



Essay

“THE FUTURE IS OURS:” FEMINISTS IMAGINE EUROPE IN 1911

By Ann Taylor Allen

Although European history is in many ways the best known of the world’s histories, the concept on which it is based—that of Europe—remains largely unexamined. North American colleges and universities have traditionally included European history in a general concept of “Western Civilization,” which is assumed to be the source of norms and institutions—representative government, Judeo-Christian religion, scientific objectivity, to name just a few—that are common to Americans and Europeans. The textbooks and syllabi of these courses seldom inquire to what extent these shared traditions were indeed “European”—that is, typical of Europe as a whole, or only of certain times and places. In Europe itself, historians focus chiefly on national narratives, seldom asking how, or even if, these diverse narratives constituted a “European” history. Most early historians of women and gender, though they questioned many conventions of their discipline, preserved these. Some works of women’s and gender history centered on one national culture or history; others (chiefly anthologies of articles) placed such trends as feminism in the context of Western civilization. As the rise of a new global perspective on history has called both the national and the Western paradigms into question, it is time to include women’s and gender history in a more general re-examination of the concept “Europe.”

Historical accounts of Europe as a whole have until recently centered chiefly on various attempts to unite Europe economically and politically. The German historian Hartmut Kaelble sets a broader agenda: a European history should concern itself with all the ways that Europeans perceived, experienced, and created Europe. European society, he remarks, “cannot be regarded simply as the discovery of social historians. It makes sense only if it was experienced, discussed, or desired by European contemporaries.”¹ Here we will look at one of the first Europes to be “experienced, discussed, and desired” by women. Activists in international feminist organizations around the turn of the twentieth century imagined a specifically European and feminist identity, based on friendships, contacts, cultural transfers, and shared aspirations of women throughout Europe.

My definition of “identity” draws on the concept of “intersectionality,” as developed by feminist scholars who study American minority groups. These scholars point out that identity is always multiple, shaped by a host of factors that include not only gender but also class, race, nationality, religion and many others.² The identity that

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- 1 Kaelble, Hartmut, *The European Way: European Societies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York 2004, p. 376.
 - 2 Crenshaw, Kimberle, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*, in: *Stanford Law Review* 4 (1991), pp. 1241-1299.

I will describe combines three major components: the nation, Europe as a community and a civilization, and “womanhood,” defined as a universal category that in some sense included all women everywhere. These like all other identities, though sometimes perceived as “natural” or essential, were in fact constructed and thus products of a specific time, place, and situation. The turn of the twentieth century, as some historians have already remarked, marked a high point in international feminist organizing throughout Europe and the Western world.³ This era also saw the growth of feminist scholarship and intellectual life, as women drew on the central insights of the social and natural sciences to create what some called “feminist studies.”⁴ These intellectuals and activists created one of the earliest analyses of European women’s social, economic, and cultural status—an analysis that was based on feminist perspectives on history and prehistory.

Because this project involved discussions that were much too extensive to be covered in a short essay, I will focus on a work that was designed to present many of the central issues in a concise and readable form. The volume, entitled *Mutterschaft*, was published in 1911 and edited by a German-speaking feminist, Adele Schreiber, but its subject-matter and its list of authors marked it as European rather than German.⁵ As an author and activist of international repute, Schreiber was well qualified to edit this ambitious volume. Born in Vienna in 1871, she first worked as a journalist in England, France, and Italy (she spoke all three languages). Later, she was among the leaders of the League for the Protection of Mothers, a German organization founded in 1905 that had attracted wide interest throughout Europe; of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, of which she served as Vice President from 1904 until 1933; of the German Society for the Rights of Mother and Child, which she founded in 1911; and of the child and maternal health departments of the German Red Cross. She served in the German Reichstag as a delegate from the Social Democratic Party from 1920-24 and 1928-33.⁶

