

Åkerström, Ulla & Elena Lindholm (eds.) (2020), *Collective Motherliness in Europe (1890-1939): The Reception and Reformulation of Ellen Key's Ideas on Motherhood and Female Sexuality*. Peter Lang: Berlin.

In 2014 Sweden launched a feminist foreign policy aiming at gender equality, women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights. Thereby Sweden implemented Ellen Key's intentions of "Collective Motherliness" whose credo it was that women's maternal force in the future would change society in a positive direction. Ellen Key (1849–1926) was both an admired lecturer and a controversial debater. In 1903 she published *Love and Marriage*, in which she argued for women's right to their own bodies, to their sexuality, to free love but also for Motherhood as women's true calling.

The aim of *Collective Motherliness in Europe* is to chart "a network of thoughts in which Key's work was one of the main sources." Why was Key called "the prophetess of sexuality?" How were her texts received and reformulated in the English, German, French Italian and Spanish language areas? Why not add Russian? Key's best-seller *The Century of the Child*, was translated into Russian three times between 1905-1910. Key's friends Victoria Benedictsson, Anne Charlotte Leffler and Alfhild Agrell whose novels discussed the woman question, were translated into Russian in the 1890s.

In the Introduction there is a timely reference to Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) Just as Gilroy looks at the Atlantic as one transnational unit, *Collective Motherliness in Europe* sees the European continent as a transnational unit to European feminists.

The reception of Key's texts in the five language areas follows a similar pattern. During the first two decades of the 20th century reform pedagogues dominate. They demand gender equality, suffrage, and marriage reform. As a cultural elite they have no problems with Collective Motherliness, Key's metaphor for women's entry into public life. The second feminist group, one decade later, consists of anarchists and sex reformers focusing on individuality, sexuality and free love.

The importance of novels to promote the woman question is demonstrated by Claudia Lindén in her "Love Round Trip." When in the 19th century women writers such as Jane Austen in her novels describe the evils of marriages in detail, the latent message is to get rid of them. When Key in *Love and Marriage* demands that the law put an end to men's misbehaviour, the readers of women writers supported her.

In the United States Key was glorified due to the sexologist Havelock Ellis. In his introduction to *Love and Marriage* Ellis modified Key's radical, social ideas. As a result, Key's vision was seen as "an ideal that is not practical but very respectable because it is spiritual." Is this a suggestion of Collective Motherliness?

Tiina Kinnunen clarifies how new gender roles diminish the appreciation of motherhood in Germany. Thus, in *Die Anti-feministen* (1902) Hedwig Dohm criticizes Key for narrowing down the woman issue to motherhood. So do Moderate

feminists whose concept “geistige Mütterlichkeit” comes close to Key’s definition of Collective motherliness as “women’s motherly participation in society.”

Key supported Bund für Mutterschutz, founded in 1905. One of its members, Helen Stöckern, like Key, had a radical view of sexuality as a resource for happiness.” In contrast to Stöcker, who was against homosexuality and lesbianism, Key made an exception for lesbian women who searched for soulmates. Both Stöcker and Key strived for Collective Motherliness, whose utmost goal was to allow women’s maternal force change society in a feminist direction. In Sweden, Key was persona non grata due to her view on sexuality.

What Karen Offen calls “French affinities” illustrates how Gilroy’s thesis of a shared transnational unit works. Did Key initiate arguments or was she influenced by French ideas? Thus in *Socialism and Sexualism* (1893) Aline Valette anticipates Key’s arguments in *Misused Women Power* (1896) by three years. Although Key never met Nelly Roussel her arguments have affinities with Key’s ideas such as a woman’s right to control her body. As early as 1900, Nelly Roussel, stated that the future of the human race “depended on women,” unaware of Key’s identical claim in Collective motherliness.

Ulla Åkerstrom’s title suggests that Italian feminists operated between tradition and modernity. Thus, difference feminists replaced the cult of Mary by belief in “special qualities ... rooted in the female experience” Likewise the ultimate goal of Collective Motherliness was to allow women’s maternal force alter society in a feminist direction.

Unione Femminile, founded in 1899, claimed that motherhood was essential both to biological mothers and unmarried women as vicarious mothers. One of its members, Sibilla Aleramo, was Key’s friend. But when Aleramo in her autobiography *Una Donna* (1906) describes how she chooses divorce before keeping her son, Key disapproves. To Key motherhood was more important than individual freedom.

In Spain, Havelock Ellis once more promoted Key’s ideas. Still, Key’s harsh critique of Catholicism was the dividing line in the Spanish reception of Key. At the time when Picasso and Dali worked in Madrid, the first wave of Spanish feminism consisting of reform pedagogues lived there. One its members was Carmen de Burgos, a renowned journalist. In her novel *La Rampa* (1906) the suppression of motherliness is shown. Burgos wrote serialized novels forming the fullest analysis of Key’s Collective motherliness. Thus novels prove to be very potent weapons in conveying political messages.

Elena Lindholm uses Manuel Monleon’s book cover of the Spanish translation of *Love and Marriage* to illustrate the many faces of love. Traditional love is represented by Göring’s wedding photo from 1935, natural sexuality by the idealized picture of a naked woman and maternal love by a lioness with her cubs.

The second wave feminists in Barcelona consisted of anarchists sexual reformists, individualists. In her novel *La Victoria* (1930) Federica Montseny comes close to Key’s critique of institutionalized marriages. Montseny illustrates how women’s nature was shaped during centuries of male domination and

submission of women. According to Key women's reproductive capacities were the ethical axis for building a future society. For Collective motherliness, is a social force grounded in the woman as both biological and spiritual being.

What was Key's Brave New World like? Key was not only a prophetess of sexology, but promotor of free love and reformed marriages. In the European feminist transnational network she was a celebrity. Key's ideas were either realized like the suffrage, or became obsolete. By contrast novels problematizing the woman question could be negotiated again and again,. However, Keys dreams of a' Brave New World survived as Collective Motherliness, a code word for a better world based on women's experience through the centuries. The Swedish feminist foreign policy harks back to Key's belief in women's tradition of promoting understanding and peace.

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