

Kristen Ghodsee

second world second sex

Socialist Women's Activism
and Global Solidarity during the Cold War



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Duke University Press
Durham & London 2019

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Baker
Typeset in Warnock Pro and Helvetica Neue by Copperline Books

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ghodsee, Kristen Rogheh, [date] author.

Title: Second world, second sex : socialist women's activism
and global solidarity during the Cold War / Kristen Ghodsee.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2019. | Includes
bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018026169 (print) | LCCN 2018029608 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478003274 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478001393 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN 9781478001812 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Women's rights—International cooperation—
History—20th century. | Feminism—International cooperation—
History—20th century. | Women political activists—History—20th
century. | International Women's Year, 1975. | International Women's
Decade, 1976-1985. | Women and socialism. | Women—Political
activity—Bulgaria. | Women—Political activity—Zambia.

Classification: LCC JZ1253.2 (ebook) | LCC JZ1253.2 .G47 2019 (print) |

DDC 305.4209171/709045—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018026169>

Cover art: Course participants in the WIDF-CBWM School
for Solidarity, Bulgaria, 1980.

For Elena Lagadinova
and Irene Tinker

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAPSO

Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization

ACWF

All-China Women's Federation

AAWC

All-African Women's Conference

ANC

African National Congress

BCP

Bulgarian Communist Party

BL

British Library

BSAC

British South Africa Company

CAW

Congress of American Women

CBW/CBWM

Committee of Bulgarian Women/Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (This committee had two different names during its history)

CEDAW

Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CIA

Central Intelligence Agency (United States)

COINTELPRO

Counter-Intelligence Program (United States)

CPUSA

Communist Party of the USA

CSW

Commission on the Status of Women (United Nations)

DFL

Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party

EAP

Endangered Archives Program

ERA

Equal Rights Amendment (United States)

FBI

Federal Bureau of Investigation (United States)

FLS

Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women

GAD

Gender and Development

G-77

Group of 77 developing nations in the UN General Assembly

HUAC

House Un-American Activities Committee

IISH

International Institute for Social History

ILO

International Labor Organization

INSTRAW

United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

NAIMSAL

National Anti-Imperialist Movement for Solidarity with African Liberation

NIEO

New International Economic Order

NGO

nongovernmental organization

NOW

National Organization for Women

NSC

National Security Council

PAWO

Pan-African Women's Organization

PKI

Partai Komunis Indonesia (Communist Party of Indonesia)

REWA

Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Committee

TsDA

Tsentralen Darzhaven Arhiv (Central State Archives. Bulgaria)

UN

United Nations

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNICEF

United Nations Children's Fund

UNIP

United National Independence Party

UNIP-WB

United National Independence Party-Women's Brigade

UNIP-WL

United National Independence Party-Women's League

UPP

United Progressive Party

USAID

US Agency for International Development

WEAL

Women's Equity Action League

WID

Women in Development

WIDF

Women's International Democratic Federation

WILPF

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

WREE

Women for Racial and Economic Equality

WSP

Women Strike for Peace

Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations from the Bulgarian are mine or that of my former research assistant Mira Nikolova, unless the quotes derive from a Bulgarian source that has already been translated into English. In the endnotes and bibliography, all transliterations are mine. Transliterating the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet into Latin letters presents some challenges, as there are different traditions and much inconsistency regarding usage. The trickiest characters are the Bulgarian ф (which can be transliterated as “ff” or “v”), ъ (which can be transliterated as “a,” “u,” or “ü”), and ц (which is either “tz” or “ts”). Throughout the book, when doing my transliterations from the Bulgarian, I have chosen to use “v” for ф, “ts” for ц, and “a” for ъ. I also transliterate ж as “zh,” and я as “ya.” However, in the case of previously published materials and names already transliterated into Latin letters by the authors, I have reproduced the words in their published transliterated form. I have also retained the English spellings of well-known geographical names such as Sofia and Bulgaria (rather than Sofiya and Balgariya). As a result, there will be some inconsistencies in the text.

Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time in the making and was supported by generous grants from many institutions and foundations in the United States and Europe. The initial seeds for this project were planted while I was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University in 2010–11. I am most grateful to Bowdoin College for providing me with various pots of seed money to fund some of my initial trips to Bulgaria and the Netherlands. The real breakthrough came when I won a generous grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 2012, which gave me funds for travel to Zambia and the opportunity to buy some time off to conduct research. In 2014–15, I was a senior external fellow at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies in Germany, which generously hosted me for the entire academic year. In 2015–16, I benefitted from fellowships from the Imre Kertész Kolleg at the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena, Germany, for five months, and from the Aleksanteri Institute at the University of Helsinki in Finland for three months. Once again, I won several small faculty development grants from Bowdoin College, and they graciously allowed me to take a two-year sabbatical leave. Finally, Diana and Matthew Webster lent me their home in London in August 2016, giving me the gift of unlimited and uninterrupted writing time so that I could finish the first draft of this book before my return to full time teaching.

A wide variety of friends, mentors, and colleagues offered advice or read and commented on various sections of this manuscript over the eight years I have been working on it, including Maria Bucur, Anne Clifford,

Krassimira Daskalova, Francisca de Haan, Susan Faludi, Jane Jaquette, Sandrine Kott, Sonya Michel, Maxine Molyneux, Joan W. Scott, Scott Sehon, Maria Todorova, Barbara Weinstein, and Sharon Wolchik. I am also deeply grateful for the many efforts of my former student, Mira Nikolova, who started as my research assistant in the spring of 2010 and continued to help with various aspects of this project over the next six years. Mira read through hundreds of pages of documents, sought out sources in the National Library, grappled with translations of official documents in convoluted bureaucratic Bulgarian, and organized the massive amount of paper brought back from Sofia to Maine. Mira's thoughtful questions and dedicated support were invaluable to the completion of this project.

Some of the material in chapter 1 was previously published as "State Socialist Women's Organizations in Cold War Perspective: Revisiting the Work of Maxine Molyneux," *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 10 (2016): 111–21. Portions of chapter 2 appeared as "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 538–62. Certain sections scattered over the three chapters on the United Nations conferences previously appeared in "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 49–73. I have also been inspired by and expanded on research that I used for my articles: "Internationalisme socialiste et féminisme d'État pendant la Guerre froide. Les relations entre Bulgarie et Zambie," *Clio. Femmes, genre, histoire*, no. 41 (2015): 115–137; "Research Note: The historiographical challenges of exploring Second World–Third World alliances in the international women's movement," *Global Social Policy*, 14, no. 2 (2014): 244–264; and "Revisiting the United Nations Decade for Women: Brief Reflections on Feminism, Capitalism, and Cold War politics in the Early Years of the International Women's Movement," *Women's Studies International Forum* 33, no. 1 (2010): 3–12.

I am grateful to the archivists at the Central State Archives in Bulgaria, the National Archives of Zambia, the International Institute for Social History in the Netherlands, the Sophia Smith Collection in Northampton, Massachusetts, and at the British Library in London. I am also deeply indebted to all of the women I interviewed in Bulgaria and Zambia, and particularly those who shared their personal archives with me. I am especially grateful to Virginia (Ginny) Hopcroft, the Bowdoin government docu-

ments librarian, for helping me track down key United Nations sources at the very beginning of this project.

At Duke University Press, I feel blessed to be working with such an amazing editorial, design, and marketing staff. Courtney Berger has been an incredible editor, and her insightful comments and suggestions for revision improved the manuscript beyond measure. Sandra Korn, Sara Leone, Christine Riggio, Laura Sell, and the rest of the Duke University Press staff take excellent care of their authors. I am thankful for the insightful comments of the anonymous external reviewers, and for the copyediting of Susan Deeks.

As always, I am grateful for the patience of my partner and daughter who supported me in innumerable ways as I worked on the manuscript. I feel like my daughter grew up while I wrote this book, following me around the world as I chased down sources and holed myself up to write. I am glad that my daughter had the chance to meet Elena Lagadinova in person at least once, because the latter provided so much support with this research project over the many years I worked on it. Lagadinova gave me access to her personal archive and shared her many memories with me over the scores of times we met between 2010 and 2017. Unfortunately, I kept interrupting work on this book to write three others. Although one of those, *The Left Side of History*, explored parts of Lagadinova's life, it was my great hope that I would be able to share this one with her in print. But I delayed too long; Lagadinova died on October 29, 2017 at the age of 87.