The contents of the volume’s 67 chapters reflected the editor’s wide network of international contacts. Chapters were contributed by authors of both sexes and of at least ten European nationalities and contained information on the social, medical, legal and cultural status of mothers and children in Europe as a whole, in sixteen individual European countries, and in many other parts of the world. Contributors to the volume included well-known feminist and socialist leaders; for example the Germans Schreiber, Marie Stritt, Lily Braun and Henriette Fürth, the Austrians Rosa Mayreder and Bertha von Suttner, the Hungarian Rosika Schwimmer, the Swedish Anna Wicksell and Ellen Key, the Swiss Gertrude Woker, and the French Nelly Roussel. And Schreiber regretted that the coverage was not even broader: the Turkish physician who had promised an article on motherhood in Islamic societies had been prevented by the warfare and social disruption prevailing in his own country from sending his contribution.⁷ The volume is

3 Rupp, Leila, Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women’s Organizations, 1888-1945, in: *The American Historical Review* 99 (1994), pp. 1571-1600.

4 Allen, Ann Taylor, Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity: The Debate on the Origins of the Family in Europe and the United States, 1860-1914, in: *American Historical Review* 104 (1999), pp. 1085-1113.

5 Schreiber, Adele (ed.), *Mutterschaft: Ein Sammelwerk für die Probleme des Weibes als Mutter*, München 1911.

6 Biographical information in Schreiber, Adele, *Wie ich wurde*, in: *Fürs Haus* 14 (1926/27), pp.1552-1553 and Allen, Ann Taylor, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1991, pp. 149-172.

7 Schreiber, Adele, *Vorwort der Herausgeberin*, in: Schreiber (ed.) *Mutterschaft*, pp. vii-x.

lavishly and beautifully illustrated with paintings, sculptures, cartoons and other works of visual arts from a wide range of cultures in all parts of the world.

The ideological basis of this ambitious enterprise was expressed in the title, *Motherhood*—a word that, in the feminist vocabulary of the age, referred not only to child-bearing and rearing, but also to a broad agenda of social and political reform. As an aspect of women's culture, "motherhood" was often understood metaphorically as the basis of a distinctively female mission to bring the nurturing spirit of the home into public life—an ideology to which some historians have referred as "maternalism."⁸ This was a mission that could be shared by childless women. "Even women who are not physically mothers," wrote the Hungarian Rosika Schwimmer, who contributed to Schreiber's volume, "feel all as the mothers of the human race."⁹

This maternalist ideology clearly fell into the category that the historian Karen Offen has defined as "relational" feminism, with a focus on "the complementary and interdependent relationship between women and men, and women's distinctive contribution to society, particularly as mothers." Offen distinguishes relational from "individualist" feminism, which was chiefly concerned with equal rights and personal liberty.¹⁰ In the introduction to *Mutterschaft*, the well-known socialist Lily Braun portrayed these two approaches as complementary rather than contradictory. The success of struggle for individual rights such as access to higher education and the vote was "only a matter of time." But such gains did not resolve the next great question: "how gender equality was to be reconciled with gender difference."¹¹ That is, how could the aspirations of women to equality with men be combined with their distinctively female function: motherhood?

In a sense, *Mutterschaft* was based on a concept of a universal female culture based on motherhood, an experience that was shared by women everywhere. Among the volume's 67 chapters were several that compared contemporary European ideals of motherly behavior to those of past eras and non-Western cultures. Most historians of Europe in the "Age of Imperialism" characterize feminists' views of non-European women as racist and condescending. For example, according to the British historians Catherine Hall and Jane Rendell, progressive British women of the mid-nineteenth century expressed a "consciousness of superior civilization and national identity" based on "the idealised and domesticated role" of European women, which they compared to "the harems and polygamy of an undifferentiated Orient and the burdened and laboring women of 'savage' populations."¹² Certainly some of the contents of the 1911 volume expressed similar attitudes. The anthology's introductory chapter, written by the anthropologist and physician Paul Bartels, dealt with motherhood in a very wide assortment of non-Western societies, from Bedouins to Comanche Indians. All of these were presented as examples of a lower evolutionary stage designated as "the childhood of the

8 Koven, Seth; Michel, Sonya, *Womanly Duties: Maternalist Policies and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920*, in: *American Historical Review* 95 (1990), pp. 1076-1108.

