

Unpolitical Politics? Conservative/right-wing women and social action in late 19th and 20th century Europe

The public and political agency of conservative and right-wing women is a topic about which we still know far too little. Despite pathbreaking research by pioneering scholars such as Claudia Koonz or Kathleen Blee, research on conservative and right-wing women has continued to lag behind work on those women whose political subjectivities led them to more easily embrace the label “feminist,” along with its more left-wing and emancipatory associations. And yet the questions posed by politically active women who refused the feminist appellation and all that it entails (notably accepting the idea that one belongs to a group that is subjected to systematic oppression) are of crucial importance for reflecting on how it is that those who are, in fact, systematically excluded from the normal world of electoral politics have imagined and created spaces for themselves in that very male domain. As social action has so often been the instrument through which conservative women have carved themselves a place in politics, this collection uses women’s social action, broadly conceived as social protection, as a lens through which to understand how women on the right found their way into public and political action across the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Conceived in relation to the edited volume *Conservative/right-wing women and social action in comparative and transnational perspective, 1870s-1980s* this sourcebook aims to gather and analyze documents from across the very wide Europe embraced by our COST Action. These documents should speak one way or another to the questions raised by the notionally “unpolitical politics” practiced by conservative and right-wing women for whom social action constituted a royal road to public, even political action. The reader will be organized chronologically but also thematically, with themes such as the professionalization of social work (to distinguish it from traditional and “unscientific” forms of charity), the role of (secularized) religion in mobilizing conservative women, their complex stance with respect to conserving tradition whilst embracing some form of modernity. Other themes will certainly emerge over the course of our work in putting together this volume.

Our goal is to give students, scholars and interested readers alike access to a broad array of hitherto unpublished documents, or documents that may have been previously printed but unavailable in English. By gathering them together in one place, readers may explore comparatively and across the late 19th and 20th centuries the complex relationships woven among conservative and right-wing politics, social action and female actors who may or may not have identified themselves as feminists.

If you would like to contribute a small series of documents with commentary to this sourcebook, please get in touch with the editorial team and let us know what kinds of documents you propose to contribute. The *Unpolitical Politics* team will be holding a workshop at our June 28-30 COST meeting in Lisbon to discuss all contributions collected thus far and the emergent themes and questions that will shape the introductions to each of our thematic chapters as well as the volume’s overall introduction.

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