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Going Solo: A Qualitative Comparison of Single Women in Japan and Colombia

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Going Solo:

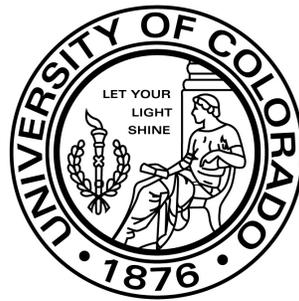
A Qualitative Comparison of Single Women in Japan and Colombia

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To Mom,
for teaching me strength.

To Gretchen,
for teaching me creativity.

To Maddy,
for teaching me inquisitiveness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past century, the twin forces of globalization and industrialization have significantly shifted global cultural and social norms. One crucial demographic outcome of this has been the emergence of single women as a new category and identity for women. Prolonged singlehood often radically alters a woman's life, allowing her to escape the confines of an early marriage, pursue education, and join the workforce. Understanding how the economic situations of women in different contexts around the globe differ from each other and how these differences impact singlehood is the focus of this thesis. While these processes are globally ubiquitous, they happen in different ways in various contexts. In this thesis, I focus on two case studies- Japan and Colombia- to better understand how specific political-economic contexts impact single womanhood. Based on these case studies, I aim to demonstrate that the single woman demographic is an overlooked category in many studies of gender inequality. Paying greater attention to single women is crucial to understanding how gender impacts global economic development. By examining globalization on an international level through the lens of single women and economics, a more nuanced understanding emerges of how women's greater access to education, work, and rights plays out differently in the Global North versus the Global South. While improvements of rights in certain categories, for example education or financial independence, are typically thought of as universally beneficial to the improvement of women's rights, the context in which these improvements are provided impacts the ability of women to take full advantage of them.

For much of modern history, it has been uncustomary for women to remain single or unwed unless they were nuns or widows. Although single women did exist in the past, they were often ostracized from their communities (Traister 2016; Hufton 1984; Hill 2001). In the past fifty

years however, changing cultural norms have allowed more women the freedom to remain unmarried without harsh social backlash. These norms are shifting due to various international dynamics. For the purposes of this paper, singlehood refers to women not in a legally recognized partnership. The main factors that render prolonged singlehood as a possibility for women include: financial independence, access to healthcare, education, sexual and reproductive rights, the ability to own property, cultural acceptance, religion, class and status, and economic conditions. Many of these factors have already been contextualized theoretically in articles that explore the emancipation processes of women internationally. Understanding how these factors affect single womanhood is key to a broader understanding of how marriage affects gender equality around the world. Drawing on the growing literature on modern singlehood, I demonstrate that later marriage is only a partial indicator of gender equality. It is especially important to compare different global contexts, developed versus developing, to fully understand the complex relationship that exists between marriage and equality.

In my two in-depth case studies of Japan and Colombia, I explore a variety of factors related to gender equality and marriage in each country. The primary factors include: the country's history, economic situation, female labor force participation rate, education, and household structures. Secondary factors include modern-day rhetoric, political events, industries, and class and status. The analysis is grounded within specific socioeconomic groups in both countries.

The main sources of information used for this analysis are secondary sources. For the Japan case study I relied heavily on books and supplemented the information with articles. There are relatively few books written about women in Colombia, thus the main sources for information are articles. Although some of the information engaged with single women directly,

much of the information in these sources was about women in general. A lot of the analysis about single women is my own. I have supplemented this information with data from internationally recognized databases from the United Nations, OECD, and World Economic Forum. The method in which the information was collected for this thesis was an extensive annotated bibliography. In my experience at the University of Colorado Boulder, the feminist lens can be problematic for many scholars of international relations. For that reason, I have chosen to ground my analysis not only in the field of women and gender studies, but also economics, a much more traditional and widely accepted field within international relations. Because the single woman is such a new and unique category of investigation, by grounding the analysis in economics I hope to bring legitimacy to my findings for more traditional scholars.

I choose Japan and Colombia because of what they represent on a larger international level. Japan is the embodiment of a developed country while Colombia is emblematic of a developing country. The differences in economic prosperity in both countries will provide an interesting framework for analyzing the circumstances of single women and how gender equality is impacted by economy. Although these countries are in totally different parts of the world, speak different languages, and have totally different cultures, the fact that both countries are experiencing a growth in the numbers of single women in their countries provides the rationale for analysis.

Japan presents an interesting case study for a few reasons. Like other developed countries, Japan has recently been experiencing an increase in the average age at marriage for men and women, a shrinking overall marriage rate, and an upsurge in the number of single people in the country (United Nations 2013). Even though these events are occurring around the world in both developed and developing countries, Japan has received a great deal of attention

from popular culture and international media outlets (Ansari 2015; The Economist 2016). Much of the blame for the falling birth and marriage rates in the country is being placed on single women. However in reality, it is a complex set of cultural and economic factors that are responsible for the diminishing fertility rate. Japan therefore raises interesting questions about how marriage, economics, and gender inequality all intersect within the context of a developed country.

Colombia is well known for its various gender inequality and economic issues, many of which likewise affect other developing countries, particularly in Latin America. For example, Colombia suffers from a high rate of sexism. Best known by its Spanish name as ‘machismo,’ it is a type of sexism that generates a culture of gendered expectations that men are powerful and dominant while women are passive and subservient. Machismo is a residual aspect from the days of colonialism and affects much of Latin America (De Vos 1987, 503). Not only is Colombia a great case because it exemplifies the challenges women from developing countries face in their everyday lives, it also has interesting industries within the country that impact women. Part of the Colombian case study will be an in-depth examination of the cut-flower industry, including how it impacts women, and how this industry is representative of larger economic phenomena happening around the globe. This case study will also focus on the phenomenon of feminization of poverty, which refers to the increased numbers of women among poor people. Colombia therefore elicits interesting questions in the study of single women on how global economic forces are creating new spaces for single women to exist while also exploiting them through sexist institutions.

