

Contents lists available at [SciVerse ScienceDirect](http://SciVerse.ScienceDirect.com)

# Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif)

## Decentering agency in feminist theory: Recuperating the family as a social project<sup>☆</sup>

Amy Borovoy<sup>a</sup>, Kristen Ghodsee<sup>b,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> East Asian Studies Department, Princeton University, 211 Jones Hall, Princeton, NJ 08544–1008, USA<sup>b</sup> Gender and Women's Studies, Bowdoin College, 7100 College Station, Brunswick, ME 04011, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

Available online 21 April 2012

### SYNOPSIS

Ethnographic investigations demonstrate that there are many cultures in which women relinquish rights for broader social goods and protections, which are equally acceptable, if not more desirable, to women. These include Western European social democracies, Eastern European post socialist nations, and the East Asian industrialized nations. Exploring these gender politics provides a powerful window into how the liberal emphasis on “choice” captures only one narrow aspect of what is at stake for women in issues such as feminist debates about domesticity and the politics of abortion and family planning. In this article we draw on Japan and Bulgaria as our case studies, and we historicize the brand of social feminism that we are discussing, locating it in the mission to incorporate women into national agendas during the interwar period in many locations throughout the industrialized world as well as in the diverse mandates of early socialist feminism in the United States. We argue that “social feminism” can help sharpen the critiques of liberal feminism mobilized by anthropologists under the banner of “cultural relativism.”

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

American feminist debates of the last two decades have been characterized by a divide between those who champion the liberal belief in individual rights and autonomy on one side and those who advocate for cultural relativism on the other, exemplified by debates between liberal feminists and post-colonial feminists influenced by subaltern studies. In most societies, however, as many feminists would readily acknowledge, the tension between women's rights and cultural values is far more complex. In many industrialized societies, women's movements have defined women's welfare not primarily in terms of rights, choice, or autonomy—though these goals are often in the mix—but rather in terms of the provision of broader social supports and

a shared access to social goods: social assistance for family and child-rearing, economic stability through market regulation, and the social construction of domesticity, fertility, and motherhood as national assets (e.g. Borovoy, 2005; Ghodsee, 2010; Guenther, 2010; Leve, 2007; Navailh, 1994; Stern, 1999a,b; Thébaud, 1994).

For instance, the social significance of motherhood has been a touchstone for liberal feminists in Japan since the turn of the century, as well as a platform for women's broader political involvement in local governance and social movements (LeBlanc, 1999; Vogel, 1988; White, 1992). More broadly, feminism in many industrialized countries has not always been antagonistic to broader social goals, even when they curtail certain rights or do not explicitly invoke women's autonomy, including traditional family planning, promotion of public safety, government regulation of social services, savings campaigns, and even the promotion of patriarchy through support for the single wage. Such societies include Western European social democracies, Eastern European democracies emerging from a tradition of state socialism, and the East Asian industrialized nations (Borovoy, 2001, 2010a; Cott, 1994; Garon, 1997; Ghodsee, 2010, 2011a,b; Leve, 2007; Mahmood, 2001; Mohanty, 2003;

<sup>☆</sup> The authors would like to thank Robin LeBlanc, Sonya Michel, Michele Rivkin-Fish, and the two anonymous reviewers for Women's Studies International Forum for their valuable comments and conversations concerning the manuscript. Both authors would also like to acknowledge the support of the School of Social Sciences at the Institute for Advanced Study, and in particular our ongoing conversations with Farzana Shaikh, Joan Scott and Michael Walzer.

\* Corresponding author.

Navailh, 1994; Rivkin-Fish, 2004; Stern, 1999a,b; Thebaud, 1994).

Historically, the emphasis on family integrity and social cohesion as feminist goals can be linked to the demands of particular historical moments of nation building. The social democracies of Western Europe were born in the late 19th century context of powerful nation-states and empire, but crystallized in the post World War II context of the need for economic and social planning (Judt, 2005). The Japanese state was influenced by the Western European model of the late 19th century (particularly France and Germany), but emphasized reliance on family and community in caring for society, rather than an emphasis on state munificence (Garon, 2010). Other East Asian societies including South Korea were strongly influenced by Japan's model of corporate welfare in promoting industry regulations and guarantees which protected the family wage, incentivizing women to stay at home, and exacting tight control over individuals through intensive socialization and tightly-woven communities. At the far extreme of this model, the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe were almost entirely planned economies. Yet state ownership of the economy and gender equality were inextricably intertwined. So-called scientific socialism depended upon the provision of childcare, flexible work-schedules, and in many instances state-subsidized abortions and generous maternity leave—as well as the provision of public laundries, cafeterias, and other services that socialized domestic work (Gal & Kligman, 2000; Haney, 2002). The growth of these economies depended on women's labor; in turn, women's equality as workers and citizens was an outcome of the nationalization of private services.<sup>1</sup>

We suggest that the stark division between liberal rights-based perspectives and cultural-relativist perspectives (which emphasize the cultural acceptability of certain forms of subordination), has not always been productive in theorizing the improvement of women's lives. This juxtaposition occurs, in part, because the question of “rights” has often played a pivotal and polarizing role in defining the terms of the discussion. When the violation of rights becomes the ultimate litmus test for defining feminism or measuring the moral worth of a society, the conversation tends to focus on those most egregious and visible ways in which rights are violated: genital modification, trafficking, prostitution, veiling, and so forth. Enlightenment feminists will say that these practices are untenable, while those inclined towards relativism will demonstrate how they are comprehensible within specific moral and cultural frameworks—or that women's agency can be found even within such practices. What such conversations leave out, of course, is the more mundane compromises that many women make on a daily basis in the interests of the social security and social integration—the mommy track, the double-shift, the self-restraint involved in accommodating close-knit communities and kin, and so forth.

But an additional question we might ask is, even if practices such as prostitution or trafficking can be shown to have agentic elements, should we condone them as feminists? Or does the tragedy of these circumstances lie elsewhere, beyond the violation of rights, in the failing of society—and state—to provide economic opportunities for women? Sex work is objectionable from the social feminist perspective because it reflects an economic scarcity that makes sex work a lucrative trade compared

with paid employment in the private sector, which would make better use of women's education and prior work experience (Gulcur & Ilkkaracan, 2008). The preoccupation with individual choice continues to disproportionately shape feminist debates, but such a preoccupation distracts us from the social structures and practices that gender social life more broadly, and for more women.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than focusing on questions of agency and individual choice, or exploring how we might expand the definition of these concepts, we posit that there are many cultures in which women prefer to advocate for their own needs by advocating for a better society. Feminism in many industrialized nations over a broad stretch of modern history has emphasized a better life for women by investing in broadly shared social goals. In the following consideration of social feminism, we explore the nature of the trade-offs that women have made in return for social stability and social security, including the intrusion of the state into private lives, pressures to socialize children into middle-class values, and rigid gender role divisions—all of which are difficult to accept from the vantage point of traditional liberal or even socialist feminist ideals. We do not wish to put forward the possibility of an Eden in which women enjoy both state protections and also individual choice in all matters. Rather, our goal is to culturally contextualize women's preference for improvements in the social conditions of their lives—even when these come at the expense of individual autonomy.

In this article, we address two case studies of how women have conceptualized feminism and women's welfare in terms of the social good rather than in terms of individual autonomy: 1) women's role in child-rearing and domesticity; and 2) debates around abortion and family planning. In developing these cases, we first address a history of feminism as linked with nation-building in the social democracies more broadly—in hopes that such an analysis can move us beyond the customary distinction between “first world” and “third world” feminisms (Suchland, 2011). We locate the origins of social feminism in the mission to incorporate women into national agendas during the interwar period throughout the industrialized world as well as in the diverse mandates of early socialist feminism in the United States, which has subsequently faded or been absorbed by liberal and third world feminisms. We also briefly reflect back to earlier American socialist feminist traditions in order to show how their influence was considerably broader than is currently imagined. Indeed, these traditions were foundational to both early third world feminism and to liberal feminism (Horowitz, 2000; Weigland, 2002).

The beginnings of this exploration lie in our respective experiences as American feminists conducting extended ethnographic research in Japan (Borovoy), a social democracy modeled in some ways after the Western European statist regimes of the late nineteenth century, and in post-socialist Bulgaria (Ghodsee), a former People's Republic, now struggling to provide basic services amidst a radical and abrupt program of privatization. In the early 2000s we began to share ideas, finding that in both instances, the ways in which women conceptualized their goals—and feminism itself—did not accord with liberal discourses about the desirability of social, economic, and political autonomy for women. We also found important synergies between our observations and the critiques of

third world feminism that have shaped recent scholarship. In both cases, women linked improvement in the conditions of their own lives with broader social goods, though the provision of such social supports was often accompanied by conservative social values.