9 Rupp, *Constructing Internationalism*, p. 1583.

10 Offen, Karen, *Liberty, Equality, and Justice for Women: The Theory and Practice of Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, in: Bridenthal, Renate; Koonz, Claudia; Stuard, Susan (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Boston 1987, pp. 335-374 (quotation pp. 337-338).

11 Braun, Lily, *Einleitung*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 1-4 (quotation p. 3).

12 Hall, Catherine; McClelland, Keith; Rendell, Jane, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*, Cambridge 2000, p. 54.

human race.”¹³ From this profusion of examples, Bartels concluded that the respect for mothers that seems “matter-of-course to us, is not accepted everywhere and especially not among primitive peoples. And that is understandable, because our beliefs are the result of our cultural stage of development, and that stage is something that has developed, rather than something that has always existed.”¹⁴

However, this and other chapters on non-Western peoples also criticized this Eurocentric paradigm, expressing an awareness of cultural relativism that was derived from the era’s best-known works of anthropology. By 1911, Edward Westermarck’s *A History of Marriage*, James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, and other widely-read works had undermined—though of course not completely discredited—conventional views of the West at the pinnacle of human civilizations.¹⁵ Not only had these researchers shown the vast diversity of sexual, familial and reproductive behavior throughout time and space, but they had also found many parallels between Western and non-Western customs. Bartels’ article sometimes used non-Western examples to expose what he considered the shortcomings of European civilization. He remarked that almost every culture where men held a dominant position preferred male to female children, and that included “our own people”: “I only need to remind you of the 101 cannon-shots that announce the birth of a prince, whereas a princess only gets 35.”¹⁶ However, cultures in which women were powerful—and they existed—often placed a higher value on girls than on boys. Bartels examined the legal and social status of the unmarried mother—a prominent issue in the reform campaigns that Schreiber and her colleagues headed—in considerable detail. He demonstrated that attitudes varied widely among non-Western peoples and among Europeans themselves. While some judged such a mother harshly, others (and Bartels included the Bavarian rural folk as well as the Sioux Indians in this category) accepted her. This variation, he concluded, was part of the diversity of cultures, and not necessarily a sign of “moral degeneracy.”¹⁷

Other articles used the same comparative method to call into question another cherished marker of European superiority: the Christian religion. Max Maurenbrecher, a liberal Lutheran pastor who for a time belonged to the Social Democratic Party, took a scholarly look at images of mothers and children in the religions of the world. Starting with the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis and ending with the biblical Mary, Maurenbrecher found that the worship of all these divine mothers expressed much the same emotions, which he considered universally human: awe before the mystery of life’s beginning, and hope for its continuation even into eternity. And he ended by criticizing all religions, including Christianity, which in their adoration of maternal icons had ignored earthly mothers. Only after the death of these seductive myths could “our seemingly godless science and social science” recognize true value of the mother and her contribution to society.¹⁸

13 Bartels, Paul, *Die Mutter in Sitte und Brauch der Völker*, in Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 5-40 (quotation p. 5).

14 Bartels, *Die Mutter*, p. 39.

15 Westermarck, Edward, *The History of Human Marriage*, London 1903; Frazer, James George, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, London 1922 (first edition 1890).

16 Bartels, *Die Mutter*, p. 11.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-32.

18 Maurenbrecher, Max, *Die Mutter in der Religion*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Motherhood*, pp. 709-720 (quotation p. 710).