The broader context of both of these cases will allow for a deeper understanding of trends that are happening in the Global North and South with regards to gender and globalization.

Across the globe, it is evident that an assemblage of social conditions must exist and coalesce in order for women to be able to choose to remain single. As historian Marcia Yonemoto articulates in her book, “in many ways, gender history is about seeing women’s problems as ‘our’ problems” (Yonemoto 20116, 223). By approaching this subject from a feminist lens, not only will current processes be examined and critiqued, but the history of changing gender relations can also be explored. As a vastly growing global phenomenon, the single woman demographic is critical to understanding gender inequality and economic development around the globe.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theoretical Background

For the past several hundred years, it has been incredibly uncommon for women to remain unmarried throughout most of the world without facing harsh social and cultural consequences. Instead, women have had two socially appropriate choices: they could enter into a heterosexual marriage contract with a man or they could give up everything to join a convent (Traister 2016). Adult womanhood was defined as married to a man, anything outside of this was considered dangerous and generally was not allowed. Not only was marriage an effective way of controlling women's behaviors, it also became a potent tool in the continued economic, political, and social oppression of women (Traister 2016, 192). What is interesting is not that this oppression existed, but rather how women challenged it around the world and eventually started to overcome it, particularly within the past 100 years. Although many conflicts and problems exist within the framework of society concerning marriage, gender expectations, and ideas about female singlehood, norms have in fact shifted significantly across the world within the past century. The history of the women's movements across different nations has had profound impacts on the development of the new demographic of single women around the globe (Rao 1991; Traister 2016, 28; Molyneux 1998).

There are several factors that must exist in order for women to be able to make the choice about when, if ever, to get married. First of all, to exist outside of marriage a woman must have access to financial independence (Traister 2016, 37). Within a traditional marriage women are usually left to care for the children, cook the food, and generally keep a household running, all jobs that are unpaid and not considered valuable when measuring the economy by traditional standards. Without access to the workforce or an independent income, women had to (and often

still do) marry to gain economic stability separate from that of her family. However, things began to change for women as educational opportunities as well as access to jobs began to open up for them. Part of the rise in jobs available to women is linked with the demand of labor. When more workers are needed (for example during the Second World War) and no more men available to occupy the positions, only then does it really become acceptable for women to work. Although it was a long push-and-pull process of gaining and subsequently losing rights, women slowly made their way into the workforce as well as higher education institutions.

The labor force participation rate of women is indicative of drastic changes within international and national economies. The current global economic system is one of neoliberal capitalism. This type of system deregulates industries and the economy through a reduction of government involvement, stresses the importance of privatization and the deregulation of labor, and emphasizes the individual's need for self-determination (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 38; Bay Cheng 2016, 183). As economies around the world are opening up to international trade, women have begun to be offered more jobs in export and import industries such as textiles, manufacturing, and service industries (Lucas 2007).

This system impacts every aspect of a single woman's life, from the type of work is available to them to the products available for purchase in their local stores. However, this comes at a cost. Certain types of jobs created by the global economy are feminized and conditions are worsened to become like traditional jobs held by women (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 72). In our neoliberal capitalist world, the paid economy takes precedent over the unpaid, creating a hierarchy where certain types of work are valued over others (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 71). In addition, the idea of 'commercialized feminism,' or getting women to focus on individually making a better life for themselves instead of focusing on the larger social issues of

structural violence, has emerged in neoliberal capitalistic societies and continues to grow (Bay-Cheng 2016, 183). The entrance of women into the workforce has many positive effects for many women, the main being the financial independence. While both positive and negative aspects are associated with a neoliberal capitalist system, the structure of the current global economy seems to be strongly correlated to women's ability to marry later or not at all in many different parts of the world.

The notion that more education leads women to marry later or not at all is a widely-accepted idea in literature about single women (Balakrishnan 1976, 168; Petrowski 2015, 7; Retherford 2001, 70-71; Dixon 1978, 449-450). A woman's level of education has a direct effect on the age she marries, mainly due to her participation in the labor force (Retherford 2001, 77). More education means that a woman has more options in the kind of work she can do. No longer are women limited to teaching, nursing, and factory jobs; higher education and the opportunities that come with it provide the means for women to become lawyers, doctors, CEOs, and politicians in most parts of the world. Although many of these jobs are still restricted to many women due to reasons of class and access to education, the fact that some women are entering into these professions is exciting in and of itself. There is an aspect of cultural acceptance that impacts the type of work available to women as well. It is also important to note that economic returns on higher education are higher for women and the opportunity costs of having children or leaving work also grow with level of education and rising wages (Retherford 2001, 77-82). Universal access to education does not exist in most societies and many women must continue to fight for their right to education.

Another universal theme about singlehood is the idea that it is easier for women to remain single in urban centers as opposed to rural ones (Traister 2016, 72; Balakrishnan 1976).

