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## *AFTERWORD*

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# **MATERNALISM TODAY**

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Sociologist Ann Shola Orloff has recently argued that wealthy democracies in Western Europe, North America and the Antipodes are in the midst of a series of ‘farewells to maternalism’. By this, she means that policymaking is shifting decisively away from a model in which mothers were expected to stay home and care for children toward a new model that encourages ‘employment for all’. As she puts it, the ‘explicitly gender-differentiated maternalist logic of politically recognizing, and financially supporting mothers’ caregiving’ has been losing ground to ‘ostensibly gender-neutral notions’ that attempt to foster independence through workplace participation. At the same time, she argues, maternalism as a political ideology is ‘on the decline among advocates of women’s equality’.<sup>1</sup> Orloff presents a compelling analysis that, in its general contours, is borne out by developments in numerous countries. But it is worth pausing here to briefly note some countervailing trends, both within and beyond the nations that she analysed.

Perhaps most striking is the rise of proposals to address growing concerns over ‘depopulation’ – a trend evident in nations as diverse as South Korea, Russia, Greece and Australia.<sup>2</sup> As women have seized new opportunities in education and employment, they have in many cases elected not to have children or to bear only one child; in other cases, they have reluctantly remained childless because of the difficulty of combining work and motherhood. Today, most wealthy nations have fertility rates well below replacement level, leading to fears that the young will be burdened with the support of a larger, rapidly aging population.<sup>3</sup> The obvious solution to this problem – large-scale immigration – is highly controversial,

since so many people in wealthy nations still define national identities in exclusionary ethnic and racial terms. As a result, policymakers in many countries have enacted measures designed to boost fertility among the 'right' kind of people. In Western Europe, for instance, the stigma that has adhered to explicit pronatalism since the end of World War II appears to be fading.<sup>4</sup>

It remains to be seen whether this wave of pronatalism will be accompanied by renewed efforts to define all women as potential mothers or to connect women's citizenship more tightly to their reproductive capacities. But there are some disturbing signs that such classic formulations are indeed being revived. For instance, today in Russia, one can see numerous billboards that amount to pronatalist propaganda, like one with a young woman and three children that reads: 'Love for your nation starts with love for family'.<sup>5</sup> The Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Ayyip Erdogan of the conservative Justice and Development Party, has become increasingly bold in voicing his belief that all Turkish women should bear at least three children.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, in a report aired on the radio in 2005, the Australian Treasurer Peter Costello (of the Liberal Party) urged women to do their national duty by producing three children apiece: 'If you can have children,' he stated, 'you should have one for your husband, one for your wife, and one for the country.'<sup>6</sup> In nations that had witnessed a decisive shift away from biologically based conceptions of female citizenship, the re-emergence of such rhetoric is jarring, to the say the least.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, in certain parts of the world, women themselves continue to embrace maternalist politics to retain or acquire welfare benefits. This has been particularly notable in Eastern Europe, where, under socialism, 'feminism' became widely associated with state-backed efforts to compel women to enter the workforce. In these countries, women have often espoused maternalist arguments as a way of legitimizing their public influence and asserting their political independence. For instance, Angela Argent has shown how feminists in the newly established Czech Republic articulated a form of maternalist feminism in the 1990s as a way of legitimizing their claims to power. These women recognized the public's antipathy for the ideal of the 'superwoman' who worked full time while still performing the vast majority of housework – a model that, under state socialism, had served to legitimize the heavy burdens placed on women. Moreover, they understood that, given the special importance of the private realm during socialist times, a political language that emphasized women's private roles as mothers would resonate more strongly than an 'equal rights' discourse that had become widely discredited due to its association with the former regime. By arguing that women alone possessed the 'moral virtue and life sustaining energies' needed to regen-

erate society – because they alone had remained distant from state power in socialist times – Czech feminists insisted that women should play a prominent role in the emergent political order.<sup>8</sup>

Resistance to a more gender neutral, neo-liberal model is also evident Eastern Europe on a policy level. Indeed, according to Christy Glass and Éva Fodor, the widespread ‘farewell to maternalism’ that Orloff has charted is not occurring in Hungary and Poland, where policy regimes ‘show marked continuity with socialist era maternalism, which supported women’s extended retreat from paid work following childbirth’.<sup>9</sup> In her impressive study of Hungary, sociologist Lynne Haney has charted how the socialist government’s maternalist policies in effect helped to create a nascent political constituency of mothers– one that mobilized in 1995–6 when the new government proposed a restructuring of the nation’s comparatively generous system of maternity and family leave. Middle-class women, who opposed the shift from a universal to a needs-based system, protested outside welfare agencies in Budapest, shouting ‘We are still mothers!’ Subsequently, maternalist ideology proved effective in uniting conservative and liberal Hungarian women, who have joined together to protest a proposed reduction in maternity benefits from three to two years.<sup>10</sup>