For example, Ghodsee's early research on women's labor in post-socialist Bulgaria revealed heated debates over whether the move to competitive labor markets would harm women (Ghodsee, 2005). One of the most important questions after 1989 was whether the Bulgarian government would keep its communist-era maternity leave policies. In the late 1990s, some Western and local feminist organizations, together with gender experts at the World Bank, argued that these maternity leave provisions handicapped women in competitive labor markets. (Liberal feminists feared that benefits would be detrimental to women's competitiveness and that employers would discriminate against women of childbearing age in order to avoid the inconvenience and expense of maternity benefits.) In contrast, Bulgarian women, together with many prominent politicians, argued that potential discrimination against women in the labor market was more tolerable than forcing women to choose between work and family. The liberal ideal that motherhood was an individual "choice," a private matter supported by individual means, and an "option" that one could forgo for the sake of career, was unthinkable in the Bulgarian context. Women argued that motherhood was a social contribution and thus it was the state's responsibility to facilitate women's dual roles. The resolution of the problem was highly symbolic in the post-socialist context. Despite severe fiscal constraints, Bulgarians opted to keep their maternity leaves, which remain among the most generous in the European Union.

Whereas the communists mobilized women as workers and mothers, the Japanese government since the early decades of modernization in the late 19th century, imagined a state in which women's labor was deployed at home, in the form of the socialization of patriotic youths, the promotion of literacy, public safety, and hygiene. Early in her career, Borovoy was participating in a cross-cultural reading circle with a group of transplanted Japanese housewives accompanying their husbands who had been transferred to the U.S. After reading selections together from Betty Friedan's 1963 manifesto, *The Feminist Mystique*, a number of members of the group commented that they didn't identify with the trivialization of the housewife in Friedan's text as preoccupied with interior decoration and fashion magazines. Middle and upper-middle class women imagined their roles to be intertwined with broader social goals; and they experienced their authority as mothers, rather than their desirability as erotic objects to their husbands, to be central to their role as housewives (Borovoy, 2001, 2005). The Japanese state continues to rely on women's work at home for supporting men's labor, facilitating education, and for elder care—so much so that women are finding it difficult to produce more than one child. In return, however, women's roles, particularly as mothers, are relatively more socially supported and socially sanctioned. For these reasons, in both instances, liberal feminism's call to economic autonomy and liberation from the family had limited appeal. While our two case studies are strikingly different in many respects, it was these observations from the field that led us to revisit the history of liberal

and socialist feminism, and to explore how our two cases fit with a broader pattern of social feminism in the industrialized world. In what follows we argue that revisiting this history and exploring the nature of the trade-offs will help to decenter liberal feminism and also to break down the divide between "first world" and "third world" feminisms.

### **Liberalism vs. cultural relativism: moving beyond current divides in feminist thought**

In many ways we are building on early critiques of liberal feminism emerging from third world feminists influenced by postcolonial theory. Those feminists were responding to a rather rigid environment of liberal feminism, which cherished the ideal of individual agency as the primary vantage point from which we should examine women's status and activism. In her famous essay, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for women," moral philosopher Susan Okin made this case in extreme terms, when she criticized the progressive agenda of the 1990s to provide state and social support for minority schools and services. Okin argued that religious and cultural minorities and immigrant groups often hold beliefs and practices that are antithetical to women's interests. Taking up lightning-rod issues such as bigamy, genital modification, harsh punishments for women's infidelity, veiling, and so forth, Okin argued that "culture" ("tradition," rituals, "personal law") is a particularly venal influence on individual rights, because it encroaches into the private sphere of family, sexuality, and reproduction. She wrote, "To the extent that ... culture is patriarchal...the healthy development of girls is endangered." For Okin, the single most important barometer of a good society is individual freedom—in Okin's words, "the right to be let alone" (Okin, 1997: 3) Culture is problematic because it controls women, and women's decisions, which do not involve "choice" are assumed, on the balance, to be detrimental (Okin, 1997: 4) Okin's work has in some way become the straw figure for those wishing to critique a certain kind of liberal feminism; her views have been the launching pad for a number of subaltern critiques of this feminism and have provoked a deep set of reflections concerning feminism and the postcolonial condition in the fields of anthropology, literary criticism, and history.

One of the most powerful and influential lines of argument in this regard is the work of scholars such as Saba Mahmood who can be taken to represent the cultural relativism side of the spectrum. Through an engagement with the revival of Islamic piety among women involved in the mosque movement in Cairo, Mahmood enjoins us to understand the internal logics and embodiment of belief that characterize this movement. She makes her case first by suggesting that moral sentiments such as modesty or devotion are often learned through ritual comportment; such "habituated learning" (Mahmood, 2001: 214) is different from the kind of forced submission to authority that scholars such as Okin imagine when they envision patriarchy and subordination. In approaching practices such as arranged marriage, veiling, and patriarchal family life, Mahmood argues for the compelling cultural logic of the notion of "*sabr*" among Egyptian women: their valuation of the capacity "to endure in the face of hardship without complaint" (Mahmood, 2001: 220). The virtues of modesty, divinity, virtue, and suffering have "lost

their value in the liberal imagination,” Mahmood argues, and it is our job as anthropologists to re-imagine how such virtues can constitute a form of women's agency and self-fulfillment.

Behind Mahmood's analysis is an analytically powerful thread of “third world feminism” which wrestles with the problem of women's agency in the context of patriarchal institutions—a tension, articulated early on by Gayatri Spivak. Spivak revealed the way in which capturing subaltern women's agency was a politically fraught project, caught between nostalgic representations of women's “willing” capitulation to patriarchal traditions and the contemporary theoretical search for modern forms of agency and intentionality (Spivak, 1988: 303).<sup>3</sup> Mahmood's (2001) challenge to liberal feminism and to anthropology is to decouple the notion of “agency” from its attending values of emancipation, subversion, resistance, and freedom (“the desire to be free from relations of subordination”). In her book, *The Politics of Piety*, she explains that she wants her work to speak back to “...the normative liberal assumptions about human nature... such as the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them...” (Mahmood, 2005: 5). In other words, Mahmood reveals the hidden assumptions behind liberal ideals, which take individual fulfillment and individual agency as a key mandate of feminism. Her argument allows us to imagine the possibility that women experience a sense of empowerment and even pleasure in relationships of subordination (what might otherwise have been seen as subjugating and conservative practices).

In many ways we follow on Mahmood here, though what we hope to offer is slightly different. Instead of scrutinizing practices that are known to be subordinating and helping those rooted in classical liberal thought to see them in ways that reveal forms of self-realization and dignity, we would like to direct attention to what we see as the real social gains for women that are achieved in certain instances through their immersion in community and family. We worry that one legacy of the “relativist” approach has been the juxtaposition between “oppression” and “subordination that can be empowering”—in the form of orthodoxy, arranged marriage, veiling, and so forth. Instead, we would like feminists to turn their attention to other forms of constraint which are quite common in industrial democracies, but which often accompany very real material and psychological goods that reach beyond individual self-realization.

### Revisiting social feminism and its antecedents

Social feminism is, in many ways, the product of a shared moment of social planning and nation building in the history of the industrialized world. It is not a coincidence that we find dominant strands of social feminism in widespread locales, including Western Europe, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and East Asia. Subsequently some of these areas influenced one another, transnationally. Japan, for example, looked to Germany and France in its initial bursts of modernization and industrialism and then imposed its influence in

East Asia during the period of colonization before and during World War II. Despite shifts and continuities that have occurred throughout the twentieth century, as well as national variations in social feminisms, dominant strands remain, and it is the United States that continues to be the outlier in its emphasis on “women's liberation” (Thébaud, 1994: 12). Historians have argued that the early part of the twentieth century, particularly the interwar period as nations mobilized for “total war and fierce competition,” had transformative effects on gender relations (Offen, 1995: 147). Statism in the industrialized and industrializing world of this period was preoccupied with social improvement and social integration—the building of the welfare state and the project of population control. Towards that end, the enfranchisement of women was central, and it is this moment that continues to define women's close relation to the state in many spheres outside the U.S.

In her overview of Western Europe during the First World War and interwar period, Françoise Thébaud argues that the war caused Western European nations to “sweep aside old distinctions between private and public, family and government, individuals and state” (Thébaud, 1994: 17). The projects of nation-building, “population improvement” (pronatalism, eugenics, etc.) and the war effort itself drew women into the service of the nation during the early part of the twentieth century, supporting them in unprecedented ways as mothers, workers, and public citizens, while in turn, binding them to conservative national agendas which often reinscribed the gendered division of labor. Family became a fundamental node of national mobilization. A myriad of state efforts were directed towards social improvement. The broad mandate of the population improvement programs that informed state policy in virtually all industrialized and industrializing nations during that time included a wealth of social initiatives to serve the needs of parents and children, addressing education, socialization, and hygiene.