This is a worldwide phenomenon: cities mean jobs, jobs mean financial independence and security, which allows for women to forego marriage for either a period of time or forever (Retherford 2001, 70-71; Dixon 1978, 449-450). As women began to move from rural family farms to urban centers and the subsequent factory jobs offered in these cities, they began to postpone marriage for different reasons. From wanting the financial security to pay for an expensive wedding in Japan pre-1960 (Dixon 1978, 456) to not wanting to give up economic independence to survive on a man's income when women married in Ireland (Dixon 1978, 464), the reasons for postponing marriage either for a time or altogether began to emerge and subsequently began to be accepted within society. When women have alternative options to marriage they tend to forgo it in greater numbers. Living in urban areas generally gives women more options concerning if and when they want to get married (Dixon 1978, 465). Today, "cities offer domestic infrastructure" (Traister 2016, 81), i.e. laundry, cooking, and cleaning services, everything that women provided to men as their wives, which allows women to remain single and participate in the public sphere as opposed to being contained to the private sphere only. For a long time, if a woman desired a sexual and reproductive life as well as good standing within her community, she had to marry (Traister 2016, 38). Slowly, these trends and social stigmas began to shift and allow women to forgo marriage for longer periods of time, if not altogether, without inciting social ostracization.

Access to reproductive health options such as contraception and abortion, have also been key factors in determining the single status of women. If a woman does not have easy access to birth control, it can mean early pregnancy and generally an early marriage age if not single motherhood (Balakrishnan 1976, 167). Having children can make balancing the public and private spheres much more difficult, in particular when trying to stay above the poverty line. The

idea of feminization of poverty comes into play here. Few countries offer resources to mothers, and even fewer to single ones, to help pay for education, childcare, and health care (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 78). Having children can push women, even in highly developed countries, into poverty (Goldberg 2010). Because of the many challenges they face, single mothers generally exist in the lowest classes within any society (Joyce 2007, 157). Age at marriage has a profound impact on number of children, especially in places where it is hard to access birth control (Balakrishnan 1976, 167). Thus, a woman's access, or lack thereof, to birth control and abortion services is fundamental in determining her equal status within a society as well as her ability to remain single and free from poverty.

Women's sexual health and reproductive rights are not only about abortion and birth control but autonomy of one's body and right to decide when, where, and with whom to have sex and/or children (Placido 2007, 243). One interpretation of the control over women's access to these services is that men are continuing to control women's bodies and decisions (Traister 2016). This, like marriage, is another type of institutionalized oppression that men in many parts of the world use to exert control over.

Class is another determining factor that needs to be taken into account when trying to understand female singlehood. As Traister writes, "while some women are enjoying more educational, professional, sexual and social freedom than ever before, many more of them are struggling, living in a world marked by inequity, disadvantage, discrimination and poverty" (Traister 2016, 183). Class is probably the single most important factor when trying to understand the lived experiences of single women,

It's crucial to remember that privileged women no more invented liberation from marriage than they invented the idea of working to earn wages. These were all behaviors developed, out of economic necessity, by poor workingwomen. When imitated by richer women who have more power to start with, they can be understood as beneficial; the can

be seen as social progress and perhaps part of a movement, or at least a glamorized trend (Traister 2016, 209).

Thus, looking at the differences between upper and lower class women can tell us about what female singlehood really is and what the differences between women's experiences are. This analysis can be done within a country but also on a global scale when comparing countries at different levels of development. The choice between marriage and remaining single are vastly different depending on a woman's class. Married women generally have greater economic advantages over their single counterparts, in part due to the number of sources of income coming in (Joyce 2007, 30) and in part due to how society has been set up to favor heterosexual partnerships (Budgeon 2016).

There is also a significant amount of literature that claims that women from lower socioeconomic classes tend to marry at lower rates than women from higher socioeconomic classes. Because of systematic gendered economic inequality, it can be more difficult for women from poorer socioeconomic classes to maintain a husband, children, and a job all at once. Marriage presents certain risks to low-income women, including the affordability of marriage and economic factors, loss of control due to traditional gender roles, and domestic violence (Edin 2000, 117-126). Marriage is a very different institution in the context of poverty. Poverty in this sense is "not merely an effect of non-marriage, but an important predictor" (Edin 2000, 115). It can be harder for women from lower classes to find a suitable due to the type of men available to them in their areas (Boo 2003; Edin 2000; Gibson- Davis 2005; Schneider 2015).

Studies show that a woman is more likely to get married if she has access to economic privilege: food, health care, and environment (Traister 2016). However, "[p]oor women are less likely to marry than their more affluent counterparts but are far more likely to have a birth outside of marriage" (Schneider 2015, 1893). This is typically true because of the high standards

that are expected of a relationship to be considered for marriage: financial stability, high quality of the relationship and the fear of divorce (Gibson-Davis 2005, 1310). Among America's poor today, having a child together is no longer grounds enough for marriage (Gibson-Davis 2005, 1311). Considering how class impacts singlehood in the context of motherhood and why women choose not to marry their partners is an important consideration in the study of female singlehood.

Finally, defining what a single woman actually is for the purposes of this paper is instrumental. There are many different ways of thinking about single women. They could be women who do not marry until later in life, widowed, divorced or women who have never married. They can be from any age group over 15 years old, of any race or ethnicity, any religious affiliation, any cultural background, any nationality, any economic background, any sexuality (lesbian, bisexual, polyamorous, questioning/queer, pansexual, trans, etc.), and women with and without children. Thus, the term 'single women' refers to a large and diverse group of individuals. Women also define being single differently within the context of their own lives (Traister 2016). From seeing singlehood as a personal freedom to explore individual interests to seeing singlehood as a temporary phase in one's life that is supposed to eventually end (Budgeon 2016), women's self-understanding of singlehood varies greatly:

A woman who remains single longer than her peers does not necessarily consciously adopt or repudiate a particular model of femininity, and neither can her single status be understood purely as a product of general changes in social ideals or expectations of womanhood (Dales 2009, 13).

Single women come from different backgrounds and environments. Said external conditions have great impacts of their states of singlehood.

