbe came back on her earlier refusal. Letter FPC to TS, [c. August 1883], *ibid.* I am grateful to Fernanda Perrone, Rutgers University Libraries, for helping me retrieving these letters, that were already transcribed.

26 Cobbe, Frances Power: Introduction to “The Woman Question in Europe”, p. xiv.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Cobbe, Frances Power: Introduction to “The Woman Question in Europe”, p. xvi.

*“obliged to make a distinction between the women of independent Greece and the Christian Greek women still under foreign yoke – although they are intimately linked by the same language and religion, the solid foundation of Greek nationality – and then to discriminate between these two classes and Oriental women in general, by which I understand Ottomans, Armenians, Jews and Bulgarians. I shall say but little concerning these latter races, for their women are in a state of lamentable inactivity which offers almost nothing worthy of record.”*²⁹

The Woman Question in Europe in European History

As was said before, *The Woman Question in Europe* is hardly used as a classical source for the study of the history of European feminisms. The sole reference to it in the recent volume *Emancipation Movements in Europe* is by the British historian Christine Bolt in the closing chapter on British and American feminism, and in the context of discussing British and American women’s sense of their own distinctiveness:

*“For women as well as for men, the Anglo-American relationship involved rivalry as well as friendship; tapped into normally veiled but significant feelings of national superiority, Americans and Britons had formed views of each other in the wake of the American Revolution that did not entirely change as their two countries grew more alike, politically and economically.”*³⁰

Remarkably, she seems to interpret Theodore Stanton’s reverence for the British feminists as “admitting” their superiority as compared to American feminists instead of to European feminists. She fails to see the connection with the *History of Woman Suffrage*, and therefore fails to see that in fact he claims superiority of his own “race,” in very much the same way as Theodore Roosevelt did in his book *The Winning of the West*:

*“Americans belong to the English race only in the sense in which Englishmen belong to the German [...] The modern Englishmen is descended from a Low-Dutch stock, which, when it went to Britain, received into itself an enormous influence of Celtic, a much smaller infusion of Norse and Danish, and also a certain infusion of Norman-French blood. When this new English stock came to America it mingled with and absorbed into itself immigrants from many European lands.”*³¹

Though Stanton stated the principles of *The Woman Question in Europe* firmly, the numerous national contributions to the book in many ways contradicted the supposed “ethnological order,” or even the supposed standard to measure the progress of women’s movements that has been termed “from social to political feminism.” Not only is the authority of the main national contributors contestable, but it is also often contested on the very same pages. In his Preface, Stanton claimed that “the editor greatly

29 Kehaya, Kalliope A., *The Orient*, in: *WQE*, pp. 457-472, quotation p. 458.

30 Bolt, *British and American Feminism*, p. 286 (also see footnote 5).

31 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, p. 179.

increased his labors,” not only to ensure that authors stick to the facts and keep the “juste milieu” in writing, but also to produce “a work which would be homogeneous and, at the same time, acceptable to a public three thousand miles away, of whose character all foreign writers are more or less ignorant.”³² Especially the non-English essays needed strong editorial intervention:

*“With the exception of the English essays, to which I have added only a few notes, no chapter appears in its original form. Each has been subjected to severe pruning, some have been abridged one-half. In several chapters the order of the matter has been changed, paragraphs have been remodeled, and new sentences introduced. But in every case the English arrangement has received the final approval of the author.”*³³

Having said this, to a twenty-first-century reader, the virtual omnipresence of the editor is quite astonishing. Not only is he constantly visible in the notes, as he signed them all with his initials “TS,” he also appears in very different capacities. Thus, sometimes he corrects and even contradicts the author, sometimes he adds whole paragraphs to the author’s text, while on other occasions he introduces another authority, dead or alive, often a well-known male politician, such as the British Member of Parliament, John Bright, or a writer or philosopher, such as Goethe, Diderot or Voltaire, or a scientist, like the archeologist Schliemann, to assess or enhance an author’s claims. Quite as often, in the notes and references, other women are given the floor, who bring in other perspectives to the woman question in their respective countries, or set other, sometimes much more radical accents than the main author. Even here, Stanton is being heard, saying where and when he met this or that spokesperson or what was the date of the letter from which he quotes.

The final impression is therefore not one of homogeneity, but very much one of what a “European book” often looks like: polymorphous and/or polyphonous, having exactly the Bable-like qualities that Elizabeth Cady Stanton mildly criticized, and that Theodore Stanton perhaps was not capable of containing.³⁴ In the end, the book contradicts any suggestion of clear-cut beginnings and straightforward developments. Even though he was firmly convinced of the general order in which the book should be set, Stanton allowed for a plurality of voices and opinions in the annotation, so that even within one national contribution it is hard to see who or what defines the woman question, and what progress has been or is being made.³⁵ I think there are several ways to understand this.

