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Book Review: Professional Men, Professional Women: The European Professions from the 19th Century until Today

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Professional Men, Professional Women: The European Professions from the 19th Century until Today

2011. Maria Malatesta. SAGE Studies in International Sociology.

188 pages. Hardcover (\$94.00). ISBN 978-1-84860-625-8

Reviewed by Sharonrose Sefora¹

Maria Malatesta's *Professional Men, Professional Women*, is an extensive overview of the history of professions in Europe from the "ancient regime to the formation of the European Union and thereafter" (p1). This historical study uses sociological concepts similar to those of Michael Burrage (2006) and Liora Israel (2005). The book visits 'liberal' professions (Law, Medicine, and Engineering) in Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany from the French Revolution to 2006.

The book begins with an introduction of the European professions between crisis and transformation, this chapter takes the reader into an overview of the origins of the four professions, the reconstructing of processes and changes they went through in the last two centuries. Malatesta highlights the professions' responses to external agents namely, the state, social movements, economic crises and wars. The book rejects theories of professionalization and is inspired by Bourdieu, a French sociologist; it however draws on theories on the decline of professions, sociology of crisis and the professions' relationship with the fascist and authoritarian regimes.

Chapter 1 of *Professional Men, Professional Women*, is dedicated to the Legal profession. The reader is firstly introduced to Law where the legal field is defined from Bourdieu (1992), as a national space where the actors operate in it, the relationships and society give it its attributes. The author argues that the legal field lost its importance after the Second World War due to political change. "The advent of mass political parties overwhelmed the old notability system and relegated jurists to below other social groups" (Cotta et al., 2000: 232,251). Malatesta notes that the judiciary held great prestige in the Europe while in Germany, public administration held the power. However, in Great Britain, it was different; the judiciary held its power and unconditional trust of its citizens. In France, judges pursued a single career just as in Italy. The chapter outlines the history of notaries, the forensic kaleidoscope and details regarding bar autonomy and state regulation in the four countries (Great Britain, Italy, Germany and France). It is interesting to note that whether the state had a strong presence or not, it did not 'entail a less autonomy of the legal profession, as seen by the French and Italian bars' (p24).

Doctors are discussed in chapter 2. In Great Britain, the less protected doctors changed medicine by virtue of their organisational capacities, unlike in the rest of Europe where change was initiated by the state. These less-protected doctors (in Britain) initiated change due to a need for status, legitimisation of their occupation and need for recognition. Medicine in Great Britain was divided among three professions; doctors, surgeons and pharmacists. The author notes that the different professions under medicine, all possessed individual licences to practice. Physicians gained superiority and maintained it for more than two and half centuries (p40). Unlike today where to become a doctor, years of attendance at a university is necessary, in the 'Ancient Regime' it took two years, whilst an apprenticeship sufficed for entry to other healthcare professions. The reader is taken further into an examination of the rise of the General Practitioner.

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Interestingly, the term “general practitioner”, became common after 1815, to denote a pharmacist who also practiced medicine and surgery.

In the 19th century Italian medicine had an ancient university tradition but unfortunately it fell short of the most advanced European standards. In the first health law of the Kingdom of Italy in 1865, an obligation was stated to obtain a university entrance to be able to practice. Malatesta brings to the attention of the reader that, whereas the lawyers had had their order since 1874, the doctors were obliged to enrol in the professional registers in order to practice. “After the second world war, the conditions of the hospital physicians deteriorated. Their legal status remained undefined, career advancement was uncertain, and economic conditions worsened because hospitals depended for their financing on mutual funds which were constantly in arrears” (p71). The pressure applied by physicians in Italy, as in Great Britain, had a positive outcome. In Germany, just as in the other Western European countries, medicine was divided into two professions namely physicians known as *Artze*, and surgeons known as *Wundartze*. Physicians had attended university, administered medicine and treated illness, while surgeons alone intervened in the patient’s body and were only trained with barbers or military doctors.

Malatesta takes the reader through the history of Engineers in chapter 3. At the beginning of the 19th century, France was the only European country with a complete training system for the technical professions (p83). The title and identity of an engineer in France referred to different elements of the profession; “The profession of Engineer in France is fragmented, and it is markedly hierarchized in occupational and social terms. *Ingenieur* is a polysemic term, which simultaneously denotes an academic title, a professional title and a function in the division of labour” (p87). In Great Britain, the engineering profession acquired social visibility in response to demands. The state opted for a *laissez-faire* approach unlike the French who sought to form the technical elites for the governance of the country. In Germany the term, *Ingenieur*, came to denote all technical functions, and was titled the master builder, who was superior to a skilled worker (p95). As with France and Great Britain, the profession of Engineering in Germany was marked by terminological ambiguity and, “until 1970, the professional title was based upon academic qualification” (p95). In Italy, engineers were trained at the military academies, where the most advanced technical education was attained. Whereas *Ingegner*, is a polysemic term in other European languages, in Italy it denotes a higher level technician trained at a university. Engineers first concentrated on acquiring a university qualification to keep up with the times and acquire status.

The second last chapter gives a brief history of accountants. Accountants in Great Britain were among the non-protected professions and it was only the public accountants who had to register with the membership association. Other accountants they were not obliged to pass the examinations of the Institute of Chartered accountants of England and Wales. In France and Germany there has always been a distinction between accountants and auditors and between professional accountants and book keepers just as in Italy.

The concluding chapter of, *Professional Men, Professional Women*, is dedicated to women in these professions. Malatesta acknowledges and highlights the ‘gender question’, based on women’s access to higher education, entry into intellectual professions during the 19th (slow and difficult feminization) and 20th centuries (explosion of female presence) among the above mentioned countries and professions. During the

19th century, the European professions were gentlemen's clubs, despite differences in status, income or profession (p126). However, women were not allowed in these clubs as they did not "possess suitable qualification". Malatesta cites Rendall (1999), in saying that women were "deemed unfit to enter the public sphere in which professions operated", with reference to these clubs. In the middle of the 19th century, a new movement was created in hope for equality and gender mixing. A group of European women started the movement to challenge the male stronghold and demanded entry into the gentlemen's clubs. In relation to the professions of medicine, law, accountancy and engineering, women resorted to all kinds of strategies to enter medical schools and enrol on the medical register and to also become professional accountants from clerical roles. The battle to enter the legal professions was longer and, more difficult. It is, however, interesting to note that in the majority of the Western European countries, women entered the liberal professions before they obtained political rights (p142). "Although there was a gap that still persisted between possession of a degree and employment, the presence of women in the professions substantially increased" (p145). It was only in the second half of the twentieth century, that the feminization of liberal professions resulted from social and cultural changes (p153).

Although this review does not do justice to the in-depth account of the history of the four professions, the author provides a very detailed account with exact dates, and a broader understanding of the process of the birth of these 'liberal' professions from the 'ancient regime to the formation of the European Union and thereafter'. Overall, *Professional Men, Professional Women*, is a valuable text for those interested in the history of the liberal professions and gender studies.