There are several points during a woman's life that she may find herself in a state of singlehood. In general, women are single from the time they are children to the time that they

reach their childbearing years. At this point in their lives, various factors impact whether or not they get married and at what age. Unless a woman does not marry, she will not be considered single for the majority of her childbearing years as she is typically engaged in the raising of her children within the context of her marriage. However, later in life women can once again find themselves in a state of singlehood, usually due to divorce or the death of a husband. Different social norms can affect women differently at the different points in their lives. Being single at 25 is different from being single at 65 in the same way that being rich and single is different from being poor and single. Different circumstances lead to different lifestyle appropriate behaviors. All of these factors must be kept in mind throughout this thesis.

By grounding singlehood in the life cycle of a woman while also remembering that the context of every individual's life is different, this paper defines single women as any woman who is unwed. Although it is impossible to place all single women in a single category, the ambiguity as to who is considered a single woman or not is done on purpose. This paper does not seek to make a judgment about how women choose to lead their lives, rather it uses the category of 'single woman' to ground its analysis of larger economic and social forces that impact gender relations around the world.

One challenge when analyzing gender in research is that one experience does not fit all. For the purposes of narrowing down the immense number of potential topics surrounding single women, this paper will focus on the economic aspects of being single. In particular, the differences between the Global North and South and their differing interpretations of singlehood and understandings of women's issues will be the overarching comparison of this paper. Developed and developing countries have such vastly different economies and while literature exists on the differences between them economically and its impact on women (Rao 1991; Lucas

2007; Mutari 1997; Rives 1997), few academic sources have examined it with the insight offered by the lens of single women. How class and the global economy affect women around the world is key to understanding the modern processes going on today.

Comparative Data

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has created the World Marriage Database about the percentage of men and women who reported being married, single, divorced, separated, in a consensual union, and widowed in both Colombia and Japan in 1970 and 2005. This data is a good starting point for the case studies as it grounds the analysis in hard numbers regarding singlehood. There are some notable differences between the data from these two countries.

In Japan, between 1970 and 2005, women aged 20-44 reported significant increases in the number of singles and significant decreases in those who reported being married (United Nations 2013). For example, in 1970 18% of women aged 25-29 reported being single while in 2005 that number jumped to 59%. In Colombia, the numbers are a bit more spread out. While there were increases in women who reported being single, they were lower. For example, in 1970 among women aged 25-29, 29% reported being single, while in 2005, that number was 36%. This 7% increase in Colombia is in stark contrast to the 41% increase in Japan.

The decreases in women reporting being single and the increases in those reporting to be in a consensual union are much more significant in Colombia. Among women aged 20-24, the number of women reporting being married dropped from 36% to 8.5% while the number of consensual unions rose from 11% to 33% (United Nations 2013). Thus, it is apparent that while single women exist in both countries, the ways in which they consider themselves single is fundamentally different between the two countries. Because the number of people cohabitating

in consensual unions in Japan were so low, numbers on people in these types of unions are not included in the census. This is definitely not the case for Colombia, and as will be discussed later, consensual unions are key to understanding unmarried women in Colombia.

Two other interesting points of analysis emerged from this data. The first is the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM), which is the average age at which people marry in a country. In general, the SMAM in Japan is much higher than that of Colombia. From 1970 to 2005 the SMAM of people in Japan increased drastically while in Colombia it did not. In Japan in 1970, men married at an average age of 27.5, which increased to 31.1 in 2005. For women, these numbers increased from 24.7 to 29.4 (United Nations 2013). In Colombia in 1970 the SMAM for men was 26.3, which increased to 26.5 in 2005. For women the SMAM went from 22.5 to 23.1 (United Nations 2013). These increases in Colombia are minimal and not particularly significant to the understanding of singlehood in the country.

There are two conclusions that can be drawn from this information. The first is that people in Japan tend to marry at a later age than those in Colombia. The fact that people in Japan marry at a later age is potentially reflective of larger trends between developed and developing countries but more research would need to be done to confirm this. This data also shows that the processes with regards to marriage in Japan seem to be much more intense than those in Colombia. The changes that are occurring in Japan with regards to singlehood and marriage are happening in drastic ways. This is not to say that what is happening in Colombia is any less noteworthy, but rather that the two countries are going through different processes. The second interesting thing that emerges from this data is that in both countries, there do not seem to be much difference in the numbers of widows and divorces between 1970 and 2005. Although there have been some changes and fluctuations in numbers of divorces and widows, the differences are

not significant. This is interesting because even though both countries faced violent conflicts in the last century, rates of widowhood have not changed drastically. It is also significant because although divorce is becoming more socially acceptable in both countries, divorce rates are only slightly increasing. In both countries, an increase in divorce never seems to go above 5% (United Nations 2013).

There is some additional data from the Global Gender Gap Report from 2016 that is interesting to consider when comparing Japan to Colombia. This report focuses on the differences in gender-based disparities in countries around the world. It assesses factors in education, economics, health, and politics to rank countries depending on how large or small the gaps between the genders is in those categories. Out of the 144 countries included in the study, Japan ranks 111th while Colombia ranks 39th (World Economic Forum 2016). While this may come as a surprise considering the differences in economic development between the two countries, it does show that institutionalized sexism is still strong in Japan whereas conditions between men and women in Colombia, while still unequal, are slightly less disproportionate. Although there are similarities between the experiences of single women in Japan and Colombia, the processes happening in both countries are distinct.