During the early to mid-20th century era of war, nation building, and the newly emerging welfare state, modernization and economic development were the primary goals of the industrializing nations of Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Japan. The paradox of women's “liberation” in this period was that women became empowered as public citizens through their newly-emphasized role as mothers and keepers of the home (and, during wartime, as workers). Feminist calls for political equality focused on universal state-sponsored endowments for motherhood (in the form of child allowances and paid maternal leave) and on recognition of mothers' work as “productive” and “value-creating” (Bock, 1994; Stern, 1999a,b). This perspective of feminism-for-the-state was captured under such banners of “*femminismo sociale*” or “*femminismo pratico*” in Italy, in France as “*légalité dans la différence*,” and today in American feminist debates as “social feminism” or “difference feminism” (Bock, 1994; Folbre, 2001; Scott, 1988).

Women's newly-formed role as individual citizens loosened relations of patriarchal authority with respect to their husbands, but “rerouted” them through the line of authority consisting of “external agents of the state”—what Stern (1999a,b: 376), citing Jacques Donzelot, has referred to as the “reconfiguration of autonomy” (377). Women's new autonomy from men was accompanied by a host of new

protections, which served their interests: health care, judicial protections, and social assistance. The process was often accompanied by conservative social imperatives towards national improvement—including population improvement, hygiene, education, socialization, and sometimes a eugenic social policy—hardly reflecting an agenda of individual freedom or of liberation from the home (Cott, 1994; Thébaud, 1994). Recently historians and social scientists have described this feminist moment in early twentieth century in the industrializing world as the “nationalization of women”—a moment in which feminist agendas were brought strongly into line with the nation-building agendas of the state. Although the Eastern European socialist model, Western European social democratic model, and East Asian social democratic model each differed from one another significantly (the latter two continued to see family care as private), all believed that support for the home and women as mothers was essential to building the modern state (Wood, 1997). Whether we believe that feminists were co-opted (Stern, 1999a,b) or whether there was a more mutualistic relationship between state and society (Garon, 1997), it is clear that most international feminisms, in this formative era, emerged from a strong sense of immersion in the social as something in women's own self-interest, a point which is key to the argument we hope to develop further here.

It is important to remember that West European efforts to “nationalize” women carried lasting effects in the form of the post-World War II welfare state, and the emphasis on social stability and “planning” which resulted from the war's aftermath of chaos and poverty (Anxo, 2007; Judt, 2005). In industrial democracies both East and West (with the notable exception of the U.S.) political leaders interpreted the concept of “democracy” to mean less a focus on individual rights and more an emphasis on equal access to shared social goods: safety, well-being, and the protection of family through social insurance (unemployment insurance, welfare, pensions) and nationally endowed or regulated services such as health care and education.

Not surprisingly, it was primarily in the United States (where the call to social feminism was more muted due to Cold War politics) (Cott, 1994), that the liberal agenda of “women's lib” emerged as a dominant strand of second-wave feminism. In the U.S. context, “emancipated womanhood” grew out of a family sphere walled off from society: an eroticized, psychologized, and consumerist domestic unit, independent of national goals, rooted instead in emotional ties and the project of self-realization (Cott, 1994; Thébaud, 1994; Zaretsky, 1986). Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* captured this privatized aspect of American femininity and condemned it. In its trivialization of the domestic sphere as an inherently parochial, inward-looking, apolitical space, focused on cleaning, interior decorating, and commodity acquisition, the book spoke chiefly to American audiences where women had not benefitted from the types of public protections available to wives and mothers in other developed capitalist or socialist countries (Borovoy, 2001).

The critique of Western liberal feminism is often understood as having emerged from third world and minority feminists in the 1980s (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002/1981; Spivak, 1988), but it has a much longer and more diverse history. We can see the operations of this critique in other cultural

contexts by examining feminist discourses in the non-postcolonial contexts of countries in Eastern Europe and East Asia. Even in the United States, the so-called mainstream white women's movement of the 1970s has been misunderstood as more homogeneous than it was. Although a particular version of second wave feminism became inscribed in the popular imagination, a closer inspection of the historical record shows a wide diversity of experiences and positions among white women of that period. Indeed, some have argued that socialist feminism had a broader influence on mainstream feminism than has previously been accounted for, and today prominent feminist scholars like Nancy Fraser continue to press for more socially conscious forms of organizing (Fraser, 2004; Fraser & Naples, 2004).

In the past, many U.S. socialist feminists distanced themselves from Marxist feminism because they felt they could not privilege class identity above racial, gender or sex identities and because the reality of East European communist regimes in the 20th century seemed to require that social goods could only be pursued at the expense of individual freedoms (Horowitz, 2000; Weigland, 2002). In an early instantiation of what is now talked about as “intersectionality,” some socialist feminists refuted the economic reductionism of what Barbara Ehrenreich called the “mechanical Marxists” who always privileged class identities. As a result, these socialist feminists found themselves in an uneasy position between the American Marxists of the New Left and the U.S. women's movement, trying to find a balance between the need to challenge the structural forces that oppress women (capitalism and patriarchy) without undermining the demand for core liberal freedoms (e.g. Ferguson, 1999; Fraser, 2009; Gardiner, 2002, 2008; Holmstrom, 2002, 2003; Kennedy, 2008; McRobbie, 2004; Weigland, 2002).

What we wish to emphasize is that “second wave feminism” should not be reduced to liberal feminism; it had far-reaching tentacles and a good deal of breadth. Its concerns went beyond class equality to broader social equality, global equality, support for statism, and the valuation of institutions such as family, care work, and unwaged reproductive labor. Socialist feminism was also one foundation for what later emerged as “Third World” feminism. (Fraser, 2009). For example, Chandra Mohanty (1991), a key third world feminist critic who drew attention to the predicament of colonialism for feminists in the 1990s, called attention to the privileging among first world feminists of individual political freedoms over social stability, community, public safety, environmental protection, and economic support (“the right to shelter”) (Volpp, 2001). In her famous essay, “Under Western Eyes,” Mohanty powerfully argued that it was ethnocentric to view institutions such as family, tradition, religion, and local culture chiefly in terms of how they were binding, “backwards” and entrapping for third world women (Mohanty, 1991: 56). Indeed, Mohanty argued that attaching oneself to the home could be construed as a privilege for third world or minority women who have had little voice in our feminist discourse. (Similar arguments have been made about poor or lower-middle class white American women.) Subsequently Mohanty has argued for a return to such shared feminist concerns in the face of threats posed to contemporary women by poverty, the dismantling of welfare states, and environmental degradation brought about by unregulated

capitalism. Indeed, numerous writers have called for moving beyond the postmodern impasse of liberalism vs. third world feminism, which, in Seyla Benhabib's (1994) words, "fails us by undermining the normative principles around which identity-transcending group solidarities would have to be formed."

### **Women's empowerment through maternalism and the nationalization of the family**

Both the Bulgarian and Japanese experiments with socialism and social democracy (respectively) are powerful examples of the ways in which the agenda of women's empowerment has been imagined and enacted through the formation of social security and social protections. In both cases women's status was an explicit aspect of both feminist politics and national modernization agendas. Although the two nations took notably different paths, both emphasized a better life for women through support for the family or the broader common good. In both cases shared social institutions were seen as integral; and in both cases, "liberation" (suffrage, political voice, and a broader social role) came about through a closer reliance on the state. In short, women's "independence" and status came about through an emphasis on family and a strong social safety net, which promoted a stable society and broad-based social equality. Even in communist Bulgaria, the wage was not imagined as the solitary foundation of women's equality; rather, particularly in the decades immediately following World War II, it was the nationalization of the home that was seen to ensure women's status. Finally, in both cases, the home was explicitly seen as integral to public life; thus women's "independence" came not from escaping the home (as in American second wave feminism) but rather in seeking support for making a social contribution through one's work as a wife and mother, and in the Eastern Europe case, combining this with work for wages.

In general, twentieth century communist governments emphasized women's equality through labor force participation. They were particularly radical in their notion that emancipation for women (through economic equality) meant neither freedom from social constraints nor autonomy—but rather the nationalization of the most intimate spheres of home and childcare and women's participation as workers in producing shared social assets (Gal & Kligman, 2000; Ghodsee, 2004; Navailh, 1994; Verdery, 1996; Wood, 1997). To achieve these ends, socialist states attempted to socialize domestic work as much as possible, creating public canteens, laundries, and a wide network of child care facilities. Marxist-Leninist concerns for the equality of men and women played a large role in the practical reshaping of gender relationships in socialist society (Gal & Kligman, 2000; Ghodsee, 2004; Guenther, 2010; Haney, 2002), and women's labor had little to do with careerism, choice, or self-realization.