Though in many ways Eurocentric, the picture of European society differed greatly from most master narratives that celebrated European supremacy by glorifying such masculine achievements as military superiority and imperial expansion. Instead, it drew on a much more critical view of history—a view that was based on the works of men such as the Swiss scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen and the German socialist Friedrich Engels and developed in the body of feminist scholarship that flourished at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Well-known women authors such as the American Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the French Céline Renooz and Jeanne Oddo-Deflou, the Germans Lily Braun and Helene Stöcker, the British Frances Swiney and Catherine Gascoigne Hartley, and many others drew on new research into the history and pre-history of the human race to create new visions of women's possibilities in the present.²⁰ This knowledge was disseminated in lectures at national and international conferences and in books, brochures, and periodicals; for example the Paris-based *Groupe des Études Féministes*, founded in 1898, disseminated the new knowledge both in a journal and in a course on women's history offered by Renooz at her home in Paris.²¹

The chapters in *Mutterschaft* that were based on this research gave an account of the European past that was very different from conventional historical narratives of the era—narratives that, according to the historian Anne McClintock, presented the European family not only as the abode of Christian morality and virtue, but as the basis for Europe's world domination: “the organizing trope for marshaling a bewildering array of cultures into a single, global narrative, ordered and managed by Europeans.”²² On the contrary, many contributors to *Mutterschaft* charged that the European family in its present form was not the product of any advanced moral system, but on the contrary of a pre-historic act of violence that had resulted in thousands of years of oppression. Inspired by the works of prominent anthropologists and some of the feminist authors mentioned above, several contributors asserted that the first human societies had been shaped and led by women, and mother-love had been the first civilizing influence. “In the first stages of human culture, the woman was the leader in all areas,” wrote the well-known suffragist Marie Stritt. Much later, men had seized power—some historians asserted by violence—and had imposed male supremacy in the family as well as in society as a whole. And the outcome of this prehistoric injustice, which continued into the present, was the degradation of this once-powerful matriarch into a “parasite, a sexual object,” who was “powerless, helpless and vulnerable within the family, and also as a mother.”²³ Of course, modern historical research has invalidated the factual basis of this

19 Bachofen, J.J., *Myth, Religion, and Mother-Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*. Translated by Ralph Manheim, Princeton 1967; Engels, Friedrich, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, New York 1942 (first edition 1883).

20 Gilman, C.P., *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, Boston 1898; *Psychologie Comparée de l'homme et de la femme*, Paris 1898; Hartley, Catherine Gascoigne, *The Position of Woman in Primitive Society: A Study of the Matriarchy*, London, 1914; Swiney, Frances, *The Awakening of Woman: or, Woman's Part in Evolution*, London 1908.

21 Allen, Ann Taylor, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma*, New York 2005, pp. 19-40.

22 McClintock, Anne, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York 1995, p. 45.

23 Stritt, Marie, *Die Mutter als Staatsbürgerin*, in Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 688-703 (quotations pp. 689, 690). See another influential anthropological work of the era, Mason, Otis Tufton, *Woman's Share in Primitive Culture*, New York 1899.

narrative.²⁴ However, its central insight—that the European family and gender order are not fixed and natural institutions, but the products of a process of historical evolution that continues into the present and future—still informs today’s field of women’s and gender history.

Several chapters explored the many forms of inequality from which mothers still suffered. Legal systems still gave fathers control over all decisions regarding their offspring; condemned illegitimate children and their mothers to various forms of ostracism and disadvantage; and forced women to become mothers against their will. Callous social policies allowed millions of mothers and infants to die of preventable disease or simply of poverty. Industrialization, in conventional histories a mark of advancement and progress, figured in these feminist narratives (as in many socialist works of the era) chiefly as a source of new forms of oppression and disadvantage. Drawing on Engels as well as feminist theorists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman—a speaker at the 1904 Congress of the International Council of Women, which was held in Berlin—Schreiber and others claimed that industrialization and other economic trends had transformed the theory and practice of motherhood. The transfer of production from home to factory had brought many women into the paid labor force, often with devastating consequences for themselves and their children.²⁵