Finally, I thank Irene Tinker, my mentor at the University of California, Berkeley, in the late 1990s and the person who first inspired my interest in the United Nations Decade for Women. I first met Irene in 1996, just a year after she attended the Beijing conference, in her final years of university teaching before her retirement. Irene was an endless font of insights and wisdom about the "global women's movement," and it was she who encouraged me to do research on the East European women who attended the world conferences. Irene Tinker served as a member of the board of directors at the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, and she remembered that they regularly received reports about the status of women in the Eastern Bloc countries. "I thought they were just propaganda at the time," Irene recalled, "But maybe they were true." I wrote my first article about the influence of the Cold War on women's international development programs with Irene's help, which was published in 2003. Since that first article fifteen years ago, Irene has been a generous interlocutor, reading my work

and offering her feedback. She has not always agreed with me, but she has been a constant source of inspiration and motivation. Irene is really one of those women who has endeavored to pass her torch to the next generation of feminist scholars. I am truly awed by her decades of passion and perseverance.

Although Elena and Irene never met, they were kindred spirits and shared a passion for women's rights. Their efforts made the world a better place for those who came after them. They were my foremothers, and it is to both Elena and Irene that I dedicate this book.

Introduction. Erasing the Past

In September 1995, more than seventeen thousand women gathered in Beijing to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women. Diplomatic representatives of United Nations member states gathered to prepare an official conference document—the Platform for Action—while thousands of activists met at a separate forum for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss and debate women’s issues. Marking the twentieth anniversary of the International Women’s Year and the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975, the Beijing conference celebrated two decades of women’s activism at the United Nations and the global movement for women’s rights it had inspired. There was only one problem. Women from the countries that had initiated the original call for an International Women’s Year back in the early 1970s were being “intentionally shut-out” of the discussions.¹ Frustrated and ignored, several of these women circulated a “Statement from the Non-Region.” The statement included a map showing the location of their nations to remind their fellow conference-goers that they still existed.²

At issue was text in the conference document’s “Global Framework” chapter. In a paragraph on the geopolitical climate affecting women’s rights, the authors of the proposed Beijing Platform for Action had chosen to downplay the importance of what was, to many women in attendance, an event of massive political significance: the sudden and unexpected end of the Cold War. In the final document, the chaos and upheaval of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the violent revolution in Romania, the divorce of the Czech Republic from Slovakia, the collapse and breakup of the Soviet Union, and the genocidal wars of Yugoslav succession (all of which af-

fected hundreds of millions of women from Budapest to Vladivostok) received only two cursory sentences in the official conference document: “In Central and Eastern Europe the transition to parliamentary democracy has been rapid and has given rise to a variety of experiences, depending on the specific circumstances of each country. While the transition has been mostly peaceful, in some countries this process has been hindered by armed conflict that has resulted in grave violations of human rights.”³ The collapse of communism had radically shifted the geopolitical terrain of international relations across the globe, including in the socialist-aligned countries in the developing world, but the “transition” in Eastern Europe was acknowledged in the second half of exactly one of the 361 paragraphs of the Platform for Action.

More important, women’s activists from the state socialist countries in Eastern Europe—what used to be called the “Second World”⁴—were once leading voices at the United Nations. They included women such as Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, who led the Soviet delegation to the previous three UN conferences. Elena Lagadinova—the youngest female partisan fighting against the Nazi-allied monarchy in Bulgaria during World War II—led her country’s delegation to the 1975 and 1985 conferences, and was a prominent organizer of women from the East European and socialist countries of the Global South. Lagadinova had been elected general rapporteur in Nairobi (the official spokeswoman for the conference to the world’s press) and in 1991 had received a medal from an American university honoring her achievements. Chibesa Kankasa of Zambia was a national heroine, a soldier in the struggle for her country’s independence from the British. Kankasa’s compatriot Lily Monze was the first Zambian woman to earn a university degree and would eventually serve as her nation’s ambassador to France. Kankasa and Monze held senior positions in the Zambian government, and both had attended the conferences in 1980 and 1985. Tereshkova, Lagadinova, Kankasa, and Monze were all proponents of various forms of socialism, and without these women—and their united opposition to the official delegations from the United States and its Western allies—the issue of women’s rights would never have garnered the attention of male politicians on either side of the Iron Curtain. But by 1995, their legacies were already being erased.

Obscuring the contributions of East European women and socialist women from the developing countries allows for a particular story about the United Nations Decade for Women to be told, one that credits Western women and independent social movements for the progress of wom-



FIGURE INTRO.1
Valentina Tereshkova
and Elena Lagadinova,
circa 1970.

en's rights during that era. But the Cold War context was just as important as any march or consciousness-raising session. Superpower rivalries played a key role in bringing global attention to the status of women in the mid-1970s. Although women had advocated for various rights long before the 1975 UN International Women's Year, members of the second sex still faced a vast ocean of legal, economic, and cultural barriers. In Western democracies, bias conspired to keep women in their domestic roles, and those who ventured out into the workforce struggled against pay discrimination, sexual harassment, and glass ceilings. In developing countries, poverty, colonialism, and patriarchal traditions combined to keep women subservient to, and economically dependent on, men. Even in the state socialist countries, which supposedly had solved the "woman question" through the abolition of private property and the full incorporation of women into the labor force, women staggered under the weight of the double burden of paid employment and domestic work.

The first three world conferences—Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985—forced national governments to expend new resources to examine laws, collect data, and create special women's desks and ministries. Governments enacted measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's

FIGURE INTRO.2
Chibesa Kankasa,
circa 1970.



rights with respect to inheritance, child custody, and loss of nationality. In Copenhagen, Valentina Tereshkova, Chibesa Kankasa, and other representatives from UN member countries signed the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a treaty that still serves as an international Bill of Rights for women. The convention explicitly protected women's reproductive rights, and it encouraged nations to resist cultural norms and practices that oppressed women in the public and the private sphere. International events between 1975 and 1985 also challenged millennia of ideas about women's "natural" roles and opened a new landscape of opportunities because two rival superpowers vied for the hearts and minds of the world's women. This book recaptures some of the energy and enthusiasm that infused socialist women's activism and argues that their contributions to the history of twentieth-century women's rights should no longer be ignored. Leftist women in the Global South forged strategic alliances with their counterparts in Eastern Europe, which allowed them to amplify their collective voices on the international stage.

Recuperating the stories of women such as Elena Lagadinova and Lily Monze can help us rethink the possible role of state actors in challenging millennia of entrenched sexism and discrimination.

The UN Decade for Women provided a platform for women's organizing across the boundaries of class, race, religion, ethnicity, and the nation-state, even as Cold War ideological positions divided women into the West (capitalist), the East (communist), and the Global South. But even these ideological positions did not map neatly onto political realities: there were plenty of socialists and communists in the capitalist West; the "communist" East was a flexibly defined group of nations that usually (but not always) supported the Soviet Union, including Southern countries such as Cuba and Vietnam.⁵ The developing countries represented a conglomeration of newly independent nations following various paths to economic development, either nonaligned or aligned with one of the two hegemonic power blocs. During the Cold War, and especially at the United Nations, these three loosely defined and ever-shifting blocs were often homogenized into what was then known as the First, Second, and Third Worlds. These three worlds supposedly represented the fault lines of geopolitics, and the women's activists who participated in the United Nations were well aware of the deep divides that pitted governments against one another in the international arena.

When asked in 2011 to comment on the role of women from Eastern Europe at the UN conferences, Arvonne Fraser, a member of the official US delegation in Mexico and Denmark, recalled that the socialist women had been "a very strong presence" at the meetings, despite the few efforts to preserve the history of their activism. Indeed, women such as Elena Lagadinova helped shape the eleven-year period that gave birth to the "global women's movement" or the "worldwide women's movement,"⁶ terms that loosely refer to the networks of women that mobilized around, and participated in, the UN conferences on women, including all of the official and unofficial preparatory meetings aimed at influencing the intergovernmental debates and parallel NGO forums.