The example of socialist Bulgaria provides some insight into the process of reimagining the family as a public, rather than as a quintessentially private, institution. Bulgaria was a small, independent nation which had been allied with the Germans during WWII. Advancing Russian troops swept the Bulgarian communist partisans into power. After 1945, a new socialist constitution guaranteed Bulgarian women

full equality with men in all aspects of public life, and the Bulgarian Popular Women's Union conducted a widespread literacy campaign targeting rural women. Women gained equal access to expanding educational opportunities and were fully incorporated into the formal labor force. As paid workers, women had rights to all of the benefits of formal employment: their own wages and pensions, access to personal credit through workplace cooperative savings schemes, paid holidays, access to enterprise-owned hotels and camps, and so forth. At the same time, the communist state liberalized divorce laws, expanded free access to abortion, and created special supports for single mothers (Ghodsee, 2004).

By the mid-1960s, however, many European countries were confronted with negative birth rates at a time when continued industrialization required an expanding workforce. The Bulgarian government was concerned, and instituted a generous new system of maternity leaves that linked the interests of family life to women's paid employment. It encouraged women to stay home with their young children for up to two years, with the option of an additional unpaid year. A woman maintained her status of employment, and the time spent on maternity leave was considered labor service toward her pension. She also continued to enjoy of the social entitlements provided by her place of employment, which benefited her family: access to recreational facilities, housing, canteens, kindergartens, and so forth. In 1971, Bulgaria was the first socialist country to enshrine the right to maternity leave as a constitutional principle (Vidova, Abadjieva, & Gancheva, 1983). Moreover, if the woman preferred to return to work early, she had the right to sign over her maternity leave provisions to her husband, her mother or her mother-in-law (or other designated family member), and these family members were also guaranteed the right to use the remainder of her paid leave.

The anthropologist Katherine Verdery (1996) has argued that the socialist model was successful in lessening women's economic dependence on men, because it made both men and women equally dependent on the state. States of the former Eastern bloc nations transferred authority away from the household and cultivated a "quasi-familial" dependency on the state, what Verdery describes as "socialist paternalism." Rather than promoting citizenship through the granting of political rights or the acknowledgment of ethnocultural similarities, socialist paternalism encouraged a moral tie that bound subjects to the state through their right "to a share in the redistributed social product" (63). Both family and wage labor offered a roster of entitlements that made the politics of women's empowerment shift away from a politics of independence, autonomy, and resistance and towards a politics of the social: producing a better life for women through social involvement (through labor and child-rearing), social entitlement, and a closer reliance on the state. Citizenship was not realized through the exercise of political rights like voting or free speech, but rather citizenship was experienced through labor participation and the social entitlements that came with being a productive member of society.

While the Bulgarian situation did not always provide free choices for women, the politics of feminism and resistance are more complex here than the traditional "liberalism vs. multiculturalism" debate will allow—and force us to consider how women weigh the trade-offs between individual

autonomy on one side and social security and state paternalism on the other. Clearly, centrally planned communist states like Bulgaria had many downsides and inefficiencies; there were shortages of consumer goods, travel restrictions, police surveillance and limits on human rights like freedom of religion, speech, and assembly. Social security could often come at the price of political autocracy. Nevertheless these trade-offs were apparently tolerable enough that when market reforms were implemented in a sweeping way throughout Eastern Europe, many women, though not all, took anti-reformist positions and today many former socialist citizens are nostalgic for the centrally planned past (Ghodsee, 2004, 2011a). Many post-socialist women have been dubious about the introduction of liberal freedoms because they are seen to be incommensurate with the social entitlements once enjoyed under the old system. While Eastern European countries like Bulgaria theoretically could have pursued a more social democratic path to free markets and liberal democracy, the Western desire to completely dismantle communism meant that East European welfare states stood little chance to try to forge their own balance between individual rights and the common good (Ghodsee, 2011b; Wedel, 2001).

The case of industrializing Japan is another interesting example of a feminist politics that has often traded the promise of individual liberation for a more broadly conceptualized politics of the social. The drive to modernize in Japan and the preoccupation with “catching up with the West” in the late 19th and early twentieth century produced an intense focus on the home and community—so much so that government bureaucrats spoke explicitly and poetically about the necessity of stay-at-home mothers as a building block for a strong society (they called these women “good wives and wise mothers” (*ryōsai kenbo*) (Nolte & Hastings, 1991). Whereas the communists in Bulgaria transformed the domestic sphere by sending women out to work and socializing domestic work, the Japanese made the home a constituent enterprise in the rapid expansion of industrialization. Rather than nationalize social care, the government provided only minimal nationalized benefits, preferring instead to mobilize middle-class women to help manage children's education and men's industriousness and produce the social values conducive to modern industriousness and social cohesion.

Women's emergence into social and political life in the early to mid-twentieth century came about through their roles as wives and mothers. This trend crystallized after the war and continued through the high-growth decades, as middle-class families had increasing resources to permit women to stay at home. Furthermore, family was central to the public agendas of nation-building in the years of modernization and increasingly during the mobilization for war in the mid-twentieth century. Nation-building endeavors pushed them into the public sphere through public hygiene initiatives, savings campaigns, philanthropy, patriotism, education, and public safety. It is this involvement that has provoked some historians to comment that the home itself was understood as “in service to the state” and that women in their roles as wives and mothers functioned as quasi civil servants. Moving into the postwar years, women were recognized as public citizens and became increasingly influential in social and political life through their roles—indeed as an extension of their roles—as wives and mothers (e.g. Borovoy,

2005, 2010a; Garon, 1997: 359–360; Gordon, 1997, LeBlanc, 1999; Vogel, 1988; White, 1992).

After the war, through a system known variously as “corporate welfare,” “convoy capitalism,” and “stakeholder capitalism” (Schoppa, 2006), the Japanese government help set up a system of guarantees which supported men as wage-earners and bolstered employment stability by supporting companies largely with bank loans rather than forcing them to rely on shareholder investment. The system created a platform in which companies would weather economic volatility and in which the single-wage earner model became viable for a growing middle class. In turn, Japanese middle-class women made home the center of their world, investing in husbands' productivity, local community work, and children's education. The home became a “satellite sphere” to corporate productivity and upward mobility via children's educational achievement (Borovoy, 2005, 2010a; Gordon, 1997, Vogel, 1988). This mandate was explicit: the Japanese Home Ministry and Ministry of Education, as early as the mid-1950s, developed a program to train women to be more modern homemakers through the rationalization of housework and reliance on labor-saving devices, explicitly linking this to increased productivity in a husband's next-day's work (Gordon, 1997). The home, imagined as a quintessentially bourgeois sphere in much American feminist theory, was significantly de-privatized and discursively constructed as integral to both national community and industrial productivity.

In the Japanese case, although women have not achieved financial autonomy, the domestic sphere became a source of economic and social stability for middle-class women. Their sense of economic vulnerability was diminished for two reasons: 1) women's work in the home was recognized as necessary for husbands' productivity; and 2) the home was primarily a sphere of productivity and reproductivity, wherein the importance of women's erotic desirability to their husbands was diminished. (This was strengthened by a tradition of commoditized extra-marital “play” represented by the Japanese tradition of geisha and hostessing, which has been integral to corporate capitalism) (Allison, 1991). Japanese marital love was rooted in a shared division of labor (in contrast with the notion of a partnership rooted in shared interests or shared social life). As a result, women were less likely to fear being abandoned by their husbands and were less vulnerable to their romantic whims. With the home a somewhat less eroticized and less commoditized sphere, “liberation” from the home was a less compelling feminist agenda; simultaneously, the importance of social supports for family to women's wellbeing was powerful. A similar story could be told of the socialist scenario in which the call for women to work alongside of men diminished the traditional polarity of gender roles; marriage emphasized companionship and women's sense of dependency and vulnerability was directed towards the state rather than towards a husband (Verdery, 1996).

In both societies, prominent strands of women's activism have concerned themselves with building women's status through support for domestic work, the building of a stable middle-class, social safety nets, and the facilitation of shared values. While some academic and policy-oriented feminists have mobilized for equal opportunity in the workplace, this strand has self-consciously differentiated itself from American

liberal feminists who assumed that working for wages would mean “liberation.” In a famous essay published in 1998, Japan's most widely-cited feminist scholar, Ueno Chizuko, warned that the push towards full-time labor for women would mean the “double shift” for women; she argued that “women's liberation” should entail an equal or greater emphasis on pushing men towards involvement in domestic tasks. Grass-roots women's activism has focused chiefly on involving women in meaningful social labor (organic shops, environmentalism, etc.), and cultural feminists have pointed out that motherhood empowers Japanese women through self-sacrifice and “innocence” (*junsui muku*), protecting them from social disenfranchisement and from sexual objectification (Asai, 1990). Socialist women also recognized that the socialization of housework did not always reduce the double burden; by the late 1970s and 1980s the socialist women's organization in Bulgaria began actively encouraging men to do their fair share of domestic work as part of their duty as socialist citizens.

