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HEATHER PAXSON *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. xvi + 335 p. \$60.00
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reviewed by Susan Greenhalgh

In this thick ethnography of modern motherhood in urban Greece, anthropologist Heather Paxson makes cultural and political sense of the dramatic fall in birth rates (today the Greek total fertility rate stands at 1.3-1.4) that has occurred in a culture still equating womanhood with motherhood. The study is based on an especially rich body of data gathered by Paxson, lecturer in anthropology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, during two years of fieldwork in Athens during 1993-95. Placing what she calls the ethics of gender--a system of virtues specifying the qualities of good women and good men--at the heart of her analysis, the author traces broad if still partial cultural transformations in the ethics of womanhood. From an earlier ethic of maternal service and sacrifice for family and husband, notions of the good woman have increasingly been based on an ethic of choice and self-determination in reproductive practices and, most recently, an ethic of well-being prioritizing women's health in contraceptive and reproductive decisionmaking. These cultural shifts are taking place within a larger political context in which nationalist anxieties about "the demographic problem" and "the abortion problem" (Paxson claims that at least half of all pregnancies are aborted) are institutionalized in a family planning program that makes women responsible for the well-being of the nation-state by conveying the notion that they have a moral obligation to fulfill their "biological mission" by "freely and rationally choosing" to reproduce energetically for the Greek nation. Far from liberating women, Paxson argues, these cultural and political shifts have exacerbated the conflicts and contradictions surrounding contraception and motherhood in Greek women's lives. This theoretically sophisticated study is part of a new wave of work on the politics of reproduction by feminist anthropologists who place issues of gender, agency, and modern selfhood center stage. In successfully tying individual reproductive experiences to larger nationalist politics, Paxson has produced an exemplary study that makes an important contribution both to the anthropology of reproduction and to the cultural study of low fertility in modern Europe. Highly readable and highly recommended.