Chapter 3: Japan Case Study

Introduction

Japan, an economically well-developed country, represents challenges faced by other developed countries with regards to falling population and marriage rates. How economics in a highly industrialized country like Japan impact women is essential to understanding larger global economic processes. Japan's case is also unique due to the cultural and historical conditions that exist in the country. Interestingly, the country has received international attention for the fact that “[t]he proportion of Japanese who had never married by the age of 50 rose from 5% in 1970 to 16% in 2010” (The Economist 2016). Much of the culpability for the current population and marriage crises of the country is placed on the single female population. An in depth study of Japan will not only shed light on larger economic and political trends happening within the country and across the globe, but it will also help clarify the situation of single women within the context of a developed country.

Historical Background

The recent history of women in Japan is a fascinating and complex story. During the Empire of Japan or Imperial Era (1868-1947), married women were considered property of the household or the eldest male in a family. A woman's duty in life was the family and failure to produce an heir was considered fair grounds for divorce (Dales 2009, 14). It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the first wave of feminism would arise in Japan. The goals of this movement were expansive, ranging from social welfare to women's political role (Dales 2009, 16). It is not until after the Second World War that we begin to observe a shift in traditional gender roles in Japan.

After the end of the Second World War, Allied Occupation was involved to a high degree in organizing what would become the Japanese government as we recognize it today. The Equal Rights Amendment was added to the Japanese constitution by the Allied Occupation, which not only recognized the legal rights of wives as individual human beings and their right to choose whom they wished to marry (Dales 2009, 16) but also granted them the right to vote and to education (Dales 2009, 17; Hara 1995, 103). While legal changes do not always reflect social norms and values, they are an important indicator of changing beliefs and practices within a country. During this period in Japanese history the nuclear family model (a husband, wife and 2.5 children) developed (Dales 2009, 17), a model that would come to define gender relations in Japan for decades to come. Although this Western imported ideal proliferated throughout Japanese culture, multigenerational families continued to be common. This time period set up the classic dynamic between housewife and breadwinner in heterosexual relationships. Women who worked were considered as being lower class (Dales 2009, 17), while women who were able to stay at home to raise the children and manage the household were considered the ideal of society (Kawano 2014, 3).

The economic situation of the post-wars years was one of incredible growth for Japan (Kawano 2014, 2). It was during this time period that the dominant social narrative about salary men and housewives emerged from the middle-classes. Middle class men became the sole income generators of a household, as they were more or less guaranteed lifetime employment at a rate that allowed them to provide everything their family needed. Marriage for women in middle classes essentially became 'lifetime employment' (Kawano 2014, 4). Although this narrative has come to define the gendered expectations of men and women in Japan, it is not reflective of the experiences of the larger society. It has however, created a story of what is

considered the ideal even to this day. For example, in 2004 41% of women said they would prefer staying home over working, a figure that increased to 50% in 2012 (Yonemoto 2016, 219). In addition, it is important to note that the vast social safety net (health insurance, childcare services, etc.) provided by the Japanese government also allowed for this model to exist.

Second wave feminism happened around the 1970s in Japan, yet it was not until the economic recession of the 1990s and subsequent slow economy of the 2000s that women really began to see their options outside of marriage really opening up (Kawano 2014, 5). These financial crises drastically shifted the Japanese economy and benefits given to employees opening up room in the labor market for more women to find work (Kawano 2014, 1-2). These processes forced many young people to enter into short-term irregular work. Growth of women in these irregular workforces has grown drastically, in 1985, 32.1% of women participated in irregular work, while in 2011 that rate was 54.7%. It has also grown for men but much smaller rates; in 1985 the rate was 7.4% while in 2011 it was 19.9% (Kawano 2014, 2). The slowing down of the Japanese economy created much anxiety about the future of the country. This, in conjunction with many other factors subtly shifted the options of women, leading to drastic changes in gender relations and marriage rates in the country.

One of the most unique and interesting occurrences that happened in Japan in the post-wars years was the nearly universal marriage rate within the country. In 1975, the proportion of men who had never married was 6% of the population and 5% of women. Jump forward to 1995 and those percentages rise to 22% and 15% respectively (Retherford 2001, 65). Although the universal marriage rates did not last, it is interesting to note that not long ago the Japanese population was almost universally married. One possible explanation for this is a marriage squeeze, or gender imbalance in a society due to deaths from a conflict. In 1975, there was a high

man to woman ratio in Japan. However, this appears to have happened because of the baby boom in 1945-1949 followed by a drastic fertility decline. Men who were 25-29 in 1975, they had fewer women to choose from to marry (Retherford 2001, 69). Because men outnumber women in Japanese society it should have been easier for women to marry and yet this did not happen (Retherford 2001, 70; Tachibanaki 2010, 11-13). One reasonable conclusion is that the marriage squeeze was not the cause of drastic shift in marriage age in Japan during the second part of the twenty-first century.

Modern Japanese history is a complex story, which has had profound impacts on the population of single women. The fact that only twenty years after the nearly universal marriage rate in the country, the number of couples getting married drops dramatically seems to signify that circumstances in Japan changed to the point where marriage was no longer as appealing to a large part of the population. This has huge demographic implications for Japanese society, including a low fertility rate and an aging population crisis. Understanding why people in Japan have stopped marrying is intertwined with the situation of gender inequality in the country.

Single Women

Economics

As was explained in the literature review, there are many contributing factors that allow a woman to make the decision to remain single for a prolonged period of time. In Japan, the economic situation of the country was one of the key factors that brought about a change in Japanese society allowing women more freedom to decide when, to whom, and if they wish to marry. World War II and the post-war years fostered an economic boom in the Japanese economy, creating strict gender dynamics and gendered specialization of work. The stagnation of

the economy in the 1980s and recessions in the 1990s and 2000s made the cost of marriage rise (Retherford 2001, 84).