In recent years, however, both Japan and Bulgaria have been among the countries with the lowest birth rates in the world. From one point of view, these “birth strikes” might be interpreted as a silent protest against a lack of equal opportunities for women in the workplace and an uneven distribution of domestic work in the home (and indeed this is the dominant way that it has been represented in the American mass media.) Yet they can also be seen as a protest against the shrinking of social safety nets and the lack of state support for women's roles as mothers. While the former is a matter of equality interpreted as “sameness” among individuals and across genders, the latter is a matter of providing access to shared social resources that can support responsible parenting.

In Japan, young women consistently express the desire to marry and have children. While only 9% state that they prefer to remain childless, 25% remain childless into their early forties (Schoppa, 2008, 2010). Women increasingly choose to delay starting a family, forestalling the opportunity costs of leaving the workforce and ultimately limiting their fertility to only one child (Schoppa, 2010: 423–424). Recent studies of the roadblocks to labor force participation continuity among Japanese women suggest that women lack the supports necessary to meet both home life and work life obligations (Hewlett, Sherbin, Fredman, Ho, & Sumberg, 2011). These studies point to a demand for access to day care. (The Japanese government subsidizes excellent facilities, but they are over-subscribed and the government restricts immigration for domestic labor) (Hewlett et al., 2011: 27–31; Roberts, 2002; Schoppa, 2010). An old adage contends that children are best cared for by their own mothers until the age of three, and the majority of children in that age bracket continue to be cared for at home (Schoppa, 2010: 430).<sup>4</sup> Adding to the mix is the decline in corporate welfare and work-life stability for men since the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in the early 1990s (LeBlanc, 2008: 12–13, 2009; 2010). Japanese firms' commitment to the family wage during the high-growth era was the supporting platform for women's investments in the home. As firms protect their mid-ranks by cutting back on hiring, young men take longer to establish themselves professionally. In turn, the “housewife trajectory” for middle-class women has become significantly less viable

(Borovoy, 2010b: 72; Yamada, 1999, 170, 173–175). Some have argued that the growing number of young women who choose to live with their parents as young adults (known as “parasite singles”) betrays a “new variety” of middle-class housewife ambition (Yamada, 1999: 84–85). That is, one could argue that far from rebelling against traditional values, these women are attempting to preserve their middle-class lifestyle by turning all their income into disposable income, while awaiting a viable spouse.

Similarly, the dismantling of Bulgaria's social safety net after 1989 is largely to blame for the ongoing demographic crisis (Kovacheva, 2008, Pamporov, 2008, Vassilev, 2006). After the economic changes in 1989, the once extensive state system of kindergartens and maternity supports imploded.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the dire lack of urban crèches and kindergartens has been a longstanding complaint of many women in Bulgaria after 1989, and was the subject of occasional popular protests in Sofia and Varna. Interestingly, however, the lack of childcare is not coded as a “women's issue” in Bulgaria, but part of a larger societal crisis that must be remedied. For instance, local women's organizations rarely include the expansion of childcare facilities among their advocacy efforts, preferring instead to focus on issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking in women. In summary, the evidence suggests that Japanese and Bulgarian women both continue to value motherhood, but perceive that they do not have the resources to do it well.

### Family planning

Another example of women prioritizing the social can be seen in debates about family planning in Bulgaria and Japan. Indeed, exploring the fraught debate around abortion in non-U.S. contexts provides a powerful window into how the liberal emphasis on “choice” captures only one narrow aspect of what is stake for women in this issue. The polarization of the conversation in the U.S. at present affords little room for the discussion of broader social goals, instead pitting women's “rights” or “choice” against the “right to life” or integrity of the fetus—a debate which has become highly unsatisfying to many reproductive health care providers, politicians, feminists, and ethicists alike.

The terms of this debate are hardly universal among industrialized nations. Neither the “pro-choice” nor the “pro-life” rhetoric captures issues that are central to the decisions made concerning abortion policy elsewhere: the perceived necessity of abortion towards social ends. In many societies, including France, Germany, Canada, Japan, and the Eastern European post-socialist nations, abortion is tolerated as a means to promoting certain shared social values, following on the notion that child-rearing is central to producing a good society, that children respond to the resources and care they are provided with, and, in the Eastern European (and formerly East German context), that it is necessary for improving the compatibility of employment and motherhood. This notion of abortion as a “social” necessity differs from the notion of abortion as a “right”—and diminishes the dividing lines between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” positions.

The case of Japan is not unusual in the context of social democracies or post-socialist nations. Abortion is legal, and the voices that militantly take up the “pro-life” cause are

limited to relatively marginal social and religious movements, some of which have been influenced by American evangelical Christian discourse (Hardacre, 1999). In much of Eastern Europe, where abortion has long been regarded as necessary for balancing work and family, there are few voices speaking out from what in the U.S. is understood as a “pro-life” perspective (with Catholic Poland being an important exception). Similarly, the “pro-choice” notion of legitimizing abortion based on women’s “right to choose” has been emphasized in certain feminist circles, but it has not emerged as a widespread social movement or as specifically linked to feminist politics in most industrialized countries outside the U.S., except in specific moments in which that right has been threatened or jeopardized (as, for example, under German reunification).

An emerging literature on birth control, family planning, and pregnancy in Japan suggests that what has defined attitudes towards abortion on the part of the state and citizens alike is a shared social concern for “family planning.” The history of abortion in Japan is closely entwined with modernizing social objectives: producing a “planned family,” a strong society, and powerful nation (Frühstück, 2007; Hardacre, 1999; Ivry, 2006, 2007, 2010; LaFleur, 1990, 1992; Lock, 1998). As in many industrializing nations, there was considerable overlap between family planning practices and eugenic national policies. In the 18th century infanticide was carried out for reasons of poverty and food shortage but also with the assistance of midwives, with the aim of creating “small, healthy, and economically productive families” (Lock, 1998: 217–218). National eugenic concerns culminated with the passage of the National Eugenic Law (*Kokumin Yūsei Hō*), which legalized abortion in 1940 and simultaneously opened the way for enacting coercive eugenic platforms.<sup>6</sup> Eventually a clause was added to this law permitting abortion for reasons of economic hardship, fully legalizing abortion, and this remains the chief legal sanction for abortion (Coleman, 1983; Norgren, 2001). The eugenic article of the law was eventually removed in 1986 after a long history of debate and controversy, and the new law was renamed the Maternal Body Protection Law.<sup>7</sup>

Although fetal selection for eugenic purposes is regarded as taboo among most obstetricians and many women themselves, it is nonetheless important to note that pregnancy and childbirth are still regarded as social concerns. In her overview of attitudes towards genetic testing and the new reproductive technologies, Lock finds that a family would likely feel uncomfortable screening a first child or seeking to create through technology the “perfect child”; nonetheless, in the case of one family whom she interviews, having had one disabled child, they would feel comfortable terminating a second pregnancy which looked abnormal, on the premise that caring for both the children would be unfeasible (Lock, 1998). Prenatal care regimens are highly intrusive (Ivry, 2007, 2010), and concerns for quality of care also keep the incidence of birth out-of-wedlock exceptionally low in Japan (Hertog, 2009).

Abortion and the values associated with childrearing are not antithetical, in part because there is no presumption of the mutual autonomy of fetus and mother. A mother’s decision to terminate a pregnancy is conceptualized less explicitly as a matter of “rights,” “choice,” or women’s liberation—

but rather as a matter of responsibility as a parent (LaFleur, 1990: 535). While this is hardly a feminist victory when conceptualized in terms of women’s liberation from traditional gender roles (and many feminists in Japan have pointed out just that), and furthermore the high number of abortions performed is far from ideal (Hardacre, 1999, Norgren, 2001), it is, nonetheless a formulation of abortion that acknowledges the demands of parenthood. Maternalism in Japan, in other words, has brought about a reconciliation with the necessity of abortion through concern for social welfare, thus allowing “fetal life” to be compatible with the moral acceptability of its termination (Borovoy, 2011: 74–76).