Of course, using a term such as the "global women's movement" elides much complexity. From the beginning, women's activism had been influenced by a wide variety of vastly differing political projects, and it is impossible to speak of one global "feminism."⁷ Similarly, from the outset "global women's movement" referred to a complex conglomeration of often competing movements that represented women from a broad range of ideological perspectives. Even within the Western capitalist countries,

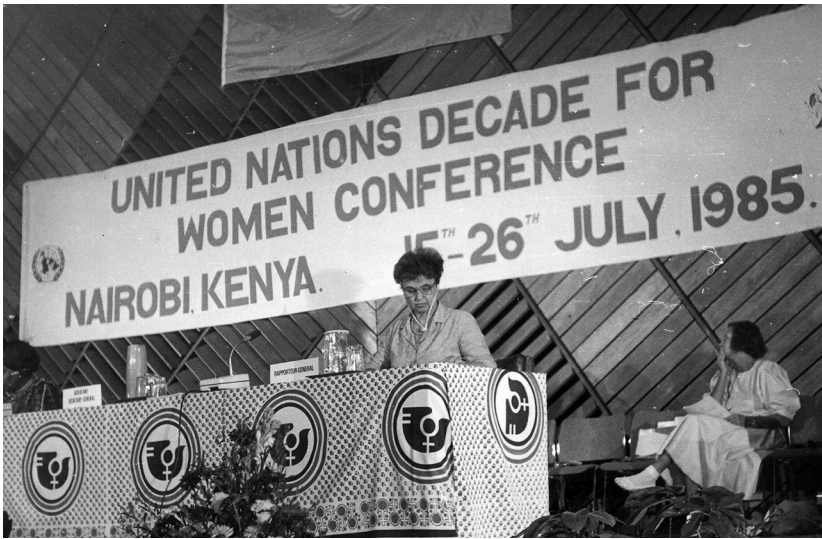


FIGURE INTRO.3 Elena Lagadinova, Nairobi, 1985.

there were multiple feminist perspectives and there was much internal struggle among varying groups of women advocating for different types of rights, whether they were social, economic, or political. But because the women's activism catalyzed by the International Women's Year and the UN Decade for Women happened within a bounded time frame, subsequent feminist activists and authors have often found it convenient to speak of one singular global movement for women's rights, a movement supposedly led by liberal feminists from the Western capitalist countries, the Gloria Steinems and Betty Friedans of *Ms. Magazine* and the National Organization for Women.

But it was women from the Eastern Bloc countries who initially pushed for an International Women's Year to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a global women's organization that enjoyed consultative status with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations.⁸ In 1972, the General Assembly voted to declare 1975 the International Year of Women, and the WIDF began planning an elaborate World Congress of Women to be hosted in East Berlin in the German Democratic Republic.⁹ Since the McCarthy era, the US government had considered the WIDF a "communist front" organization, so American women hoped there would be an official United Nations conference in a noncommunist country.¹⁰ Initially,

the US government did not want to waste money on a conference about women, but under domestic pressure it agreed to help sponsor an official UN conference in Mexico so that the communists would not host the only global event for International Women's Year.¹¹

The Mexico City conference in 1975, and the two subsequent Copenhagen and Nairobi conferences, brought official representatives of the world's governments together for deliberations under the auspices of the United Nations. Yet from the outset, little international consensus existed about what a women's conference should strive to achieve. Many Western women, especially the Americans, expected the conference to focus on specific questions of legal and economic equality, as well as efforts to oppose the continued patriarchal oppression of women. A women's conference was supposed to be *about* women. Women such as Tereshkova from the Soviet Union, Lagadinova from Bulgaria, and others from the communist bloc felt they had already earned legal and economic equality. They believed that the conference should provide an opportunity for women to speak about more pressing international issues, providing a forum where they could weigh in on global geopolitics and advocate for peace. Since men dominated the United Nations and most national governments, women needed an opportunity to make their voices heard. A women's conference should be *for* women.

Admittedly, the Second World position largely rested on essentialist assumptions about women's true nature, or what some scholars have called "difference feminism" or "relational feminism."¹² Since women were mothers and primary caregivers, they were supposedly less inclined to violence, and international relations would be more peaceful, based on mutual understanding and cooperation, if women had power at the international level. Because women performed their care work in a wider societal context, representatives of the state socialist women's organizations also believed that women's issues could not be separated from the greater political and economic issues that shaped their lives. Women such as Kankasa and Monze from Zambia largely agreed with their counterparts in countries such as Bulgaria and East Germany and demanded that the official conference allow women to speak on issues of development, colonialism, racism, apartheid, imperialism, and the creation of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which would radically redistribute the world's wealth.¹³

Indeed, by 1985 most women from the developing world (and quite a few women in the First World) had embraced the idea that feminist strug-



FIGURE INTRO.4 Valentina Tereshkova (center) and Elena Lagadinova (left), 1975.

gles could not be separated from issues such as national independence and economic development.¹⁴ Women's equality with men proved useless in a nation torn apart by war or in contexts of racial inequality. This position often frustrated liberal or "equality" feminists from the West who insisted on the primacy of "women's issues," which they took to mean the de facto legal and economic equality between men and women. As Irene Tinker, a prominent American women's rights advocate put it, "We didn't believe that men and women were the same, but if we didn't say they were the same we wouldn't get any of the male privileges."¹⁵ This liberal feminist position came to dominate the politics of the official delegations of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other key Western countries.¹⁶ They wanted to focus on removing the barriers that prevented women from achieving the kind of independence and autonomy that men enjoyed and on achieving equity in both the workplace and the home. These liberal feminists often frowned on special labor protections for women workers or on gender-specific entitlements (such as

maternity leaves) because they introduced inequalities based on sex. They often referred to the discussion of other issues as “politicization,” an attempt to divert attention from the uncomfortable topic of sexual inequality.¹⁷ At Mexico City, a French delegate, Françoise Giroux, argued, “The International Women’s Year will have been another mockery if the results are subtly diverted toward either national or international political causes, no matter how pressing, respectable or noble their aims might be.”¹⁸ Tinker, who attended the NGO forums of all three conferences, believed that male politicians from the developing countries tried to use the women’s conferences to further their agendas: “Did women really have any chance of changing apartheid by voting about it at the conference? The answer is no. Take those issues to the [General Assembly].”¹⁹

Despite these protests, the world conferences did consider more than just women’s issues, and the American “equality” feminists and their allies found themselves outnumbered by the coalition of women representing the “difference” feminism of the Eastern Bloc and the countries from the developing world.²⁰ Thus, superpower machinations (on both sides) profoundly shaped the contours of International Women’s Year and the UN Decade for Women that followed, but by the 1995 conference in Beijing, the importance of the Second World contribution was being erased from the history of global women’s activism, prompting several East European women to circulate their “Statement from the Non-Region.”

Yet anyone who goes back to read primary documents about the Decade can find evidence of the importance of superpower rivalry. In 1987, Arvonne Fraser wrote openly about the Cold War tensions in 1975: “American women learned that they could be the target of public vilification, which shocked many of them deeply . . . the new U.S. women’s movement had taught many American women to think of all women as friends, people united in a common cause. To find this not true, in their first international encounter, was, to some, an infuriating and very disappointing experience.”²¹

Other first-person accounts of the UN conferences brim with references to Cold War conflicts. Jane Jaquette, an American political scientist who attended the parallel NGO tribune in Mexico City, also recalled that women from the developing countries challenged the leadership of American women: “I found North American feminists surprised to discover that not everyone shared their view that patriarchy was the major cause of women’s oppression, and that Third World women held views closer to Marx than Friedan.”²² In her 2005 intellectual history of women and the

United Nations, the Indian economist Devaki Jain explicitly wrote about how state socialist women supported the positions of women from the Global South: “By the 1960s, the majority of the members in the General Assembly were from the newly liberated countries and these nations and the Eastern bloc countries had become a strong presence in the UN. [The Eastern Bloc] supported the stand taken by developing countries on various issues surrounding development, identity, political participation, and economic policies.”²³ Women from the Third World found powerful allies in their state socialist counterparts, and the growing solidarity between the communist countries and the developing countries created a variety of ideological problems for the liberal feminists in the West, especially in the face of accusations that the very concept of feminism was just another form of cultural imperialism. Reporting on the first conference in Mexico City, one journalist wrote that some African women considered what they called “Western feminism” a neocolonialist plot to divide and conquer the men and women of newly independent countries in the Global South.²⁴ In 2017, historian Jocelyn Olcott captured these tensions at the Mexico City conference in a chapter aptly titled “Betty Friedan versus the Third World.”²⁵

Indeed, the United States failed to sign two key documents produced by the official women’s conferences and only selectively endorsed a third. The American delegation refused to support the “Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace” (1975) for a variety of reasons, but most famously because it equated “Zionism” with the words “racism” and “imperialism.” For the same reason, the House of Representatives passed a hasty resolution forbidding the US delegation from signing on to the Programme of Action of 1980, the official conference document supporting a wide range of women’s legal rights in terms of property, nationality, and child custody. Facing a similar fiasco in Nairobi, the US delegation threatened to walk out of the conference if the word “Zionism” appeared anywhere in the conference document. Only the careful diplomacy of the Kenyans averted disaster. Still, the Americans submitted reservations to twelve different paragraphs of the Forward-Looking Strategies, disagreeing with issues that ranged from Palestinian women’s rights and economic sanctions on the South African apartheid regime to the concept of “equal pay for work of equal value.”²⁶ No other country took exception to as many paragraphs as the United States, and the Eastern Bloc countries had no reservations whatsoever. So where did this history go? Why did East European women in

Beijing feel compelled to circulate a map reminding other women's activists that they still existed?