European history was thus not a story of constant progress, but of oppression both in old and in new forms. And the triumph of male supremacy had left its mark not only on women and their children, but on all of European civilization. Bertha von Suttner, who had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905 for her work in the peace movement, contested the widespread view that European military supremacy was a sign of cultural superiority. Rather, she asserted that warfare was belonged to the regime of “violence and oppression, that both in the past and the present has pervaded the history of our society.” She called on women to oppose war, not just as mothers, but also as the informed and reasonable citizens that they aspired to become. Women who developed all their capabilities—not only feminine “compassion and moderation” but also masculine “courage and intelligence”—would recognize that war was a “major obstacle to cultural development and in every way—morally and economically—harmful and abhorrent.” Such rational women could do more than mourn their soldier sons—they could work in the public arena to resolve conflicts peacefully.²⁶

In fact, the contributors declared, Europe was now the scene of a world-historical transformation in gender relations: the emergence of women from subjection into equal citizenship. “Whatever our beginning may have been,” wrote the German Maria von Stach, “the future is ours.”²⁷ The French activist Nelly Roussel optimistically hailed the “complete transformation of the state and the family,” and the rise of a nurturing commonwealth guided by the maternal wisdom of women citizens.²⁸ But this utopian goal still lay far in the future. Schreiber and others claimed that women of all social classes

24 See for example Mitterauer, Michael, A “European Family” in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries?, in: Kaelble (ed.), *The European Way*, pp. 140-160.

25 See especially Woker, Gertrud, *Naturwissenschaftliche Streiflichter auf das Problem Mutterschaft und Beruf*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 221-229; Müller-Lyer, F., *Die Ehe*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 132-155; Stritt, Maria, *Die Mutter als Staatsbürgerin*, in: *ibid.*, pp.688-703.

26 Von Suttner, Bertha, *Die Mütter und der Weltfrieden*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 704-708.

27 Stach, Maria von, *Mutterschaft und Bevölkerungspolitik*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 186-200 (quotation 200).

28 Roussel, Nelly, *Frankreich*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 487-493 (quotation p. 493).

confronted a new conflict. The modern woman demanded access to education, jobs and careers. But in the words of Lily Braun, this ambitious woman faced the “immense conflict between vocation and motherhood.” Women must find a way to live both as economically independent individuals and as mothers. On the solution to this problem depended “not only the future of women, but of the human race.”²⁹

Among the most important steps toward this end, so the authors asserted, was the transformation of motherhood from an inevitable destiny to the free choice of an enlightened woman. By 1911, marital birth-rates had already declined significantly in much of Western and Northern Europe, and by 1930 this trend had spread to many countries in the East and South. This so-called “demographic transition” was a momentous change for which contemporary historians can find no simple explanation.³⁰ For the contributors to *Mutterschaft*, however, the cause was clear: the modern woman demanded the right to control her fertility. “Every woman must decide for herself at what point she will become a mother, and this freely-chosen motherhood must be respected—it must enhance, not limit, women’s rights,” wrote Nelly Roussel, whom Schreiber regarded as a friend as well as a colleague in the international struggle for reproductive rights. Roussel further remarked that this was a distinctively European trend: a “general and inevitable phenomenon of advanced civilizations, and not a peculiarity of our country. To be sure, it appeared here [in France] earlier than in neighboring countries, but all of these are now moving in the same direction.”³¹

By 1911, reproduction had become not only a private but a public issue: in the words of the German feminist Maria von Stach, a “life and death issue for the state.”³² Some European governments of this era, which were already planning for the war of the future and based their military strength on the number of men who could be put into the field, regarded declining birth-rates as a catastrophe that the state must work to prevent, if necessary through laws limiting women’s access to education and professional work—aspirations that many believed made women reluctant to become mothers—and to contraception and abortion. Feminists in many European countries saw this perceived “population crisis” as both a threat and an opportunity. Schreiber and some of her collaborators, including Roussel, Stritt, and the lawyer Anna Schulz, were among Europe’s most courageous and radical advocates of reproductive freedom. They declared that women would not be forced to bear children, and demanded access not only to contraception, but also to legalized abortion—a demand supported by a substantial minority of the mainstream German feminist organization, the Bund deutscher Frauenvereine (League of German Women’s Organization) at their 1908 meeting. Schreiber, an outspoken and radical advocate of legalized abortion, mocked the hypocrisy of legislators who condemned women who chose to terminate their pregnancies but ignored the immense destruction of unborn life in industries that employed pregnant women without regard for their health.³³ Schulz went even further: Paragraph 218, the law that crimina-

29 Braun, Einleitung, p. 4.

30 Szreter, Simon, Falling fertilities and changing sexualities in Europe since c. 1850: A comparative survey of national demographic patterns, in: Eder, Franz X.; Hall, Lesley A.; Hekma, Gert (eds.), *Sexual Cultures in Europe*, Manchester 1999, pp. 159-232.