This compatibility between family and abortion rights is not unique to Japan. German law, despite its traditional emphasis on the sanctity of fetal life, sanctions abortion as a matter of “protection” for women—the responsibility of the German state to care for German families. In Canada, just across the U.S. border, abortion falls under the mandate of universal provision of health care. Western European law more broadly emphasizes public health and humanitarian justifications for the practice of abortions: the social costs of unwanted pregnancy, health risks to women, the psychic toll of raising unwanted children, and the state’s positive obligation to protect women (Marx Ferree, 2003: 314–318; Outshoorn, 1996; Studlar & Tatalovich, 1996, 78–82; in the context of Russia, see Rivkin-Fish, 2004: 283–287, 2011). Pragmatic concerns for social equality, social welfare, and family stability limit the impact of fundamentalism or rights-based discourse. In contrast, *Roe v. Wade*, the American law which currently protects women’s unconditional access to a first-trimester abortion, stands out for its commitment to abortion as a “negative liberty”—the right of women to be left alone, to make a “private” decision in the absence of the state’s concern, and, correspondingly, in the absence of its support (Saletan, 2004).

In Eastern Europe, where religion has posed little opposition, access to abortion has primarily been sanctioned in relation to the demands of women’s labor force participation (with the most notable exceptions being Poland after 1989, Romania before 1989 and the USSR under Stalin (Rivkin-Fish, 2011: 410; Kligman, 1998)). Like many Eastern European nations, the Bulgarian Communist Party began to implement pronatalist policies in the late 1960s, fearing demographic decline. An American legal review of abortion laws in 1967 listed Bulgaria (together with the USSR and Hungary) as the three most liberal states with regards to abortion (Roemer, 1967). Yet it is significant that the policies implemented sought to increase the total fertility rate only so far as could be managed while preserving social stability and economic welfare. The new policies were aimed at encouraging women to have more children, however, abortion continued to be available for all unmarried women, all women over forty, and all married women with two children. Unlike Romanians to the North whose pronatalism went to the extreme, the Bulgarians considered quality as important as quantity when it came to the production of children.

Significantly, the Bulgarian government allowed abortions for women who had adopted children, who had older children from previous marriages or were caring for the children of relatives, noting, “The main thing is that the mother is taking motherly care of them while more children in the

family would entail difficulties” (Vidova et al., 1983: 56; also see Carlson & Omori, 1998). In return, the government placed an emphasis on encouraging married couples with less than two children to procreate, under the premise that these were the people best posed to accept the responsibility of raising children. Even while facing a demographic crisis, the Bulgarian government recognized that forcing a family which already had two children to have a third would entail particular hardships, and that unwanted children would be a burden to the society as a whole, whose responsibility it ultimately was to educate and employ all children. Although the government encouraged women to have three-child families, abortions were readily available to any woman caring for two. As a result, the carrot of maternity benefits and child allowances increased with each child up to three, but were considerably reduced for any children born after the third.

The pattern of abortions in Bulgaria shows the long lasting impact of the state's intervention in individual fertility decisions.<sup>8</sup> Under communism, women had an incentive to marry young and have children as soon as possible in order to qualify for independent housing and generous newlywed payments granted by the state. (The existence of maternity leaves and a vast network of crèches and kindergartens made this easy to achieve, as did the lower retirement age for grandmothers who could help look after the children.) Abortion rates were highest among married women with one or two children. In the context of Bulgaria, discussion about abortion access has not been framed in terms of fetal rights, but rather in terms of population decline and the “demographic death” of the Bulgarian nation. Abortion politics in Bulgaria and elsewhere in Eastern Europe,<sup>9</sup> as in Japan, are to a significant degree less about the rights of individual women and more about social concerns for women's health and the need to provide the social supports for healthy and well-cared-for children.

## Conclusion

U.S. abortion politics when seen from the vantage point of other industrialized societies show us that both the liberal “pro-choice” positions and conservative “pro-life” positions have failed to address the arduousness of parenting and the social contributions and responsibilities of the family unit more broadly. The “choice” rhetoric, in particular, obscures the issue of why women decide to terminate their pregnancies in the first place. Indeed, the image of the typical abortion client as a sexually promiscuous teenager with little sense of remorse is increasingly coming into question: most abortion cases are women who have a high school education or more, who already have one child, and who are economically unstable. Abortion is most often not felt as a matter of freedom and carefree “choice.” It is a decision that is motivated by social constraints, and it is often a decision motivated by the need to prioritize the care of already existing dependents. (61% of American women who procure abortions are already parents of at least one child; 69% are economically disadvantaged [Franke-Ruta, 2005; Guttmacher Institute, 2012]). Indeed, while the majority of abortions were once performed on white, middle-class women, recent statistics show that increasingly abortion has become the domain of

economically disenfranchised women.<sup>10</sup> The question that emerges is to what extent are women's liberties being protected by focusing disproportionately on the freedom to choose—in the absence of other protections including subsidized daycare, job security, social assistance, quality public education, universal health care and so forth? The feminist politics of “choice,” while perhaps necessary, is not sufficient and would seem to have substantially short-changed American women.

Using the examples of Japan and Bulgaria, this article has briefly explored two cultural contexts in which women accept the social constraints imposed by the state and constituent institutions into their lives, conceding certain freedoms when these concessions lead to the attainment of shared social goods. The language of agency has been a productive anchor for feminist scholarship—whether that signifies women's freedom of action or, as in some feminisms, culturally sanctioned forms of social submission. Yet what is downplayed in this debate, and what we hope to contribute, is the importance that many women and feminist movements have accorded to advancing women's position through advancing social welfare more broadly. As socialist and third world feminists have so often noted, “choice” has little meaning in a context in which the material conditions of people's lives determine what must be done.

Nancy Fraser (2009, 2011, 308–309) has suggested that the burgeoning of religious fundamentalism in the United States and elsewhere reflects the defeat of socialist ideals and the impoverishment of utopian social ideals on the part of the left. In the wake of the discrediting of state socialist regimes, the left now lacks a language for imagining shared meanings, values, and the “good life.” Between liberal democracy and religious fundamentalism (two extremes often pitted against each other) lies a void, which Fraser warns, the left has failed to fill with a secular set of unifying and motivating social ends. In some ways, feminism too seems caught in this ideological vacuum.

Critiques of liberal feminism have been difficult to launch, and individual rights, while crucial, too easily become a trump card for defining the good society. Radical relativism has been a powerful rhetorical antidote to this trend. Yet as we look around the world, we see that a consensus, while hard-fought and contested, exists in many societies around social care and family values. Often battles conceptualized in terms of rights in the U.S., such as family planning and social protections for mothers are conceptualized in terms of connections between child-rearing, family, and the broader social good. Indeed abortion is not a highly politicized issue in much of the industrialized world because “right” and “left” have reached hard-fought compromises between the desire to protect women's welfare and family welfare and the desire to protect unborn life.

More broadly, most societies have made accommodations to socially-supported motherhood, whether this is through a modified “mommy track” (Holland, Germany), a viable single-wage for middle-class families (Japan until recently), or nationalized childcare as in the post-socialist and northern European welfare states. Again, the U.S. stands out as a society that imagines child-rearing to be largely a private matter, which each must carry out according to his or her means.

The trade-offs of these compromises are clear. The corporatist system that attempts to protect Japanese middle-class women through the single wage also condemns them to economic dependence, and regards motherhood as a woman's highest calling. Politics that privilege the social good are often conservative in nature, paternalistic, and family-oriented with a particular vision of "family." As demonstrated in the Bulgarian context, the state can be heavy-handed in co-opting opposition and pressuring citizens into accepting homogenizing or repressive social agendas: concerns about "population quality" and pronatalism, hypernationalism, and mild to substantial forms of political autocracy.

Yet, in the current geopolitical climate of global recession, the dismantling of welfare states, and shrinking public budgets for basic services—all of which are failing the middle class and failing middle-class and poor women in particular—perhaps it is time to explore these trade-offs in a more rigorous way and to move beyond the customary divides. What we are proposing is perhaps in some ways harder than turning the gaze to third world "others" who arguably accept certain cultural forms, which appear to liberals as oppressive. We can live and let live if we expand our definitions of agency sufficiently. Ironically, the "family values" that many women in the industrialized world live with have been as hard or harder for some feminists to accept than "veiling" and more seemingly exotic forms of feminine oppression.

But in the context of an increasingly global and unregulated market economy, we are faced with difficult choices. The solution proposed by second wave feminists in the mid-twentieth century to advocate for women's wage labor in return for psychological and financial autonomy was only ever a partial solution. The problem of who will care for family continues to disproportionately affect women, and the dismantling of the welfare state in the U.S. now requires even poor women to outsource their childcare so that they are not rendered "dependents." In a recent interview, Nancy Fraser warned of feminism's romance with "women's wage labor and women's entrepreneurship" and the dangers of market-based solutions to women's poverty such as microenterprise (2011: 310). While such solutions promise greater "choice" and independence for women (and sometimes deliver it) and increasingly capture public attention as a market-based way of doing social good, they often occur in the context of states that are committed to cutting services to the poor (310).

