France has advanced equality legislation, gender parity laws, state support for domestic workers, women ministers and women presidential candidates. The recently appointed head of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, was previously the first woman Finance Minister. French women intellectuals, theorists and writers are world famous; women students and graduates outnumber their male counterparts; and girls outperform boys at school. French women won the vote in 1944, the right to work in paid employment without their husband’s permission in 1965, the legalisation of contraception in 1967 and abortion in certain circumstances in 1975. It might seem, therefore, that the separate study of women in France is no longer necessary.

However, in France, one woman is killed every two and a half days by her husband or partner; 75,000 women are raped every year; and the gender pay gap is 27%. With women making up 18.9% of the Assemblée nationale, France occupies 59th position in the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s table of women in parliaments worldwide. This places France just below Lithuania, El Salvador and Tajikistan, and way below the table leaders, Rwanda, Andorra and Sweden.

Women have not been passive recipients of rights bestowed upon them by male parliaments; they have fought for their rights and, once won, fought to see them implemented. The articles in this collection are not simply accounts of inequalities and injustice; they are also about resistance and struggle. Together, they contribute to our understanding of the lives of women in France: not just famous individuals, but workers, activists, ordinary women, who make up 53% of the population.