Marriage for middle and upper classes in Japan was, and still is today, a costly affair. Many women would get temporary, highly supervised jobs in the years leading up to marriage as a way to save for their dowry (Dixon 1978, 457-458). The financial crises also drastically shifted the benefits given to employees in Japan. Many young people were forced to seek short-term irregular work characterized by low-salaries, limited benefits and low possibility for advancement (Kawano 2014, 1-2). This made the ideal nuclear family a much more difficult goal to realize for young people. The fact that men were no longer guaranteed lifetime employment with one firm, in addition to the slowing economy, put a huge constraint on the ability of nuclear families to continue existing at the same standard of living without a second income.

The economic situation of men during this time also changed drastically. During the years of elevated economic prosperity, many men were able to find jobs that guaranteed lifetime employment at a rate that allowed them to provide for their families without necessitating a second income. In order for men to provide enough income for their families on a single income, many became alienated from their families due to overwork and exhaustion. However, many men prefer alienation to sharing the responsibility of work with their wives (Mathews 2014; Dales 2009, 25). Today, the era of lifetime employment is generally over for men in Japan (Mathews 2014, 63). The resulting job instability necessitates a change in family organization. The tightened job market in Japan generally signifies that any jobs that do exist are given to men first (Kurotani 2014, 85). Today, there is a big disparity between how men feel about women in the workplace: publically they say that women are more than capable of doing what men can do, but in reality, many do not believe that (Kurotani 2014, 100). Even today, women's status in the

labor market is valued lower than men because of the cultural belief that men are meant to be the breadwinners (Kimoto 2010, 225).

“The rates of marriage are not the same across Japanese society. Women with fewer financial resources and lower levels of education may need to marry earlier as a means to support themselves” whereas “women with higher educational levels and good jobs may be able to wait indefinitely until they find the appropriate person” (Nakano 2014, 164). Class in most developed countries, including Japan, is highly stratified between the have and have nots, which impacts the ability of women to remain single (Tachibanaki 2010, 265). While a large portion of this chapter focuses on the struggles of middle class women in Japan and their fight for equal rights, women in different social classes are an important part of the story of single women in Japan.

Social class in Japan, especially for women, is complex. It is generally thought to be composed of three factors: education level, occupation, and income (Tachibanaki 2010, 51). For married homemakers who do not work, however, a husband’s income is the sole determinant of their social class in society (Tachibanaki 2010, 59). A woman's class is not based solely on her occupation, most women are considered to be in middle to lower classes with only a few in the upper classes (Tachibanaki 2010, 61). Because of the lack of opportunities and resources offered to women by society, many have a difficult time getting and remaining safely out of poverty. On the other hand, women have more social mobility than men in some sense because they have the option to marry up (Tachibanaki 2010, 271). This comes at the cost of their own economic freedom and independence to make their own decisions without a husband. These phenomena will likely not change until women begin to have more of the same opportunities that men have and the culture shifts to recognize women in their own right.

A separate yet equally important part of this analysis is the role that status plays in Japan. Japan has a long history of aristocracy and hereditary elite (Lebra 1993). This history plays out today even though there is much less of an emphasis on the hereditary aspects of this social hierarchy and much more of an emphasis on capital and education. For example, many primary school teachers are highly revered in society. This is because of the important role that they play in molding young minds and the fact that they must be in possession of a comprehensive understanding of all subjects taught in schools. Even though they do not make much money, their status in society is quite high (Yonemoto 2016). Other examples of this include those educated at the elite schools and married to those that come from ancient elite families (Lebra 1993).

It is important to make a distinction here about the fine line that exists between *choosing* to work and *having* to work. In Japan, the latter is much less prestigious and lowers a person's status in society. Especially if someone is a mother, working due to financial need is seen as lesser than a mother who is able to stay at home to raise her children. Working mothers in particular face strong stigmatization in Japanese society, even if it is a conscious choice made without concern for financial need.

The “[n]ature of women's poverty has been minimized and overlooked in Japanese society” (Kimoto 2010, 203) mainly due to the fact that women have consistently been protected from poverty by the incomes of their husbands. With the collapse of the economy and the huge shift in Japanese society, female poverty is no longer something Japan can overlook. Generally, most at risk for poverty are lone women (usually older) and single mothers (Chandler 1991, 92). Japan needs to address these women and their concerns if it hopes to maintain living standards for all of its citizens.

The economic story of Japan has close ties with the story of single women in the country. The economic boom around the middle of the twentieth century created many new jobs for both men and women. Men were often engaged in lifetime employment positions at large corporate firms, while women typically participated in temporary part-time occupations. At the same time a dominant narratives about the breadwinner-housewife ideal were created in the middle-class from outside Western influences. The changing economic situation of the country in the latter half of the twentieth century altered the types of jobs available to men, making this middle-class ideal much more difficult to realize. While the cultural beliefs in the country have not shifted much with regards to gender roles, women have begun to push back against traditional ideals. Although working after marriage and children is still stigmatized in Japanese society, more women are consciously making the decision to continue participation in the economy regardless.

Female Labor Force Participation Rate

Beginning around 1975 in Japan, the labor force participation rate of women (especially ones aged 25-29) began to drastically increase (Retherford 2001, 79). One plausible explanation for this was the increase in service industry jobs that were created as the economy slowly began to shift away from manufacturing jobs. These service industry jobs were popular after 1975 as they offered a new avenue of part-time employment to working women in Japan (Retherford 2001, 84). Although it was a huge advancement for women to finally be paid for work they did, there are several problems associated with service industry jobs. Generally, these types of jobs are part-time, without benefits, highly gendered, increase the pay gap, and have little to no room for advancement (Goldberg 2010, 284). Working is not a solution to women's poverty mainly because women do not get the same opportunities as men. Thus employment, particularly part-time employment, is really only a partial solution to poverty for women (Bequaert 1976, 127).