On February 18th, 2012, the *New York Times* reported that for the first time, the majority of children born to U.S. women under 30-years-old were born out of wedlock.<sup>11</sup> Such a statistic might be seen as evidence of women's newfound "autonomy": women no longer rely on men financially to raise children. But it may also be evidence of the absence of supports that would make marriage more sustainable, including expanded employment opportunities for men. And how should we evaluate a single mother's autonomy in the absence of subsidized child care, declining public education, and limited subsidies for private health care insurance? Support for families is necessary for women's welfare, and such support must inevitably come with a measure of acceptance of women's differentness and their need for social protection—as it does in the case studies we have outlined here. Perhaps these are the trade-offs that feminists should consider when trying to think our way out of the bind in which we find

ourselves. There can be a feminism that sees women's interests as aligned with broader, shared social goods.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Communist governments had little success in encouraging men to take up any of the housework or child care, preferring instead to socialize all domestic labor. The authors are also well aware that we are operating in a primarily heteronormative framework, but this is the dominant framework in our respective field sites.

<sup>2</sup> As another example, genital cutting may in many instances be coerced, but it simultaneously provides the foundations for social integration and social stability for many women, allowing them entry into a world of kin-based and economic support and protecting them from pervasive poverty that would oppress them in different ways.

<sup>3</sup> In this classic essay, Spivak (1988) disputes the notion of widow-burning as "choice," while simultaneously revealing its cultural construction as a "reward" and form of martyrdom and virtue for women (in contrast with colonial narratives of sati as a form of punishment or self-abnegation).

<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, government officials refrain from clear platforms which support childrearing fearing that they will be perceived as pronatalist—a label that harkens back to wartime slogans to reproduce for the sake of the nation (*umeyō, fuyaseyō*) (Schoppa, 2010: 429).

<sup>5</sup> In 1980, there were 1151 public crèches offering 77,369 places for children under the age of three. By 2003, there were only 637 crèches offering 21,542 places, a 45% decrease in the number of facilities (Mihova, 2007: 225).

<sup>6</sup> The law was revised as the Eugenic Protection Law (*Nihon Yūsei Hogo-Hō*) in 1948.

<sup>7</sup> The new law states, "The articles of the former Eugenics Protection Law issued in Shōwa 23 [1948], which were aimed at preventing the birth of people with inferior heredity...are offensive and discriminatory toward the disabled. Therefore, the regulations that are [based on] eugenic ideology are canceled" (*Kōshū Eisei Hōsoku IV*: 141), (Ivry, 2006: 445). The birth control pill was not legalized and made widely available in Japan until June 1999 (Norgren, 2001: 103–130).

<sup>8</sup> The demographic of elective pregnancy termination differs accordingly between Bulgaria and Western European countries. In Western Europe, abortion rates are highest among single women with no stable partner, women who choose to terminate their pregnancy for individual reasons. In Bulgaria, the average age of women seeking abortions is 30 (Stoyanova & Richardus, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> In Russia, for instance, a study of contemporary reproductive health care shows how health providers construct access to abortion, sex education, and home birth as projects to "improve the nation's health in its physical and spiritual (moral) dimensions and to revive traditional families"—rather than as women's right to bodily integrity (Rivkin-Fish, 2004: 282). In part this agenda represents an endeavor to tiptoe around those pronatalists who blame family planning for national decline (285). However, in part this is also a mandate to provide family planning in a context in which access to abortion has not always entailed health promotion for women and in which women often complain of inadequate supports: cramped housing, part-time work options, and helpful husbands.

<sup>10</sup> Although they account for roughly 30% of the population, minorities represented fully 59% of women getting abortions in 2000 (Franke-Ruta, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> "For Women under 30, Most Births Occur Outside Marriage." *New York Times*, February 12, 2012. Online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/18/us/for-women-under-30-most-births-occur-outside-marriage.html?scp=15&sq=pregnant&st=cse>.

## References

- Allison, Anne (1991). Japanese mothers and obentōs: The lunch-box as ideological state apparatus. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 64(4), 195–208.
- Anxo, Dominique (2007). Patterns of labour market investigation in Europe—A life course perspective on time policies. *Socio-Economic Review*, 5, 233–260.
- Asai, Michiko (1990). *Kindai Kazoku Gensō Kara no Kaihō o Mezashite* [Towards thinking through illusions of the modern family]. In Yumiko Ehara (Ed.), *Feminizumu Ronsō: 70 Nendai kara 90 nendai e* [Feminist debates: From the 70s to the 90s]. Tokyo: Keisō Publishers.