If maternalism appeals to many Eastern Europeans who hoped to protect welfare benefits, women in the United States have in recent years invoked maternalist arguments as a way of protesting the lack of a nationwide system of paid maternity (and paternity) leave, affordable health-care, subsidized childcare and other benefits. One might even argue that, since around 2000, the U.S. has been witnessing a new wave of ‘neo-maternalism’; it is no longer accurate to say, as Lisa Brush observed in 1996, that ‘Maternalism is ... remarkably absent from current debates if by maternalism we mean a claim that motherhood should among other things empower women within the state and that the state should help support motherhood’.<sup>11</sup> Anne Crittenden advanced precisely these arguments in her surprise bestseller, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued*, which detailed the financial losses (she called it the ‘mommy tax’) that American women incur by becoming mothers. Strikingly, Crittenden even resurrected the analogy between mothering and soldiering, claiming, as did so many early twentieth-century maternalists, that mothers ‘render an indispensable national service to their country’ and therefore ought to be materially rewarded.<sup>12</sup> Australian Anne Manne made a similar splash with her book *Motherhood: How Should We Care for Our Children*.<sup>13</sup> Criticizing the ‘neo-liberal’ approach, Manne argued that policies designed to return new mothers as quickly as possible to the labour market are bad for children and many mothers as well. According to Manne, feminists who have made ‘the workplace the

arena of women's liberation' are out of step with the majority of parents, who overwhelmingly prefer for mothers to remain at home when children are very young.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, most feminists are still committed to deconstructing gender roles and de-gendering care work so that women can participate in employment and public life on equal terms with men, and many remain highly sceptical of maternalist approaches. Yet in the face of stubborn realities— the fact that women still perform the vast majority of caregiving and still, in sheer economic terms, pay a high price for doing so – some have cast aside their reservations about reviving maternalist approaches in a strategic manner. American political theorist Eileen McDonagh's recent book, *The Motherless State: Women's Political Leadership and American Democracy*, exemplifies this trend. Concerned with understanding why American women remain so badly underrepresented in government, she argues that the explanation resides in fact that the U.S. state is so 'un-motherly'. According to McDonagh, in nations that have a more robust welfare system, people tend to perceive the state in more 'maternal' terms and, as a result, women are more likely to be seen as having an important role to play in governing. McDonagh anticipates the feminist objection to her argument, namely: why must 'caregiving' be associated with 'maternal' rather than 'paternal' or 'parental'? And why should women pursue a strategy that reinforces the tendency to conflate the idea of 'woman' with that of 'mother' when they have long sought to challenge such thinking? Her response, in essence, is that so long as women are still perceived as caregivers, strategies to increase their political power simply have to take such perceptions into account in order to be effective.<sup>15</sup>

The progressive netroots group MomsRising has apparently arrived at a similar calculation, for it deploys the cultural role of 'mom' (rather than a gender-neutral identity of parent or caregiver) to lobby for 'family-friendly' policies, such as paid maternity and paternity leaves and flexible work options. When asked why she wrote a 'Motherhood Manifesto' rather than a 'Parenthood Manifesto', one of the group's cofounders, Joan Blades, bypassed the issue of ideology and instead referred to the specific disadvantages that mothers face, especially discrimination in the workplace. Clearly, this organization has chosen to focus on 'real-life', practical problems, rather than addressing the underlying issue of how 'motherhood' is conceptualized and defined.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps today's neo-maternalists feel less ambivalent about maternalist politics than an earlier generation of feminists because women have made significant headway in breaking down barriers in the public realm. In affluent democracies, the fear of being reduced to the role of wife and mother is no longer as palpable as it is was for second-wave feminists;

indeed, many working mothers, particularly in the U.S., long for more flexible work schedules that would allow them to devote more time to family life. It remains to be seen whether these initiatives are the beginning of a lasting trend that will result in significant political or cultural change. Still, it seems that caution is in order. If there is one thing that the history of maternalism tells us, it is surely that motherhood is often a precarious basis on which to stake political claims. The idea of recognizing and compensating mothers is always accompanied by a broader political agenda, and that agenda can all too easily shift from a progressive ideal of more inclusive social citizenship to a reactionary one of state-enforced gender conformity.

## Notes

1. A.S. Orloff. 2006. 'From Maternalism to "Employment for All": State Policies to Promote Women's Employment across the Affluent Democracies', in J. Levy (ed.), *The State After Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 230–68. Rianne Mahon has shown how the OECD has promoted two different 'post-maternalist' paths in R. Mahon, 'The OECD and the Reconciliation Agenda: Competing Blueprints', Occasional Paper 20, Child Resource and Research Unit, July 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.childcarecanada.org/pubs/op20/index.html> on 25 July 2011.
2. For an analysis of pronatalist ideology and policies in contemporary Greece, see: H. Paxson. 2004. *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
3. See, for example: P. Longman. 2004. *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What to Do About It*, New York: Basic Books, 2004. For a less polemical, though still somewhat alarmist analysis, see J. Grant and S. Hoorens. 2006. 'The New Pronatalism? The Policy Consequences of Population Ageing', *Public Policy Research* 13(1), 13–25.
4. To cite just a few examples: South Korea recently passed a law that included a raft of measures to bolster fertility rates, including financial assistance to couples undergoing IVF; Japan introduced a new child allowance without an income cap; and Russia recently enacted incentive payments for second births. C. Haub, 'Did South Korea's Population Policy Work Too Well?' Population Reference Bureau. Retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2010/koreafertility.aspx> on 2 February 2011; and 'Population Decline Worsening', *Japan Times*, 15 January 2010. Retrieved on <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ed20100115a2.html> on 2 February 2011. Whereas some of these measures are similar to longstanding family allowance policies in post-World War II Germany and Scandinavia, laws in these countries tended to be framed as support for children, rather than in explicitly pronatalist terms.
5. 'Natural Population Decline in Russia Down by 31% in 2009', *Ria Novosti*, 2 February 2010. Retrieved from <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100216/157906438.html> on 2 February 2011.
6. Erdogan appears to have first expressed this view at speech delivered, ironically enough, during a celebration of International Women's Day in 2008. His remarks have met with criticism from numerous quarters, but he continues to call repeatedly upon Turkish women to bear three children each. 'Society Reacts to PM's Call for Couples to have 3 Kids', *Tö-*