Victors Writing History

On March 6, 2017, *Forbes* magazine ran an article titled, "The First Woman in Space Turns 80, and You Probably Never Heard of Her."²⁷ Two years earlier, *Foreign Affairs* had published an article asserting that Elena Lagadinova was "the most important feminist you've never heard of."²⁸ In 2011, Devaki Jain paid tribute to Vida Tomšič, a Yugoslav communist and women's activist. "I know that Vida is not in your pantheon of goddesses," Jain said, speaking to a largely American audience, "but she certainly is in mine."²⁹ All three women were giants during the UN Decade for Women, but what unites them today is their obscurity in the historiography. Western women simply had/have more resources to record their histories (see my discussion of sources in the appendix), so the general story of international women's activism at the United Nations has been dominated by the memoirs and oral histories of women from the United States.

Attempts have been made to correct this imbalance. For example, Jain's *Women, Development, and the UN: A Sixty-year Quest for Equality and Justice* (2005) and Peggy Antrobus's *The Global Women's Movement* (2004) both tried to decenter the history of the UN Decade for Women by focusing on the contributions of women from the Global South, but the perception of Western dominance remains. Commenting on the persistence of this trope, Peggy Antrobus writes, "As someone involved in many of the processes that have led to the construction of this worldwide movement, and a witness to the ways in which it has changed since the 1970s, largely through the influence of Third World feminists and women of colour in North America, I am amazed to find that its image remains one of a movement associated with white, middle-class women from North America and [Western] Europe."³⁰ Within the West, this view has been savaged by "Third World women" and women of color, many of whom attended the parallel forums for NGOs and dissented from the official US position (especially in Nairobi). As a result, it is much easier to reclaim the history of socialist and communist women in China or in the Third World (Angola, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Nicaragua, and so on) than it is to critically reevaluate the work of women from the Second World. Even when it is acknowledged that state socialist women were powerful actors on the international stage, their contributions are downplayed because of

FIGURE INTRO.5
Devaki Jain, 2011.



the persistent stereotype that they were dupes of male communist elites back home.³¹

Moreover, while there are many books on the “global women’s movement,” none focus on the contributions of women from state socialist countries, and few include their voices, even when the Cold War context and the “politicization” of the meetings is explicitly mentioned. As Francisca de Hann has argued, Cold War stereotypes still deeply influence the historiography of women’s movements.³² Today, when historians and activists discuss conference tensions, they focus on conflicts between the Global North (Western capitalist countries) and the Global South. The former state socialist East is disappeared. For instance, one important volume collected autobiographical essays from twenty-seven women involved in the international women’s movement.³³ The book, *Developing Power: How Women Changed International Development* (2004), edited by Arvonne Fraser and Irene Tinker, included women from the developing world but did not include one entry from a woman from the former Second World, as if the latter had no part in transforming the political and economic realities of developing countries during the Cold War. In *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women’s Issues across North-South Divides* (2017), Sara de Jong demotes the former Second World to the Global South, effectively erasing the alternative history of state socialist women’s organizations in the former Eastern Bloc.³⁴ Although Jocelyn Olcott’s *The International Women’s Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (2017), on the Mexico City conference, is far more attentive to the Cold War context and recognizes the antagonisms of the “Eastern Bloc and non-aligned delegates” versus the “Anglophone and West Europeans,” Olcott’s eviden-

tiary base consisted primarily of archives in the United States and Mexico.³⁵ With the exception of Tereshkova, East European women are rarely named as individual actors and are largely absent from her narrative. This is not to assert that the contributions of Second World women were more significant than those of their colleagues in the Global South, but merely to recognize that they did indeed make important contributions.

Although the omission of Eastern Bloc women most likely results from lack of access to the primary sources in East European languages, powerful social forces in the United States still conspire to squash or delegitimize histories that take East European or state socialist women's activism seriously. It should not be forgotten that the US government targeted women with leftist sympathies after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The historian Landon Storrs demonstrated that advocates for women's and consumer rights during the first Red Scare in the early 1920s were painted as communist sympathizers and thus discredited with the broader American public.³⁶ In her *Red Feminism, American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (2002), Kate Weigand recuperated many of the communist roots of American feminism and demonstrated how these links were deliberately severed and hidden to avoid suspicion and persecution during the second Red Scare.³⁷ Daniel Horowitz exposed Betty Friedan's pre-housewife activism in the Progressive Party (much to Friedan's personal dismay),³⁸ and Erik McDuffie explored the importance of the American Communist Party to the organizing of radical black feminists, documenting their struggles against mainstream anticommunism.³⁹ But in all cases, the history of leftist women's activism remains marginal to the fantasy of feminist history that dominates the historiography of global women's movements.⁴⁰

Three broad reasons help to make sense of the way the victors have written this history. First, in the West, and in the US especially, anticommunist ideas remain strong, and they conspire to delegitimize anything socialist or communist. This was most obvious in the McCarthy era, when leftist feminists were accused of "un-American activities." Beginning in 1948, the political climate was rife with paranoia and fear following the attack on the Congress of American Women (CAW), the simultaneous savaging of the WIDF (which ultimately led to the suspension of their consultative status with the United Nations), and the ongoing insinuations against organizations such as Women Strike for Peace (WSP) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).⁴¹ Leftist women's activists felt compelled to distance themselves as much as pos-

sible from socialism in theory and in practice.⁴² The accusations of right-wing politicians that American feminists must be communists, and the FBI infiltration of domestic women's organizations had a chilling effect on women's rights advocates.⁴³ Prudent American women kept safely apart from their counterparts in the Eastern Bloc. Thus, in addition to lack of resources and the lack of interest in their own countries, former women's activists in Eastern Europe must contend with rigid stereotypes that have persisted long after the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁴

Second, those scholars and activists who have acknowledged the existence of state socialist women's organizations nonetheless claim that these women lacked "real" power.⁴⁵ Since they reported to male party leaders in the Politburo and considered class and racial injustice as just as egregious as sexual inequality, state socialist women were not pure feminists. Because the socialist state created and controlled the mass women's organizations and prohibited independent women's groups, all policies regarding women supposedly came from above, and Western observers believed that, rather than being the voice of women to the Party, state women's organizations existed to promote the Party's goals among women.⁴⁶ Because the women in these committees were often members of the Communist Party and privileged the expansion of state welfare policies over the promotion of individual self-actualization and autonomy,⁴⁷ they were seen as blind dupes of Marxist patriarchy, rendering them insufficiently concerned with true women's issues.⁴⁸ In *Women under Communism* (1978), Barbara Wolf Jancar asserts, "Throughout history, women have served the patriarchal establishment, whether as supporters of the status quo or as revolutionaries seeking to replace one variant of male political order with another. Women are continuing this support in the Communist countries."⁴⁹ Thirty-six years later, the American philosopher Nanette Funk continued to validate these stereotypes. Although Funk admitted that communism did "good things" for women, she insisted that communist women deserve little credit for societal changes because they worked within the Party structure: "Promoting women's employment, if done only because of Party directives, makes one an instrument, not an agent or feminist. When women's organizations acted as the state wanted, one needs further evidence that they did not act only because of the will of the state. If so, they were not agents of their own actions, proactive, but instruments."⁵⁰

In Funk's view, then, there were no real feminists in the Eastern Bloc countries, and thus there could be no feminism in the Western conception of the word. Since state socialist women were often working for the

states that advocated for pro-women policies, they could be seen only as acting as an extension of the state, regardless of whether they personally shared the beliefs promoted by that state. If liberal feminists rejected the idea that state socialist women could be feminist agents (or agents at all), there is little wonder that they are written out of the history of feminism.