31 Roussel, Nelly, Frankreich, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 487-493 (quotation p. 494).

32 Von Stach, Maria, *Mutterschaft und Bevölkerungsfrage*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 189-200 (quotation p. 193).

33 Schreiber, Adele, *Missbrauchte und unwillkommene Mutterschaft*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 201-220.

lized abortion, was “unlawful, because it limits the freedom of a rights-bearing person to make decisions about her private life.”³⁴

Rather than force women to become mothers, the contributors asserted that the state must offer positive incentives to motherhood in the form of assistance and support. As to the proper nature and extent of such incentives, the contributors disagreed in ways that reflected the broader debates held throughout Europe. The Swedish Ellen Key reiterated her by then well-known conviction that work outside the home was a “misuse of women’s energy,” and that the state should directly subsidize women as full-time mothers.³⁵ Other authors, for example the German socialists Lily Braun and Henriette Fürth, argued for social policies such as maternity insurance that would finance leaves for working pregnant women and mothers and child-care centers that would enable them to return to their jobs.³⁶ Some, including the socialist Hulda Maurenbrecher, put in a good word for the so-called “Einküchenhaus” (“one-kitchen house”) a communal dwelling that centralized such familial tasks as cooking, laundry and child-care.³⁷ The French Nelly Roussel argued for a state “maternity budget” that subsidized child-bearing as an essential duty of citizenship, similar to military service; the British birth-control activist Charles Drysdale disapproved of cash payments, which encouraged parenthood for unworthy and materialistic motives.³⁸ But all of the contributors argued that the only basis upon which women would consent to become mothers was that of full equality and the rights of citizenship: in the words of Stritt, “economic independence and political equality are the means through which mothers will gain a voice in the fate of the society and the nation.”³⁹

Among the results of these campaigns for maternal and child welfare were the first steps in the development of a distinctly European polity, the welfare state. Already in 1911, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, and Hungary had created state-mandated maternity insurance systems; France provided state-subsidized assistance to poor mothers; many European national and municipal governments provided medical services to mothers and children.⁴⁰ The contributors to *Mutterschaft* associated the incipient welfare state with a European rather than more generally Western civilization. The United States, which did not enact natalist population policies, was seldom mentioned. A chapter on Australia and New Zealand by Professor Alfred Manes, a German expert on insurance, lauded these nations for their advanced laws on woman suffrage and child welfare but criticized their failure to promote high birth-rates by assisting mothers—a lack

34 Schulz, Anna, Frauenforderungen an die Gesetzgebung, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 672-687 (quotation p. 682).

35 Key, Ellen, Mütterlichkeit, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 587-601.

36 Fürth, Henriette, Die Sicherung des Mutterschutzes durch Mutterschaftskassen, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 311-317.

37 Maurenbrecher, Hulda, Die neue Auffassung von Mutterpflicht, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 120-131.

38 Roussel, Frankreich; Drysdale, Charles, Grossbritannien, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 481-487.