Essentially, what this means for Japan is that although women were finally entering into the workforce, they were still dependent on men and marriage as a way to maintain their standard of living and stay out of poverty. Although these jobs opened up certain opportunities for women, they were also structurally oppressive and not a liberating force.

The shift from manufacturing to service industries in an economy has a huge impact on the pay gap. While the service industry expanded employment in low-wage jobs, especially for people without college degrees (Figart 1997, 188-189), it also contributed to the gendered division of labor (Tachibanaki 2010, 24). These part-time jobs opened up limited opportunities for women. Slowly throughout the 1980s and 1990s as the economy slowed the numbers of working women began to grow. The desire for a higher standard of living and the increasing educational levels among women also contributed to the numbers of women working (Tachibanaki 2010, 177-78). Today, the labor force participation rate for women is around 75% while for men it hovers around 95% (Tachibanaki 2010, 13). The growth in female labor force participation in Japan is reflective of the changing nature of society, changing values surrounding women's work, as well as indicative of a shifting economy in the country.

Occupational gender segregation is one of the main reasons for the existence of a pay gap, in particular the undervaluation of female-dominated occupations (Figart 1997, 188). The nature of Japan's labor market makes it particularly susceptible to a large pay gap. In 1986, the Japanese government passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO) as a way to try and change the gendered structure of the workplace in Japan (Kurotani 2014, 85). This law has few enforcement provisions and twenty-five years after implementation not much has changed; Japanese companies continue to be sexist and are not required to provide equal opportunity for men and women (Kurotani 2014, 100). The other issue with the EEO is that it was created to

address the pay gap of full time workers. A majority of women in Japan only work part time or non-regular jobs meaning that they are not protected by the EEOL (Fujimura-Fanselow 1995, xxi; Goldberg 2010, 302). Thus, occupational gender segregation remains a huge problem in Japanese society.

In general, men are much more likely to hold managerial positions within a company than women, who are mainly hired for clerical track positions (Tachibanaki 2010, 24). While these employment tracks are completely different from one another, it is important to note that there are relatively few women on the management track. In general, men are also much more favored when it comes to promotions within a firm (Tachibanaki 2010, 269). In some ways, this is representative of dominant narratives in Japanese society about the man as the breadwinner who needs to support his family. This response in addition to the gender gap in wages results in women being considered second-class citizens within the context of the workplace (Kimoto 2010, 205). Age discrimination is another issue in the hiring process in Japan, one that is usually worse for women (Nakano 2014, 170). For a long time in Japanese history, women were fired at the age of twenty-five as a way of ‘encouraging’ them to get married (Dixon 1978, 457). Although this practice is not common anymore, the stigma of remaining single past a certain age or continuing to work after marriage or children can negatively impact women’s experiences in the workplace.

The income gap in Japan widens the older a person is, making it much more difficult for a woman to remain unmarried and economically independent (Tachibanaki 2010, 35). As a result of all of these factors, many women do not believe they can simultaneously compete in both the employment and marriage markets (Nakano 2014, 171). This environment, where women’s contributions to the workforce are devaluated within Japanese society, does not foster a climate

that recognizes what women can bring to the table. As women continue to try and balance work and home without support, some will refrain from marriage and children in order to maintain a career.

As the number of women working rose in Japan, the wages also began to rise slowly and the opportunity costs of terminating employment due to marriage or children also increased (Retherford 2001, 82). The dominant narrative in Japanese society communicates the expectation that women must quit work once they marry to focus their energy on the household and child rearing. In 1998, seven out of ten women in Japan quit working after getting married or having a child (Retherford 2001, 82). Although the number of women who quit work when they got married began to decline, from 80% to 38% between 1973-1999, the number of women who quit working when they had their first child increased from 29% to 54% between 1965-1998 (Retherford 2001, 82). Despite the gains women made in being able to keep working after getting married, many still give up employment to raise children if this is an option to them. This places women in a vulnerable economic situation; by having to rely on a husband's income, women forgo their economic independence. Not being able to quit work after having children due to financial need lowers a couple's perceived status in society.

Leaving the workforce for an extended amount of time also makes it much more difficult to find a job again. However, "[w]omen are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with traditional marriage arrangements. This dissatisfaction is probably contributing to the rise in mean age at marriage and the proportion never marrying" (Retherford 2001, 96). Certainly, the systems in place in Japan are highly sexist, yet women in Japan are beginning to push back against the traditional ways of life in favor of more egalitarian understandings of a woman's place in the

world, even if it comes at the cost of a fertility crisis. Another way of saying this is: “Japanese women today may be acting by *not* doing” (Yonemoto 2016, 222).

The amount of time spent on leisure or housework is also a key part of women’s ability to join the workforce. Women perform around four times more unpaid labor tasks than men, down from the rate in 1981, which was nine times as much (Tachibanaki 2010, 32). Within the context of marriage, men and women spend much of their time on different tasks. Single men and women seem to spend similar amounts of their time doing the same thing: men average about one hour longer than women at work, but both seem to spend the same amount of time cleaning and cooking (Tachibanaki 2010, 30). What this shows is that the division of labor seems to be more equitable in situations outside of the traditional heterosexual marriage structure. As Japan progresses, more men have begun to adopt a positive attitude towards housework, even if in reality it is not practiced much (Mathews 2014, 63). Perhaps in time, these inequities in the labor environment will begin to grow more equitable for men and women.