32 Stanton, Theodore, Editor’s Preface, in: WQE, p. viii.

33 Ibid.

34 For a discussion of similar opinions on Europe held by Carrie Chapman Catt, the American president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance between 1904 and 1923: Bosch, Mineke, Between entertainment and nationalist politics. The uses of folklore in the spectacle of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32/1 (2009), p. 4-12, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2009.01.002.

35 There is no place here to elaborate on this, but an early observer of this phenomenon in the Dutch contribution was Maria Grever in her book: *Strijd tegen de stilte. Johanna Naber (1859-1941) en de vrouwenstem in geschiedenis*. Amsterdam 1994, p. 134. She suspected a conflict in the pages of the Dutch contribution, but I don’t think there was one, really. It is not a ‘Dutch’ phenomenon, but a general characteristic of the book.

The multiplicity of voices and meaning might be taken as an expression of “Euro-peanness” – the failure to identify as “European” by conforming to one standard, and thus to show one face to the outside world. This lack of identification could similarly explain the lack of attention for and reception of Theodore Stanton’s *The Woman Question in Europe* among historians of feminism in Europe. Not only do “European historians” (that is historians living or coming from Europe) not easily identify as “European,” the book also assesses the practical impossibility of a “European perspective” on feminism. Where the national contributions often seem “odd” as compared to the standardized national histories of feminism, the book can only play a marginal role in the study of European women’s movements’ pasts.

There is, however, another explanation possible, which points to the American part played in the making and reception of the book. In that explanation the multiplicity of meaning was very much the outcome of the editorial decisions Stanton made. It may therefore also be seen as the result of a specific American perception of Europe as a hopelessly old-fashioned, non-standardized collection of unconnected nations that speak a dozen different languages and therefore isn’t capable of understanding even itself.³⁶

This latter explanation hints at the fact that perhaps not the content of the book, but rather the frame in which the book was set, did have and still has an impact on “European women’s and gender history.” Let us once more return to the ambitious *Women’s Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European perspective*. Is it only a coincidence that in this book the logic of national appearance is so very similar to the one in *The Woman Question in Europe*? After a short introduction by the European-based editors Sylvia Paletschek and Bianka Pietrow-Enker, which is also a conversation with the starting points of the preceding conference, the book opens for the second time by the American scholar Karen Offen in defense of “European history.” After that the succession of national case studies begins with a chapter on Great Britain and ends with a comparative article on British and American feminism. Although the further order is not exactly the same as in its nineteenth-century forerunner, there are still some striking similarities, with The Netherlands and France as chapter three and four, with Russia and Poland near the end, and concluding with a chapter on Greece.

Given the ethnological and racial roots of this geographical order I think it is about time to reformulate our understanding of European feminism as a more horizontal and plural phenomenon that can be understood only contextually and in different political and cultural frames. In order to achieve that, and open up other narrow definitions of feminism, it is worth our while to realize what frames have formed our historical understanding of European feminism until now, and carefully study books like *The Woman Question in Europe*.

Bibliography:

Bederman, Gail, *Manliness and Civilization. A cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Chicago 1995.

36 Cf. Carrie Chapman Catt’s perceptions of Europe in Bosch, *Between entertainment and nationalist politics*, pp. 9-10.

- Bosch, Mineke, Between entertainment and nationalist politics. The uses of folklore in the spectacle of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Women's Studies International Forum* 32/1 (2009), pp. 4-12, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2009.01.002.
- Offen, Karen, *European Feminisms 1700-1950. A Political History*, Stanford 2006.
- Paletschek, Sylvia; Pietrow-Ennker, Bianka, *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century, A European Perspective*, Stanford 2004.
- Stanton, Theodore, *The Woman Question in Europe. A Series of Original Essays*, New York 1884 (Reprint: New York 1970).
-

Bosch, Mineke: "The Woman Question in Europe" in *European History*. Contribution to the web-feature „European history – gender history“. In: *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte* (2009), URL: <<http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2009/Article=418>>.

Dieser Essay bezieht sich auf folgende Quelle: Cobbe, Frances Power: Introduction to "The Woman Question in Europe" (1884). Part of the web-feature „European history – gender history“. In: *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte* (2009), URL: <<http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2009/Article=419>>.