39 Stritt, Die Mutter als Staatsbürgerin, p. 693.

40 See the table in Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, p. 371-384. Among the many recent works on the role of feminists in the formation of the welfare state, see Bock, Gisela; Thane, Pat (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880-1950s*, London 1991; Pedersen, Susan, *Family, Dependence and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945*, Cambridge 1993; Offen, Karen, *Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France*, in: *American Historical Review* 89 (1984), pp. 648-676.

that Manes found surprising in view of the small numbers of the white populations of these countries.⁴¹

But how could one define motherhood as a patriotic service deserving of governmental support while still preserving women's essential freedom to limit the number of their children? This was indeed a difficult intellectual and rhetorical dilemma, for family limitation could not be defended solely as a right of the individual woman—arguments that only confirmed the conservatives' hostile picture of the emancipated woman as a selfish egotist. In order to gain public support, family limitation had to be presented not just as a benefit to the mother, but also to the children themselves, the family, and the state. Women who limited the number of their children, Schreiber insisted, were not motivated chiefly by selfish individualism, but rather by a sense of maternal responsibility. The free and enlightened mother decided on "the right number of children to suit her personal circumstances" by taking into account "the age and health of the parents, their occupations and incomes, the other commitments of the woman as well as the man, and other favorable and unfavorable circumstances for the raising of children."⁴² Such a mother, Schreiber concluded, was a public-spirited citizen, and her carefully-nurtured offspring gave the state a "healthy, capable" younger generation whose superior quality more than compensated for its somewhat lower quantity.⁴³

The contributors presented modern maternity as a highly rational undertaking, guided by scientific information and planned with the best interests of mother, child, and society in mind. This vision of the new mother was supported by a feminist version of eugenics, the fashionable science that promised the elevation of the human race through scientific breeding. In the pre-war era, eugenics was more popular on the progressive left than on the conservative right. Its adherents included many female activists in all European countries, including many contributors to *Mutterschaft*. To be sure, such women often disagreed with some of their male contemporaries. Schreiber rejected arguments that birth-control in itself damaged population quality by enabling educated women to limit their families—she claimed, as we have explained above, that the superior quality of these children would more than compensate for their lesser number. Likewise, she attacked eugenicists who opposed the care of the sick and handicapped on the grounds that such people should not be allowed to grow to adulthood and reproduce. But she added that "care for all those who are born, and help for the weak in the struggle for existence" should not rule out "all possible efforts to prevent weak offspring from coming into the world."⁴⁴

In 1911, this was a very abstract notion—only a few American states had actually passed laws mandating eugenic sterilization, and such laws were as yet unknown in Europe.⁴⁵ But later, in the inter-war era, some European countries, democratic as well as totalitarian, enacted various kinds of eugenic legislation: for example, Denmark passed a law permitting voluntary and compulsory sterilization in 1929, and other Scandinavian countries in the 1930s. In these democratic countries, some feminist groups sup-

41 Manes, Alfred, Australien und Neuseeland, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 569-575.

42 Schreiber, Adele, Missbrauchte Mutterschaft, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 201-220 (quotation p. 212).

43 Ibid., p. 201.

44 Ibid., p. 204.

45 Schreiber, Adele, Die Ansätze neuer Sittlichkeitsbegriffe in Hinblick auf die Mutterschaft, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 163-188 (quotation p. 185).

ported such laws: for example British feminists of both the liberal and socialist persuasions campaigned actively for a sterilization law, but failed to persuade Parliament to enact it. French feminists, who generally did not approve of sterilization, advocated laws requiring pre-marital health examinations. Most of these groups imagined that such measures would chiefly prevent irresponsible men from spreading the venereal diseases that caused much death and illness among mothers and children.⁴⁶

Though much of the material in this volume focused on Europe as a whole, Schreiber also acknowledged the importance of national cultures by commissioning chapters on individual countries. These chapters noted differences among European nations, but not according to the conventional ranking of “great powers” according to their military strength or colonial possessions. Rather, the most “advanced” nations were identified as those that provided the best and most accessible services for mothers and children. In this ranking, small countries such as Finland and Norway headed the list.⁴⁷ The nations of Southern and Eastern Europe, however, acknowledged their relative backwardness. The Hungarian Rosika Schwimmer reported that although her country had yielded to the pressure of feminist organizations and enacted various forms of protection for mothers and children, it still granted women few legal rights.⁴⁸ Italy, too, received praise for enacting the first state-mandated maternity insurance system, though both its payments and its coverage were condemned as inadequate.⁴⁹ The article on Bulgaria began on a mournful note: “In modern states, motherhood has begun to be a focus of important social reforms and experiments. In this respect, Bulgaria has little to offer. [...] The position of the mother is still patriarchal, and shaped more by custom than by laws.” However, the author of this article, Jenny Bojilowa Pattewa, concluded that the women of Bulgaria shared the mentality and goals of their counterparts in more advanced nations, including the conviction that it was “time for us, too, to pay attention to mothers. Without healthy mothers, there is no healthy population and no social welfare.”⁵⁰