- day's Zaman*, 5 September 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detailar.do?load=detay&link=139512> on 2 February 2011.
7. The same programme went on to quote the conservative Australian Prime Minister John Howard, who exhorted women: 'Come on, come on, your nation needs you'. F.M. Clarke, Comment, Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, June 2005.
  7. In some contexts, pronatalism has long been a prominent aspect of social and political discourse. For instance, Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh discusses the ways in which some Palestinian women living in Galilee conceptualize their fecundity as a way of protesting Israeli policies toward Palestinians in R.A. Kanaaneh. 2002. *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
  8. A. Argent. 2008. 'Hatching Feminisms: Czech Feminist Aspirations in the 1990s', *Gender and History* 20(1), 86–104.
  9. C. Glass and E. Fodor. 2007. 'From Public to Private Maternalism? Gender and Welfare in Poland and Hungary after 1989', *Social Politics* 14(3), 323–50. Glass and Fodor argue that post-socialist Hungary has developed a form of 'public maternalism' in which women's maternal caregiving is supported and subsidized by the state. In contrast, Poland – where a strong labour movement and a powerful Catholic Church played a major role in shaping policy – developed a type of 'private maternalism', in which the government promoted policies that would support male breadwinners and allow women to 'return to their rightful roles as wives and mothers'. (Glass and Fodor use the term 'private maternalism' as a way of identifying the government's shift toward privileging women's roles as mothers rather than workers. It is worth noting, however, that Theda Skocpol would presumably characterize this kind of approach as 'paternalist'.) For a general overview of the ways in which post-Soviet bloc countries have reformed their welfare systems since 1989, see G. Pascall and N. Manning. 2000. 'Gender and Social Policy: Comparing Welfare States in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union', *Journal of European Social Policy* 10(3), 240–66.
  10. E. Kispeter. 2010. 'Family Policy Debates in Post-State Socialist Hungary: From Maternalism to Gender Equality', in M. Verloo and S. Walby (eds), Final WHY Report, Quality in Gender + Equality Policies, European Commission Sixth Framework Programme Integrated Project, Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen. Retrieved 25 July 2011 from [http://www.quing.eu/files/results/final\\_why\\_report.pdf](http://www.quing.eu/files/results/final_why_report.pdf).
  11. Brush, 'Love, Toil, and Trouble', 453.
  12. A. Crittenden. 2001. *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is Still the Least Valued*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 7–9.
  13. A. Manne. 2005. *Motherhood: How Should We Care for Our Children?* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
  14. See also idem. 2008. 'Love and Money: The Family and the Free Market', *Quarterly Essay*, 29, 1–90. Somewhat similarly, the legal scholar Joan Williams has argued that the 'full-commodification model' – based on the idea that women will enter the workforce on equal terms with men, while delegating childcare to the marketplace – has not succeeded in redressing the power imbalance between men and the majority of women who become mothers. She sees the solution residing in a shift toward 'reconstructive feminism' that 'pins hopes for women's equality on a restructuring of market work and family entitlements'. Williams believes that reconstructive feminism holds the potential to revive a stagnating movement, particularly by allowing for greater coalition building with working-class women who have remained alienated from liberal feminism. J. Williams. 1999. *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do about It*, New York: Oxford University Press, 41. Laura T. Kessler has used the term 'legal maternalism' to describe the views of Williams and several other feminist legal scholars in L.T. Kessler. 2002. 'Transgressive Caregiving', in M.A. Fineman, J.E. Jackson and A.P. Romero (eds), *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory: Intimate Encounters, Uncomfortable Conversations*, Surrey: Ashgate, 349–72.

15. E. McDonagh. 2009. *The Motherless State: Women's Political Leadership and American Democracy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
16. J. Blades and K. Rowe-Finkbeiner. 2006. *The Motherhood Manifesto: What America's Moms Want and What to Do About It*, New York: Nation Books. For a critical assessment, see N. Mezey and C.T.L. Pillard, 'Rethinking the New Maternalism', 2010. Retrieved 2 February 2011 from [http://works.bepress.com/naomi\\_mezey/2](http://works.bepress.com/naomi_mezey/2).