Third, and perhaps most important for this book, is the fact that most of the women from Eastern Bloc countries and their socialist allies in the developing world would not have called themselves “feminists.” Indeed, as I discuss in depth in chapter 1, they reserved the word as an insult to be hurled at “bourgeois” women who hoped to increase their political and economic rights at the expense of their working-class compatriots. Socialist and communist women from the countries of Eastern Europe, along with socialist and communist women from a wide range of developing-world countries taking noncapitalist paths to development (Angola, Cuba, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and so on) and women members of socialist and communist parties in Western countries would refer to themselves as “women’s activists.” Many viewed women’s rights as a fundamental part of the socialist or communist ideal and did not believe that an independent women’s movement was necessary to achieve sexual equality with men. In fact, the Romanian philosopher Mihaela Miroiu has argued that “communist feminism” is a contradiction in terms.⁵¹ Scholars have struggled to name this particular brand of state-centric women’s activism, calling it “socialist feminism,” “state feminism,” “communist feminism,” or “left feminism.” But all of these attempts to name communist women’s activists “feminists” elides the idea that one might be able to work for the rights of women without being a feminist or that “communists” are as much in favor of women’s rights as “feminists.”

Semantic disagreements aside, we must recover the forgotten history of state socialist women’s activists at the United Nations. First, the stereotype perpetuated by Funk and others (of socialist women as mere dupes of men with dictatorial power) is incorrect. Funk imagines a monolithic and rigid centralized state with little room for intervention by women. But what if women helped determine the “will of the state”? The leaders of state socialist women’s organizations, who were themselves members of both the Party and the state apparatus, might have wielded influence among their male comrades. What if these women truly believed that state ownership of the means of production provided the best possibility for women’s emancipation and willingly incorporated their demands into wider programs for revolutionary change? Rather than merely supporting

a male political order, what if communist women chose to become part of a new political program that had the emancipation of women as one of its central principles? This is not to deny the serious political constraints of working within a state socialist system; it is merely to question the idea that communist women suffered from false consciousness by believing that communism would bring greater social, legal, and economic equality. In the stories of the women I tell, I will show that they were often proactive agents, and not the mere instruments that Funk describes.

Second, women in the developing world gained power and influence because of the Cold War, negotiating a place between the United States and the Soviet Union. As women's activists rose up to make demands at the United Nations, they often found support from the women in the Eastern Bloc. In 2005, Devaki Jain lamented the end of the Cold War and the loss of the critical political space opened up by superpower rivalry: "The disintegration of the East and West blocs critically impacted the approach to development. The Socialist bloc had supported approaches that required a strong state, a thrust toward public provision of basic services, and a more equitable global economic program such as the New International Economic Order. It was often an ally of the newly liberated states as they attempted to forge coalitions such as the [Non-Aligned Movement] or the Group of 77 to negotiate with their former colonial masters."⁵²

Although my sources are limited to oral history interviews and the fugitive collections of the archival documents that I could find scattered across three continents (see the appendix), I have endeavored to present the events of the UN Decade for Women from the perspective of Bulgarian and Zambian women who considered themselves women's activists. In the chapters that follow I hope to explore some of the contacts between women in the state socialist countries and women in the Global South and how these networks of left-leaning women impacted the UN Decade for Women. While they never achieved everything they claimed, state socialist countries (in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia) did make real strides in terms of women's rights before the Western democracies and their allies in the developing world. The policies and programs put in place were implemented by the state, but they were often shaped by women working within that state, women empowered at different times and in different ways. Their state-centric approach to women's issues was promoted throughout the Global South through solidarity exchanges promoted by mass women's organizations. Yes, these exchanges often supported Eastern Bloc foreign policy goals in Africa, Asia, and Latin Amer-

ica, but they also empowered leftist women as agents of social change and forced local male elites to make space for women's organizing. Third World leaders who wanted military, technical, or financial assistance from the Eastern Bloc had to at least pretend to care about women's issues, and when compared with countries at similar levels of economic development, the state-centric approach provided ample empirical evidence that socialism challenged sexual inequality in traditional patriarchal societies.⁵³

Third, although the US tried to delegitimize anything socialist for the better part of the twentieth century, the activism of Eastern Bloc women and their state socialist allies in the Global South did increase attention to international women's issues in the capitalist West. During the Cold War, the West had to deal with the international perception that state socialist countries were the only champions of the socially weak. At the United Nations, the Soviet Union and its allies often accused the capitalist West of failing to improve the lives of women, youth, workers, and racial minorities, accusations that forced attention to marginalized groups and proved productive for the creation of new international conventions to protect social and economic rights. For example, the French Swiss historian Sandrine Kott has shown that superpower rivalry at the International Labor Organization (ILO) had a positive effect on the negotiations about, and eventual creation of, international treaties on forced labor.⁵⁴ In particular, Kott argues that coalitions between the Eastern Bloc countries and nations in the developing world forced concessions from the advanced capitalist countries. Cold War tensions not only protected workers from different forms of forced labor but also reified a new political language in which work was seen as an important social right. In the end, the world's workers benefited from the ideological tensions that manifested themselves at the ILO. "Indeed," she writes, "the conflict between the two blocs, like the decolonization process, demarcated a favorable period for defining the juncture between human and social rights. In this respect, the alliance between officials from southern and communist countries could have a catalyzing effect."⁵⁵

Similarly, the ongoing activism of socialist women in the Second and Third Worlds may have increased Western attention to the importance of domestic women's rights. The British sociologist Maxine Molyneux, for example, suggested that "East-West rivalry" proved partially responsible for the rapid "catching up" of the Western democracies with regard to women's issues in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁶ The demonstrated progress—the legal rights, professional opportunities, and social entitlements enjoyed by

East European women—as well as women in Cuba, China, Vietnam and other nations pursuing a state socialist path to development—may have pressured Western governments to address women’s issues. The coalition of Second World and Third World activists claimed that only socialism could guarantee women’s rights, and Western democracies may have felt compelled to defend their record, especially when faced with domestic constituencies who could point to the purported achievements of the communist world. As Arvonne Fraser explained in her memoir *She’s No Lady* (2007), “Nations have egos,” and American feminists “played on that.”⁵⁷ In this book, I argue that socialist women’s activism—particularly the networks forged between women in Eastern Europe and the Global South—proved to be a catalyst for the rapid expansion of women’s rights in the second half of the twentieth century.

Finally, telling the stories of state socialist women’s organizations allows us to reconsider the nature and goals of contemporary feminism. Nancy Fraser, Susan Faludi, and others have argued that Western feminism has been coopted by the economic project of neoliberalism, with its fetishization of unfettered free markets, emaciated states, and dismantled social safety nets. In 2009, Fraser published a stunning critique of contemporary liberal feminism’s abandonment of social justice issues and its narrow focus on identity politics. Her article, titled “Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History,” outlined how “the dream of women’s emancipation [was] harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation.”⁵⁸ Rather than challenging the structures of inequality that oppressed women, liberal feminists (such as those who concentrated on supporting women’s autonomy in a world of legally guaranteed sexual equality with men) unwittingly paved the way for the expansion of an economic system that ultimately increased the wealth and power of patriarchal, capitalist elites. This was a far cry from the initial intentions of the feminist project: “All told, second-wave feminism espoused a transformative political project, premised on an expanded understanding of injustice and a systematic critique of capitalist society. The movement’s most advanced currents saw their struggles as multi-dimensional, and simultaneously against economic exploitation, status hierarchy and political subjugation. To them, moreover, feminism appeared as part of a broader emancipatory project, in which the struggles against gender injustices were necessarily linked to struggles against racism, imperialism, homophobia and class domination, all of which required transformation of the deep structures of capitalist so-

ciety.”⁵⁹ It bears repeating that, while Western feminisms were always diverse, a certain dominant liberal perspective (championed by organizations such as the National Organization of Women) infused the politics of the official delegations to the UN women’s conferences between 1975 and 1985. This US government-sanctioned version of feminism looked at women’s issues in isolation from their larger social, political or economic context; it was a feminism that focused on equality of opportunity within the existing economic structure, with an implicit or explicit acceptance of that structure as fundamentally just.

A recent legacy of this type of liberal feminism (what the socialists used to call “bourgeois feminism”) can be found in *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013), by Facebook’s chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg. Millions of copies have been sold of the book, which provides a hyper-individualized program for women to succeed in corporate America. Sandberg admonishes women to work harder, to get their partners to work harder, and to overcome their internalized gender roles. As Nancy Fraser notes, “Where feminists once criticised a society that promoted careerism, they now advise women to ‘lean in.’ A movement that once prioritised social solidarity now celebrates female entrepreneurs. A perspective that once valorised ‘care’ and interdependence now encourages individual advancement and meritocracy.”⁶⁰ Sandberg is not likely to challenge the underlying structures of the economy; nor will she point out that the economic system is based on ever increasing inequality and exploitation, even if that exploitation predominantly affects women.