Benedict Anderson’s definition of a nation as an “imagined community” also applies to this feminist picture of Europe in past, present, and future. Many historians portray this era’s conceptions of European identity as marked chiefly by racism and an overweening sense of cultural superiority to the rest of the world. Although these attitudes are not absent from this volume, they are modified by a strongly critical attitude toward European culture and history. The contributors to *Mutterschaft* said little about Europe’s military strength and technological advancement and much about the continuing injustice and oppression suffered by the majority of its population—women and children. They pictured a Europe that had only begun to emerge from a state of backwardness—an improvement that they attributed not to any inherent European racial or cultural superiority, but to the laborious efforts of generations of feminists and their female and male allies in other reform movements. They pioneered supportive measures for mothers and children that laid the foundation for welfare states in many countries—a

46 Allen, Ann Taylor, *Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain*, in: *German Studies Review* 23 (2000), pp. 477-506; Allen, Ann Taylor, *Feminism and Eugenics in France and Germany: A Comparative Perspective*, in: Baader, Meike Sophia; Kelle, Helga; Kleinau, Elke (eds.), *Bildungsgeschichten: Geschlecht, Religion, und Pädagogik in der Moderne*, Köln 2006, pp. 159-178.

47 Wicksell, Anna, *Schweden und Finnland*, in: Schreiber (ed.) *Mutterschaft*, pp. 517-521; Schreiber, Adele, *Norwegen und Dänemark*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 522-528.

48 Schwimmer, Rosika, *Ungarn*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 503-509.

49 Baer-Stein, Betty, *Italien*, in: Schreiber (ed.) *Mutterschaft*, pp. 510-515.

50 Bojilowa-Pattewa, Jenny, *Bulgarien*, in: Schreiber (ed.), *Mutterschaft*, pp. 564-569 (quotation 569).

distinctive achievement of European civilization in the twentieth century. The issues that they raised—and especially those related to the combination of motherhood and career—remain valid at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the European Union and many of its member states still regard the familial division of labor as one of the main impediments to gender equality in wages and work-force advancement.

However, the feminists cited here showed a tendency, common among those who purport to speak for movements, to claim universal validity for assumptions that were actually time-bound and specific. The identity “mother”—even in the broad sense that embraced social as well as biological concerns—was not universal among women, even at the turn of the twentieth century, but appealed to a specific group of feminist reformers. Even the next generation of feminists, who came of age in the 1920s, did not agree on the equation of maternity and womanhood, and of course many of today’s feminists reject it utterly.⁵¹ Likewise, the contributors’ view of the past was framed as a universal narrative of oppression, struggle and ultimate triumph in which all the women of Europe, the Occident, and ultimately of the world, were involved. Such a narrative left little room for difference or diversity.

This early attempt to create a European female identity on the basis of a “usable past” thus holds many lessons for historians in the present. Like the feminist scholars of 1911, the historians of today still use their alternative perspectives on history as a basis from which to criticize conventional male “master narratives.” And as in 1911, our knowledge of the past still supports our ongoing struggles for gender justice in the present. However, today’s gender history is no longer based on essentialist notions of womanly or manly characteristics. Rather, it explores the many ways that cultures create and individuals experience gender identities. And the result of the project will probably not be a new, universal narrative of gender history, but rather a new understanding of the many local and particular circumstances that shape the lives of individuals and communities.

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51 Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe*, pp. 187-234.