- Benhabib, Seyla (1994). *From identity politics to social feminism: A plea for the nineties*. Philosophy of education.
- Bock, Gisela (1994). Poverty and mothers' rights in the emerging welfare states. In Georges Duby, & Michelle Perrot (Eds.), *A history of women in the west* (pp. 406–426). Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Borovoy, Amy (2001). Not a doll's house: Public uses of domesticity in Japan. *U.S. Japan Women's Journal, English Supplement*, 2.
- Borovoy, Amy (2005). *The too-good wife: Alcohol, codependency, and the politics of nurturance in postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Borovoy, Amy (2010). Japan as mirror: Neoliberalism's promise and costs. In Carol J. Greenhouse (Ed.), *Ethnographies of neoliberalism* (pp. 60–74). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Borovoy, Amy (2010). What color is your parachute? The post-pedigree society. In Hiroshi Ishida, & David Slater (Eds.), *Social class in Japan* (pp. 170–194). London, U.K.: Routledge Press.
- Borovoy, Amy (2011, Fall). Beyond choice: A new framework for abortion? *Dissent Magazine*, 73–79.
- Carlson, Elwood, & Omori, Megumi (1998). Fertility regulations in a declining state socialist economy: Bulgaria 1976–1995. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 24(4), 184–187.
- Coleman, Samuel (1983). *Family planning in Japanese society: Traditional birth control in a modern urban culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cott, Nancy (1994). Between the wars in France and England. In Georges Duby, & Michelle Perrot (Eds.), *A history of women in the west* (pp. 76–91). Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Ferguson, Sue (1999). Building on the strengths of the socialist feminist tradition. *Critical Sociology*, 25(1), 1–15.
- Folbre, Nancy (2001). The unproductive housewife: Her evolution in nineteenth-century economic thought. *Signs*, 16(2), 463–484.
- Franke-Ruta, Garance (2005). Multiple choice: Liberal concerns about abortion. *The New Republic*, 14.
- Fraser, Nancy (2004). Mapping the feminist imagination: From redistribution to recognition to representation. *Constellations*, 12(3), 295–307.
- Fraser, Nancy (2009). Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history. *New Left Review*, 56, 102–103.
- Fraser, Nancy (2011). Reflections: An interview with Nancy Fraser, interviewed by Amrita Chhachhi. *Development and change*, 42(1), 297–314.
- Fraser, Nancy, & Naples, Nancy (2004). 'To interpret the world and to change it': An interview with Nancy Fraser. *Signs*, 29, 1103–1124.
- Frühstück, Sabine (2007). *Uneasy warriors: Gender, memory, and popular culture in the Japanese army*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gal, Susan, & Kligman, Gail (2000). *The politics of gender after socialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gardiner, Judith K. (2002). Rethinking collectivity: Chicago feminism, Athenian democracy, and the consumer university. In Robyn Wiegman (Ed.), *Women's studies on its own: A next wave reader in institutional change*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gardiner, Judith K. (2008). What happened to socialist feminist women's studies programs? A case history and some speculations. *Feminist Studies*, 34(3), 558–583.
- Garon, Sheldon (1997). *Molding Japanese minds: The state in everyday life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Garon, Sheldon (2010). State and family in modern Japan: A historical perspective. *Economy and Society*, 39(3), 317–336.
- Ghodsee, Kristen (2004). Red nostalgia? Communism, women's emancipation, and economic transformation in Bulgaria. *L'Homme: Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 15(1).
- Ghodsee, Kristen (2005). *The Red Riviera: Gender, tourism and postsocialism on the Black Sea*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ghodsee, Kristen (2010). *Muslim lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, ethnicity, and the transformation of Islam in postsocialist Bulgaria*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ghodsee, Kristen (2011). *Lost in transition: Ethnographies of everyday life after communism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ghodsee, Kristen (2011). The politics of amnesia: Communist nostalgia, ethnography and a challenge for European studies. *Perspectives on Europe*, 2011, Autumn, 67–73.
- Gordon, Andrew (1997). Managing the Japanese household: The new life movement in postwar Japan. *Social Politics*, 4(2), 245–283.
- Guenther, Katja (2010). *Making their way: Feminism after socialism in Eastern Germany*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Gulcur, L., & Ilkcaracan, P. (2008). The "Natasha" experience: Migrant sex workers from the former Soviet Union in Turkey. In P. Ilkcaracan (Ed.), *Deconstructing sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and discourses*. London: Ashgate.
- Guttmacher Institute (2012). <http://www.guttmacher.org/index.html> (accessed February 7, 2012).
- Haney, Lynne (2002). *Inventing the needy: Gender and the politics of welfare in Hungary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hardacre, Helen (1999). *Marketing the menacing fetus in Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hertog, Ekaterina (2009). *Tough choices: Bearing an illegitimate child in Japan*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Hewlett, Sylvia Ann, Sherbin, Laura, Fredman, Chatherine, Ho, Claire, & Sumberg, Karen (2011). *Off-ramps and on-ramps Japan: Keeping talented women on the road to success*. New York: Center for Work-Life Policy.
- Holmstrom, Nancy (2002). *The socialist feminist project: A contemporary reader in theory and politics*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Holmstrom, Nancy (2003). The socialist feminist project. *Monthly Review*, 54(10).
- Horowitz, Daniel (2000). *Betty Friedan and the making of the feminine mystique: The American left, the cold war and modern feminism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Ivry, Tsipy (2006). At the back stage of prenatal care: Japanese OB-Gyns negotiating prenatal diagnosis. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 20(4), 441–468.
- Ivry, Tsipy (2007). Embodied responsibilities: Pregnancy in the eyes of Japanese OB-gyns. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 2, 251–274.
- Ivry, Tsipy (2010). *Pregnancy in Israel and Japan*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Judd, Tony (2005). *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth (2008). Socialist feminism: What difference did it make to the history of women's studies. *Feminist Studies*, 34(3), 497–525.
- Kligman, Gail (1998). *The politics of duplicity: Controlling reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Kovacheva, Sikya (2008). "Combining work and family life in young peoples' transitions to adulthood in Bulgaria." Sociological Problems. *Special Issue: Work-Life Dilemmas: Changes in the Work and Family Life in the Enlarged Europe* (pp. 174–192).
- LaFleur, William (1990). Contestation and consensus: The morality of abortion in Japan. *Philosophy East and West*, 40(4), 529–542.
- LaFleur, William (1992). *Liquid life: Abortion and buddhism in Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- LeBlanc, Robin (1999). *Bicycle citizens: The political world of the Japanese housewife*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- LeBlanc, Robin (2008). "Japan's low fertility: What have men got to do with it?" *Asia Program Special Report: Japan's declining population: clearly a problem, but what's the solution* (pp. 11–18). Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars.
- Leve, Lauren (2007). "Failed development" and rural revolution in Nepal: Rethinking subaltern consciousness and women's empowerment. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 80(1), 127–172.
- Lock, Margaret (1998). Perfecting society: Reproductive technologies, genetic testing, and the planned family in Japan. In Margaret Lock (Ed.), *Pragmatic women and body politics* (pp. 206–239). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba (2001). Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival. *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(2), 214.
- Mahmood, Saba (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Marx Ferree, Myra (2003). Resonance and radicalism: Feminist framing in the abortion debates of the United States and Germany. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 109(2), 304–344.
- McRobbie, Angela (2004). Feminism and the socialist tradition...undone?: A response to the work of Judith Butler. *Cultural Studies*, 18(4), 503–522.
- Mihova, Genoveva (2007). *Work time, labour condition, demographic behaviour*. Sofia: 'Prof. M. Drinov' Academic Publishing House.
- Mohanty, Chandra (1991). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, & Lourdes Torres (Eds.), *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Mohanty, Chandra (2003). Under Western eyes revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 28(2), 499–536.
- Moraga, Cherrie, & Anzaldúa, Gloria (2002). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (3rd ed.). New York: Third Woman Press.
- Navailh, Françoise (1994). The Soviet model. In Georges Duby, & Michelle Perrot (Eds.), *A history of women in the west* (pp. 226–254). Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Nolte, Sharon H., & Hastings, Sally Ann (1991). The Meiji state's policy towards women, 1890–1910. In G. L. Bernstein (Ed.), *Recreating Japanese women, 1600–1945* (pp. 151–175). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Norgren, Tiana (2001). *Abortion before birth control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Offen, Karen (1995). Women in the western world. *Journal of Women's History*, 7(2).
- Okin, Susan Moller (1997, October/November). Is multiculturalism bad for women? *Boston Review*. <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR22.5/okin.html>

- Outshoorn, Joyce (1996). The stability of compromise: Abortion politics in Western Europe. In Marianne Githens, & Dorothy McBride Stetson (Eds.), *Abortion politics: Cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 145–165). New York: Routledge.
- Pamporov, Alexey (2008). Patterns of family formation: Marriage and fertility timing in Bulgaria at the turn of the twenty-first century – A case study of Sofia. *The History of the Family*, 13, 210–221.
- Rivkin-Fish, Michele (2004). "Change yourself and the whole world will become kinder": Russian activists for reproductive health and the limits of claims making for women. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 18(3), 281–304.
- Rivkin-Fish, Michele (2011). Postsocialism: Troubling the reproduction of the nation. In Francis E. Mascia-Lees (Ed.), *A companion to the anthropology of the body and embodiment* (pp. 403–418). New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Roberts, Glenda (2002). Pinning hopes on angels: Reflections from an aging Japan's urban landscape. In Roger Goodman (Ed.), *Family and social policy in Japan: Anthropological approaches* (pp. 1–28). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Roemer, Ruth (1967). Abortion law: The approaches of different nations. *American Journal of Public Health*, 57(11), 1906–1922.
- Saletan, William (2004). *Bearing right: How conservatives won the abortion war*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schoppa, Leonard J. (2006). *Race for the exits*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Schoppa, Leonard J. (2008). Japan's declining population: The perspective of Japanese women on the "problem" and "solutions". *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Asia Program Special Report* (pp. 6–10).
- Schoppa, Leonard J. (2010). Exit, voice, and family policy in Japan: Limited changes despite broad recognition of the declining fertility problem. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 20(5), 422–432.
- Scott, Joan Wallach (1988). Deconstructing equality-versus difference: Or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism. *Feminist Studies*, 14(1), 23–50.
- Spivak, Gayatri (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In Cary Nelson, & Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Stern, Alexandra M. (1999). Responsible mothers and normal children. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12(4), 376.
- Stern, Alexandra M. (1999). Responsible mothers and normal children: Eugenics, nationalism, and welfare in post-revolutionary Mexico. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12(4), 269–397.
- Stoyanova, Violeta, & Richardus, Jan H. (1999). Induced abortions in Bulgaria: Trends during the period 1986–1996. *European Journal of Public Health*, 9(3), 223–228.
- Studlar, Donley T., & Tatalovich, Raymond (1996). Abortion policy in the United States and Canada: Do institutions matter? In Marianne Githens, & Dorothy McBride Stetson (Eds.), *Abortion politics: Public policy in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 75–95). New York: Routledge.
- Suchland, Jennifer (2011). Is postsocialism transnational? *Signs*, 36(4), 837–862.
- Thébaud, Françoise (1994). The great war and the triumph of sexual division. In Georges Duby, & Michelle Perrot (Eds.), *A history of women in the west* (pp. 427–472). Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Vassilev, Rossen (2006). Bulgaria's population implosion. *East European Quarterly*, 40(1).
- Verdery, Katherine (1996). *What was socialism and what comes next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Vidova, Milanka, Abadjieva, Nevyana, & Gancheva, Roumyana (1983). *100 questions and answers concerning Bulgarian women*. Sofia: Sofia Press.
- Vogel, Suzanne (1988). *Professional housewife: The career of urban middle class Japanese women*. Cambridge: Institute for Independent Study, Radcliffe College.
- Volpp, Leti (2001). Feminism versus multiculturalism. *Columbia Law Review*, 101(5), 1210.
- Wedel, Janine (2001). *Collision and collusion: The strange case of western aid to Eastern Europe*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Weigland, Kate (2002). *Red feminism: American communism and the making of women's liberation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- White, Merry (1992). Home truths: Women and social change in Japan. *Daedalus*, 121(4), 61–82.
- Wood, Elizabeth (1997). *The Baba and the comrade: Gender and politics in revolutionary Russia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Yamada, Masahiro (1999). *Parasaito Shinguru no Jidai*. The age of the parasite single Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho.
- Zaretsky, Eli (1986). *Capitalism, the family, and personal life*. New York: Harper and Row.