The stories of the women I tell in these pages deserve to be heard, not only because they have largely been forgotten, but also because these women championed a different vision of activism that continued to critique the structures of capitalist societies and couched women’s issues within broader issues of social injustice, even as the liberal feminist strand became more dominant in the advanced capitalist countries. This liberal feminism focused narrowly on achieving rights that could exist without the public provision of social services for women (such as maternity leaves and childcare) by claiming that special state supports for women perpetuated inequality between men and women who should be treated as if they were biologically indistinguishable. The socialists recognized that men and women were different (specifically with regard to their childbearing capacities) and argued that equity between men and women could be achieved only by state intervention.⁶¹ They further critiqued the specific

focus on equality as usually benefiting only a minority of elite women and that women's rights granted within a fundamentally unfair economic system could easily be reversed by future male leaders.

The advocacy efforts of women from the socialist world played an important role in the development of the global women's movements during the Cold War, and telling some of the women's individual stories and recuperating their perspectives might help contemporary liberal feminism free itself from its unfortunate attachment to the worst form of capitalism. Although these women were not perfect, and we should be careful not to ignore the ways they might have been complicit with authoritarianism in their own countries, we must admit that women living in the state socialist countries benefited from progressive legislation and equal rights far earlier than women in the Western democracies. Women's organizations in the East European countries also actively advocated for women's rights, both at home and abroad. Until the beginning of the 1970s, the Soviet Union and its allies dominated the international discussion of women's issues at the United Nations and at their world congresses on women, organized and sponsored by the Women's International Democratic Federation.⁶² Long before 1975, the WIDF had been a powerful vehicle for promoting the political interests of colonial and postcolonial countries around the world.⁶³ By the late 1960s, as new nations were born in Africa and Asia, women's rights had become a rallying cry of socialist and communist movements throughout the developing world as Eastern Bloc countries provided financial and logistical support to help set up state women's organizations based on the East European model, resulting in social, political, and economic gains for women across the globe. By producing a less lopsided version of this history, we can not only correct a historical misperception but can help to turn feminism back into the broader and more liberatory project it was designed to be.

Bulgaria and Zambia

The ideal way to write the story of state socialist women's activism would be to do a massive overview of all of the Eastern Bloc countries and their socialist allies in the Global South, but in these pages I focus on two case studies. Given the limitations of time and resources, this book examines the history of the United Nations women's conferences from the perspectives of Bulgaria and Zambia in the hope that their unique geopolitical positions can provide a glimpse into what an alternative historiography



FIGURE INTRO.6 WIDF office staff, 1985, East Berlin.

might look like. Although I initially started my research in Bulgaria because it was the post-socialist country I knew best, I was surprised to learn that the Bulgarian women's committee had been the *de facto* leader of the Eastern Bloc countries during the UN Decade for Women—and, indeed, that its president, Dr. Elena Lagadinova, had served as the general rapporteur for the conference in Nairobi.⁶⁴ Because Bulgaria was a small, recently poor, and largely agricultural country, it shared many structural characteristics in common with the newly emerging countries of the developing world. Bulgaria also claimed “postcolonial” status because it had been subsumed within the Ottoman Empire for five centuries. The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement (СБВМ) used this history to strengthen its links with women in Africa and Asia.

The Bulgarian case provides one example of how a state socialist women's committee operated in practice, although I understand that in some respects the Bulgarian committee was exceptional. Compared with other state women's committees in the Eastern Bloc, the Bulgarians had more independent financing and autonomy. Their president for more than two decades was a national heroine—the youngest female partisan fighting

FIGURE INTRO.7
Elena Lagadinova,
2013.



against the Nazi-allied Bulgarian monarchy during World War II.⁶⁵ Furthermore, under the thirty-five-year rule of Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria was a “soft socialist” country, with a less repressive apparatus than its northern neighbors in the Warsaw Pact.⁶⁶ In 1968, Zhivkov had taken tentative steps toward a more open society until the Prague Spring forced a cautious retreat.⁶⁷ Despite this, the Committee of the Bulgarian Women’s Movement (sometimes also known as the Committee of Bulgarian Women (CBW)) enjoyed new authority after 1968 with the power to propose legislation and take delinquent enterprises to court if they failed to grant maternity leaves or relocate pregnant women to less strenuous jobs.⁶⁸ Bulgaria also had a prominent female member of the Politburo, Tsola Dragoicheva,⁶⁹ and Sonya Bakish, the editor-in-chief of Bulgaria’s state women’s magazine, was the wife of the country’s prime minister.⁷⁰ These powerful women made a crucial difference.

But aside from these specific details, the CBWM operated under constraints similar to those of the women’s committees in other state socialist countries. Bulgaria was an authoritarian state with only two legal parties: the Bulgarian Communist Party and its junior partner, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union. The state forbade independent organizations, and the CBWM monopolized women’s issues. Most (but not all) leaders of the women’s committee were members of the Communist Party and were

committed communists. They shared a suspicion of Western-style “bourgeois” feminism and tended to essentialize women’s roles as mothers and caregivers. Finally, although they managed to pass legislation, they were not always capable of enforcing it. Despite their explicit powers of “societal control,” they still faced a sometimes immovable socialist bureaucracy and a paranoid state security apparatus.

Although I am deeply cognizant of the varieties of state socialism and hesitant to homogenize the region, I believe that the experiences of the СВМ during the United Nations’ International Women’s Year and the subsequent Decade for Women can at least give us a small glimpse into the experiences of women on the other side of the Iron Curtain, even if these experiences are not perfectly generalizable. Women’s committees in all state socialist countries focused more on expanding state entitlements for women and families than on trying to challenge patriarchal culture in the home. They were openly pronatalist in their policies and justified their activities in terms of larger Communist Party goals. Perhaps most significant, they operated in closed societies that violated political rights such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. Bulgarians, like residents of other state socialist countries in the twentieth century, suffered surveillance by the secret police, shortages of consumer goods, and restrictions on travel. Finally, and most important, in the international arena, Bulgaria, like other countries in Eastern Europe, had to be mindful of the larger foreign policy goals of the Soviet Union. In these things, Bulgaria shared much in common with its Warsaw Pact brother countries.

Zambia represents a case study of a technically nonaligned country that in practice was aligned with the Eastern Bloc. Of course, one landlocked postcolonial African nation cannot represent the entirety of the socialist-leaning developing world. But Zambia presents an interesting case study because it achieved independence from Britain in 1964, and Kenneth Kaunda, the nation’s first president, continued to rule Zambia until 1991. Kaunda’s ideological vision consisted of an “African humanism” that concerned itself with earthly action and put people, not profits, at the center of government policy. Inspired by other secular humanist traditions, Kaunda and leaders like him rejected capitalism and parliamentary democracy as foreign imports into Africa, imposed during the colonial era to justify the exploitation of the local population.

Like many other countries emerging from colonialism, Zambia initially attempted to walk the path of democratic nonalignment. But eight un-

stable countries surrounded Zambia, many with ongoing civil wars between autochthonous populations and white settler colonialists. In 1972, Kaunda, fearing internal divisions instigated by external forces, rewrote the Zambian constitution and declared Zambia a “One Party Participatory Democracy.” The constitution of Zambia’s Second Republic banned all parties except for Kaunda’s United National Independence Party (UNIP). With Western Europeans and Americans supporting white, racist regimes such as those in Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, and South Africa, the Zambians eventually accepted generous Soviet aid to support and arm the independence fighters living in camps within Zambia’s borders.

I chose Zambia as my second case study because, although nonaligned, it maintained robust contacts with women from the state socialist countries in Eastern Europe. After visiting Zambia and interviewing the leaders of the Zambian equivalent of the CBWM, I also learned that the UNIP Women’s League had a similar structure as its Bulgarian counterpart and that the Zambian women’s movement was state-based and discouraged independent women’s organizing.⁷¹ As in the Bulgarian case, the leader of the UNIP Women’s Brigade (which later became the Women’s League), Chibesa Kankasa, was a national heroine, a fighter for Zambian independence who served in the government for almost thirty years. My interviews and archival research made clear that Zambian women’s activists benefited from Eastern Bloc material and logistical support between 1975 and 1985, a period that coincided with a veritable explosion of activities around women’s issues in Zambia—issues that would lose prominence after 1991, when Kaunda allowed multiparty elections and fell from power.

