Book Review

James C. Albisetti, Joyce Goodman, and Rebecca Rogers, eds. *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: From the 18th to the 20th Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 240 pp. Cloth $85.00.

Ideas and practices regarding the secondary schooling of young women spread across modern Europe from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Individual countries responded to these transnational influences in different ways and as a result, some significant variations developed. For example, in late eighteenth century Russia, Catherine the Great's views about the education of young women "reflected an Austrian and Prussian emphasis on educating quiet and useful citizens" (p. 167), whereas several decades later and more than a thousand miles away, "secondary education in the Bulgarian nation-state replicated the Napoleonic system" (p. 157).

The editors of this volume have assembled a fascinating collection of historical essays that explore the origins, political debates, milestones, and outcomes of young women's secondary schooling in countries from Scandinavia to Southeastern Europe and Russia. This book is a very welcome addition to the series *Secondary Education in a Changing World*, edited by Barry M. Franklin and Gary McCulloch. The collection focuses on the education of middle- and upper-class girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen. In addition to thirteen chapters ranging from ten to eighteen pages each, it includes an introduction and English-language bibliography. Historians will find this a very useful reference, not only for teaching, but also as a starting point for comparative research.

Readers will appreciate the thematic coherence of this book. Each chapter highlights a particular country or region, starting with a brief sketch of the relevant historiography followed by a chronological analysis of the gradual convergence of male and female schooling. The contributors address similar topics, such as religion, domestic motherhood, nationalism, coeducation, politics, and the extent to which nations influenced the development of girls' secondary education within the colonies. This organizational strategy is particularly helpful in allowing readers to make comparisons across countries.

Although most chapters in this volume illuminate the development of girls' secondary education in specific national contexts, some overarching themes appear. First, school systems everywhere were often differentiated by social class, and the most elite institutions, such as the German *Gymnasium* and the French *lycée*, did not open their doors to girls until the conclusion of the nineteenth century. Second, for

middle- and upper-class girls during this period, secondary education involved lessons in domesticity. As the editors point out, the "importance of producing educated mothers extended far beyond national borders" (p. 3). Third, religious schooling, whether Catholic or Protestant, had a widespread influence on female education, but with consequences that differed in specific national contexts. For example, although the Catholic teaching orders often promoted a relatively domestic approach to female education, liberal currents within Catholicism, coupled with competition among private schools in education markets, encouraged some innovation in countries such as Ireland, Belgium, Greece, and Bulgaria (p. 4). Fourth, a number of chapters reiterate a similar story in which the expansion of girls' elementary education fueled some of the growth in secondary schools for young women. As the numbers of children of both sexes in elementary schools grew, demand for female teachers at the elementary level increased, a phenomenon that drove the establishment of teacher-training institutions for females. Finally, for many imperial nations, colonial education served the purposes of the state by promoting domesticity, Christianity, and national (patriotic) motherhood. For example, Joyce Goodman concludes that education for indigenous populations in many British colonies "formed part of a 'civilizing' mission that actively discouraged indigenous language, belief systems, and culture" (p. 20), a description that fits colonial education in other geographic areas as well.

This volume also illuminates some interesting differences across nations. While Catholic and Protestant schools for girls served to affirm the respectability and desirability of female education, in some nations, advances in girls' secondary schooling arose as a result of a backlash against religion. For instance, in Belgium, the expansion of public girls' secondary education resulted from the efforts of political liberals to remove girls' schools from the influence of the Catholic Church. Similar developments occurred in France after 1880 and in Portugal in 1926. Responses to the question of coeducation also differed. By and large, the Catholic teaching orders were hostile to coeducation in secondary schools. According to Consuelo Plecha, "Anxiety about coeducation was evident throughout Western Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century" (p. 87). By the mid-twentieth century, however, coeducation in secondary schools developed in response to economic conditions in some countries. In France, for instance, "the pragmatic acceptance of coeducation" spread as more schools enrolled students from artisan and working class families (p. 35).

Along with the strengths discussed above, this book has some weaknesses. The title is misleading. Admittedly, the phrase "the Western world" has multiple meanings, and the conceptual boundaries of "the West" have shifted over time. But today the phrase usually

encompasses the nations of the Americas, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, with recent additions thrown in, including Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, to name a few. The index is also very scant. Readers hoping for more than a routine list of the most common terms and names will be disappointed. Finally, although the introduction effectively lays out many of the book's major themes and issues, a really comprehensive concluding chapter, one that draws some broad conclusions from this collection and includes some suggestions for future research, would have been helpful. By and large, however, these are minor quibbles.

The editors and contributors to this volume have provided an important service to historians interested in comparative studies of women's education. The book provides a very useful introduction to the astonishing diversity of educational systems. The similarities and differences should provide grist for ongoing investigations and lively debates among scholars.

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