Like Bulgaria’s, Zambia’s situation is unique, but I also believe that it can provide insight into the struggles of women’s committees within countries of the Global South trying to navigate their way through the ever-mounting tensions of the Cold War. Rival superpower blocs competed for influence in the countries newly freed from colonialism and provided resources for a wide range of development projects. Perhaps the biggest losers of the collapse of communism in East Europe were the developing countries. In 1994, two American political scientists argued that the end of the Cold War would allow Western governments to reduce foreign aid for African countries experimenting with humanism-inspired socialism:

From independence on, the Third World, especially the African part of it, played an undeservedly important role in international politics. The Third World countries set the West off against the East in

a bidding war for their support. The West spent more than \$225 billion to curry favor with often corrupt and incompetent and sometimes bloody tyrants. The West's guilt feelings over colonialism have ended, and even humanitarian aid is drying up. But the final blow to the Third World, especially to the African part of it, came with the termination of the cold war in 1989; the West will no longer have to support authoritarian regimes and socialist economies to keep them from going communist.⁷²

Zambia happened to be one of the “socialist economies” that benefited from the “bidding war” between East and West, and this bidding war extended to women’s issues. Countries such as Zambia became testing grounds for which economic system could better provide a postcolonial pathway to economic development and true liberation for women. This issue was particularly fraught in the context of southern Africa, where national self-determination and the oppressive system of apartheid in South Africa overshadowed “pure” women’s issues. While the US Agency for International Development (USAID) supported women’s “basic needs” (the name for a United Nations Development Program effort that emphasized the need to support a specific package of goods and services that included such things as clean water, shelter, education, and access to healthcare), Eastern Bloc countries such as Bulgaria supported Zambian women’s demands to end institutionalized racism by arguing that attention to women’s basic needs should include racial and sexual equality. In the war for the hearts and minds of the Global South, therefore, the Eastern Bloc often had the upper hand, and the steady loss of women in the developing world to the “communists” had a real impact on the global discourse on women’s rights as debated at the United Nations during the Decade for Women. Furthermore, women from the Third World provided new ideas and strategies for women’s organizing to their activist colleagues in the Eastern Bloc, and the circular exchange of information between the two groups strengthened their collective power at the UN.

There are many stories of women’s activists that Western feminists have never heard of—women such as Elena Lagadinova, Maria Dinkova, Sonya Bakish, Ana Durcheva, Chibesa Kankasa, Lily Monze, and Senior Chieftainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II. They fought for women’s rights in their own way, using the rhetorical tools available to them within specific cultural and historical contexts. They may not have been “feminists” in the classic sense, since they did not prioritize women’s interests above issues



FIGURE INTRO.8 Chibesa Kankasa, 1979 (far left).

of class or race or national self-determination (a position we might today call “intersectionality”). But they believed that women’s issues were deeply embedded in larger political contexts. They saw no point in advocating for the equality of black men and women under a system of apartheid or for equal pay for equal work when the entire working class survived on less than subsistence wages. The socialists believed that women’s equity with men required some form of state intervention and necessitated a structural change in an economic system that devalued reproductive labor and care work. They believed that rights extended to women within a fundamentally unjust system would benefit only a minority of women and could too easily be taken away. The politics of recognition, to use Nancy Fraser’s phrase, should never take precedence over the politics of redistribution.

Part I of this book lays the groundwork for the careful reading of the UN Decade for Women that follows in part II. Chapter 1 deals with the theoretical literature on state feminism and the origins of the persistent stereotypes that color the dominant Western view of state socialist women’s organizing. Chapters 2–4 examine the intersections of women and socialist discourses of emancipation in the Bulgarian, American, and Zambian contexts to give readers a necessary historical grounding in the differing situations of women in the lead-up to the International Women’s Year. Although these chapters cover the same period of time, it is essential

to understand the specific domestic contexts in which women's activism took place, even if this means covering the same chronological ground more than once. Chapter 5 rewinds the clock once more to examine the geopolitics of the Cold War and the way countries such as Zambia found themselves sandwiched between rival superpowers. Part II turns to the specific preparations for the events of the International Women's Year and the subsequent UN Decade for Women. The chapters follow chronologically and narrate the history of the UN events from the perspective of Bulgarian and Zambian women, with occasional reflections on American reactions to the work of the state socialists. In the conclusion, I discuss the importance of remembering these stories as part of a political project to rescue feminism from its current role as handmaiden to neoliberalism.

In 2010, the historian Augusta Dimou exposed how German history textbooks written after 1989 obscured the European roots and international appeal of socialism and ignored "the massive impact of leftist intellectual influences on the articulation of the liberation movements in the third world, in spite of the fact that decolonization is a standard topic in history textbooks on the twentieth century."⁷³ Dimou argued that officials in the German government intentionally suppressed a history of the state socialist past that included perspectives beyond the usual tropes of totalitarianism—the secret police, travel restrictions, and consumer goods shortages. Recognizing the positive influence of the Eastern Bloc on struggles for national liberation means recognizing a positive legacy of state socialism in Eastern Europe, something that may feel politically dangerous in the current historical moment.

But academic freedom, a core principle of democratic societies, demands that intellectual inquiry remain independent of political manipulation. Intellectuals in communist countries once labored under the shackles of compulsory Marxism, a situation widely criticized by the advocates of freedom of thought and conscience. In 2018, it seems essential that researchers producing scholarship in the United States push back against the less visible, but no less binding, constraints of hegemonic neoliberalism. This does not require a wholesale rehabilitation of the state socialist past, nor a blindness to the real crimes and brutalities of twentieth-century communist regimes but, rather, a more nuanced examination of how some socialist ideals, including that of state-supported women's emancipation, shaped the course of our collective history for the better.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Ana Posadskaya, quoted in Jennifer Suchland, "Is Postsocialism Transnational?" *Signs* 36, no. 4 (2011): 837–62.

2. The press release originally appeared on <http://www.ips.org/TV/beijing15/europe-women-the-non-region-at-the-womens-conference>. It is no longer available, but a screen shot of it was preserved and is posted at <https://scholar.harvard.edu/kristenghodsee/blog/screen-shot-1995-press-release-womens-conference-beijing>.

3. Beijing Platform for Action, chap. 2, para. 15, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>.

4. I know this terminology is antiquated and politically incorrect, but these are the terms deployed by the relevant parties at the time. I use these terms throughout my text but do so in full awareness of the recent critiques of the problematic nature of the meta-geographies of the Cold War: see, e.g., Suchland, "Is Postsocialism Transnational?"

5. Defining the words "socialist" and "communist" during the Cold War period is a tricky problem. Although no twentieth-century country ever achieved true communism in the Marxist sense of the term (i.e., the state had withered away), the Western countries always referred to them as communist. To be technically correct, these countries were socialist or state socialist, because they understood that they were still in the socialist stage of their development. But because communism was the ultimate goal, the leading parties were called communist parties, and most activists referred to themselves as communists. Complicating this are the democratic socialist states of Scandinavia and the democratic socialist parties throughout the West that also referred to themselves as socialist. Throughout this book, I employ the terms "socialist," "state socialist," and "communist" to refer to countries with a one-party state striving for a communist future where that state would supposedly wither away. I use the three terms interchangeably, since many of my in-

formants used them this way, and that is how they were used during the historical period with which I am concerned.

6. Peggy Antrobus, *The Global Women's Movement: Origins, Issues and Strategies*, London: Zed, 2004; Devaki Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

7. See, e.g., Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Karen Offen, *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

8. Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 548.

9. Celia Donert, "Women's Rights in Cold War Europe: Disentangling Feminist Histories," *Past and Present* 218, supp. 8 (2013): 179–202.

10. Juliana Geran, "At the UN, Soviet Fronts Pose as Nongovernmental Organizations," December 1, 1986, www.heritage.org, accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/1986/12/at-the-un-soviet-fronts-pose-as-non-governmental-organizations>; de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations," 548.

11. For an account of Mildred Persinger's recollection of these events, see Kristen Ghodsee, "Research Note: The Historiographical Challenges of Exploring Second World–Third World Alliances in the International Women's Movement," *Global Social Policy* 14, no. 2 (2014): 244–64. Also, for a detailed discussion of the machinations leading up to the conference, see Jocelyn Olcott, *The International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

12. See, e.g., Claire Goldberg Moses and Leslie W. Rabine, *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14, no. 1 (1988): 119–57.

13. Irene Tinker, "Reflections on Forum '85 in Nairobi, Kenya: Voices from the Women's Studies Community," *Signs* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 586–89; Irene Tinker and Jane Jaquette, "UN Decade for Women: Its Impact and Legacy," *World Development* 15, no. 3 (1987): 419–27.

14. Amrita Basu, "Reflections on Forum '85 in Nairobi, Kenya: Voices from the Women's Studies Community," *Signs* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1986): 604.

15. Irene Tinker, personal communication with the author, February 2011.

16. Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56 (March–April 2009): 97–117.

17. Jane Jaquette, "Losing the Battle/Winning the War: International Politics, Women's Issues and the 1980 Mid-Decade Conference," in *Women, Politics, and the United Nations*, ed. Anne Winslow (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995), 61–76.

18. Françoise Giroux, quoted in Jennifer Seymour Whitaker, "Women of the World: Report from Mexico City," *Foreign Affairs* 54, no. 1 (October 1, 1975): 173.

19. Tinker, personal communication.
20. The Group of 77 was established in 1964 to coordinate policy making among newly independent, developing countries at the United Nations.
21. Arvonne S. Fraser, *The UN Decade for Women: Documents and Dialogue* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987), 62–63.
22. Jane Jaquette, “Crossing the Line: From Academic to the WID Office at USAID,” in *Developing Power: How Women Transformed International Development*, ed. Arvonne S. Fraser and Irene Tinker (New York: Feminist Press, 2004), 189–211.
23. Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN*, 80.
24. Whitaker, “Women of the World.”
25. Olcott, *The International Women’s Year*.
26. Margaret Galey and Bernadette Paolo, “UN Conference to Review and Appraise the UN Decade for Women, July 15–26, 1985,” in *Report of the Congressional Staff Advisors to the Nairobi Conference to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives*, 10–11 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986).
27. Ethan Siegel, “The First Woman in Space Turns 80, and You Probably Never Heard of Her,” *Forbes.com*, March 6, 2017, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2017/03/06/the-first-woman-in-space-turns-80-and-you-probably-never-heard-of-her/#7bd718f2ae5e>.
28. Kristen Ghodsee, “The Left Side of History,” *ForeignAffairs.com*, April 29, 2015, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/bulgaria/2015-04-29/left-side-history>.
29. Devaki Jain, speaking on the panel “Women Activists Speak about the UN Women’s Conferences, 1975–1995,” Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, June 2011.
30. Antrobus, *The Global Women’s Movement*.
31. Nanette Funk, “A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women’s Organizations, Women’s Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 21, no. 4 (2014): 344–60.
32. De Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organisations.”
33. Arvonne Fraser and Irene Tinker, eds., *Developing Power: How Women Transformed International Development* (New York: Feminist Press, 2004).
34. Sara de Jong, *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women’s Issues across North–South Divides* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017).
35. Olcott, *The International Women’s Year*, 197. Olcott admits to great unevenness in the sources available on International Women’s Year and has commented on the extant collections, which “clearly over-represent well-educated women from wealthier countries.” She had hoped to work with more Mexican primary documents, but the Mexican Foreign Relations Ministry apparently lost the relevant records: see Olcott, *The International Women’s Year*, 253–54.
36. Landon Storrs, “Attacking the Washington ‘Femocracy’: Antifeminism in the Cold War Campaign against ‘Communists in Government.’” *Feminist Studies* 33,

no. 1 (2007): 118–52; Landon Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

37. Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism, American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

38. Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of "The Feminine Mystique": The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000). When I first met Horowitz in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in October 2012, he told me that Friedan was very displeased with his book because she did not want her leftist past exposed.

39. Erik McDuffe, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

40. Similarly, with a few notable exceptions, US scholars and journalists write the history of American feminism as if the Cold War did not exist. The *New York Times* op-ed contributor Gail Collins wrote a 512-page history of the US women's movement that completely ignored the international geopolitical context: see Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (Boston: Back Bay, 2006). Ruth Rosen mentions the importance of the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite for spurring women's education in science and math and recognizes the significance of the anti-Vietnam War protests, but she scarcely addresses the activism of women from Eastern Europe: see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Estelle Friedman does a little better in that she recognizes the importance of socialist feminism and the influence of early socialist thinkers such as Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai. But on the whole, she still focuses on the internal dynamics of US women's organizing and, to a smaller extent, the organizing of women in the developing world: see Estelle Friedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002).

41. "News in Brief, September 21, 1954," in Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) records, 1945–79, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, box 3, folder 4.

42. Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism, American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

43. Rosen, *The World Split Open*.

44. De Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations."

45. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot."

46. Mihaela Miroiu, "'Not the Right Moment!' Women and the Politics of Endless Delay in Romania," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 580–81.

47. Amy Borovoy and Kristen Ghodsee, "Decentering Agency in Feminist Theory: Social Democracy, Postsocialism, and the Re-engagement of the Social Good," *Women's Studies International Forum* 35 (2012): 153–65.

48. Jean Robinson, "Women, the State, and the Need for Civil Society: The Liga Kobieta in Poland," in *Comparative State Feminism*, ed. Dorothy Stetson McBride and Amy Mazur (London: Sage, 1995), 205.
49. Barbara Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 206–7.
50. Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot," 349–50.
51. Mihaela Miroiu, "Communism was a State Patriarchy, not State Feminism," *Aspasia* 1 (2007): 197–201.
52. Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN*, 103.
53. Kristen Ghodsee, "State Socialist Women's Organizations in Cold War Perspective: Revisiting the Work of Maxine Molyneux," *Aspasia* 10 (2016): 111–21.
54. Sandrine Kott, "The Forced Labor Issue between Human and Social Rights, 1947–1957," *Humanity* 3, no. 3 (2012): 321–35.
55. Kott, "The Forced Labor Issue between Human and Social Rights," 330.
56. Maxine Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
57. Arvonne Fraser, *She's No Lady: Politics, Family and International Feminism* (Minneapolis: Nodin, 2007), 197.
58. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," 110–11.
59. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," 107.
60. Nancy Fraser, "How Feminism Became Capitalism's Handmaiden—and How to Reclaim It," October 14, 2013, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal>.
61. Elena Gapova, "Gender Equality versus Difference and What Post-socialism Can Teach Us," *Women Studies International Forum* 59 (2016): 9–16.
62. De Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations."
63. Elisabeth Armstrong, "Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation," *Signs* 41, no. 2 (2016): 305–31; Katharine McGregor, "Indonesian Women, the Women's International Democratic Federation and the Struggle for 'Women's Rights,' 1946–1965," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 117 (July 2012): 193–208.
64. Kristen Ghodsee, "Rethinking State Socialist Mass Women's Organizations: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975–1985," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 49–73.
65. Kristen Ghodsee, *The Left Side of History: World War II and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).
66. Ulf Brunnbauer and Karin Taylor, "Creating a 'Socialist Way of Life': Family and Reproduction Policies in Bulgaria, 1944–1989," *Continuity and Change* 19, no. 2 (2004): 283–312.
67. Henry Schaefer, "Zhivkov's Great Society," *Radio Free Europe Research*, September 23, 1968, accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/7-1-76.shtml>.

68. Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 538–62.

69. Krassimira Daskalova, "A Woman Politician in the Cold War Balkans: From Biography to History," *Aspasia* 10 (2016): 63–88.

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71. Gisela Geisler, *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation, and Representation* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute, 2004).

72. Peter Duignan and Lewis H. Gann, "Communism in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Reappraisal," Hoover Essays, Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, 1994, 1.

73. Augusta Dimou, "Changing Certainties? Socialism in German History Textbooks," in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), 299.

CHAPTER 1. STATE FEMINISM

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2. Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*.

3. Maria Dinkova, "Strasti po Velikata Zhenska Revolyutsiya," *Vesni*, no. 5 (2003): 27–30; Maria Dinkova, "Strasti po Velikata Zhenska Revolyutsiya," *Vesni*, nos. 6–7 (2003): 24–25; Maria Dinkova, "Strasti po Velikata Zhenska Revolyutsiya," *Vesni*, no. 6 (2008): 33–62. All translations from the Bulgarian are my own or the work of my research assistant, Mira Nikolova.

4. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 1884, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 1993, 1999, 2000, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family>.

5. This is admittedly a very simple rendering, and a more thorough discussion of Engels's theories and their application to feminism can be found in Nancy Holmstrom, *The Socialist Feminist Project: A Contemporary Reader in Theory and Politics* (New York: Monthly Review, 2004).

6. All of Clara Zetkin's writing is online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin>.

7. Alexandra Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, trans. Salvator Attansio (New York: Herder and Herder, [1926] 1971), accessed August 24, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1926/autobiography.htm>.

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9. Alexandra Kollontai, "International Socialist Conferences of Women Workers," 1918, accessed August 24, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1907/is-conferences.htm>.