The changing participation of women in the workplace in Japan is highly reflective of larger economic processes happening in the country. While there have been significant increases in the types of jobs available to women, the sexist nature of the labor market make working a very limited option for Japanese women. The absence of women in managerial positions, the lack of promotions offered to women, the large pay gap, and the gendered division of labor create a hostile working environment for Japanese women. The prevailing narrative in Japanese society places a high value on women who quit working after marriage and childbirth, creating a system in Japan that idealizes women’s dependence on men. This has serious consequences for single women who do not fit into the ideal cultural system. The unequal employment market creates an unfair system that penalizes single women for not adhering to prevailing social and

cultural norms. The work available to women generally still necessitates marriage to a man in order to attain middle-class status.

Education

Educational opportunities for women in Japan after the Second World War increased drastically. Through the policies of the Allied Occupation, educational opportunities were finally opened up for women (Hara 1995, 103). Today, almost every person in Japan completes high school (Tachibanaki 2010, 39). Although more men than women still attend university in Japan, the number of women attending universities has gone up drastically in the past century (Tachibanaki 2010, 26). Women in Japan are more likely to attend junior colleges (associate degree) than four-year universities (bachelor degree) (Tachibanaki 2010, 39). This occurs for a variety of reasons: some women choose this path because it is what they want, but for others it is a compromise they have to make due to societal, financial, and familial pressures. Although there is a minimal difference in quantity of people receiving some sort of education, the quality of education is remarkably different between the genders (Tachibanaki 2010, 40). This inequality impacts the opportunities and jobs that are available to women after college.

Class and education are closely linked in Japan. Whether or not a woman can get a higher education degree generally depends on what economic class her family comes from (Tachibanaki 2010, 55). The impact of class on access to education is greater for women than for men because parents are generally willing to make more sacrifices for a man to get a higher education than a woman (Tachibanaki 2010, 56). “Emphasis on educational capital often encourages class reproduction, particularly for women” (Kurotani 2014, 102). Because of the prioritization of male education, women lose the ability to change their class through attainment of higher educational degrees. Because of this, education loses its status as an equalizing force in society

and continues to perpetuate gendered class differences. The college entrance exams in Japan are also incredibly stressful (Retherford 2001, 98) and without appropriate resources it can be difficult for a student from a lower class to receive the resources needed to get into college. Although education for women can be an empowering force to bring about change in society, the educational structures in Japan are set up in a way that prioritizes male education and advancement over women's, leading to continued gender-based oppression within Japan.

Education has opened up many new opportunities for women. This in turn has changed the ages at which women and men marry. For women, the mean age of marriage is three and a half years more if they have a university degree as opposed to women who only have a junior high education. The opposite is true for university-educated men, who have low rates of never marrying. In Japan it is particularly difficult for poorly educated men and highly educated women to find spouses (Retherford 2001, 72). What can be learned from these statistics is that men are less interested in a spouse that is more educated than them, and likely makes more money, whereas women are not interested in a spouse that is non-educated who also likely does not make much money. Education has indirect effects on women and their age of marriage because of the labor participation rate, women with higher levels of education are more likely to work and delay marriage as a response (Retherford 2001, 77). Because of the cultural norms that expect women to quit work after marrying, "single women in Japan are much more likely to work than married women at the same age" (Retherford 2001, 78). Thus, the economics of education and labor force participation rates have a huge impact on a woman's decision whether to marry or not.

Increased education for women in Japan has impacted single women's ability to remain unmarried for longer. Higher education renders more options for women to participate in the

labor market. Issues still exist in Japan educational system: men's education is prioritized over women's education. However, the attainment of a higher educational degree is linked to later ages of marriage for women because it offers them more career opportunities. Thus, education offers limited but real avenues for women to remain unmarried.

Urban vs. Rural Locale

Between 1960 and 1975 there was a huge movement of women from rural areas to urban factory jobs (Retherford 2001, 80). This in conjunction with the emergence of the service industry opened up many opportunities for women. Even today, pressure is greater in rural areas for women to marry early and many do. This is in contrast to the situation in big Japanese cities, which are generally more accepting of single women (Nakano 2014, 165). Thus, the movement from rural family farms to individual work based in large cities has, and continues to allow, women to make more decision about when they wish to marry.

Household Structures

Arranged Marriages

The decline in arranged marriages in Japanese society has affected marriage rates. Certainly, many marriages in Japan today still have some aspect of 'arrangement' to them (i.e. familial involvement); however, the rise of individualism and modernization in Japanese society led to an increase in love-based marriages. Between the years of 1955 and 1998, arranged marriage rates fell from 63% to 7% of all marriages (Retherford 2001, 86). This gives rise to problems of where to meet potential marriage partners. Japan has traditionally been considered a same-sex oriented society as opposed to a couples oriented society; the focus within Japanese society is on same sex friendships and relationships as opposed to opposite-sex relationships, whether in the form of sexual relationships or friendships (Yoshizumi 1995, 190). Thus, it is not

uncommon for people from Japan to have few, if any, friendships with people of the opposite gender (Retherford 2001, 88). The number of people who say they are not in any kind of relationship with a person of the opposite sex is rising in Japan (Tachibanaki 2010, 119). In part this may explain why the marriage rates in Japan are falling and numbers of single people are increasing.

Divorce

Divorce in Japan is an interesting case. From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, Japan led the world in informal and common divorces (Fuess 2004, 1-2). However, faced with pressure from the rest of the world, Japan adopted new laws in 1898 leading to a huge decrease in divorces (Fuess 2004, 3). Although divorce numbers began to rise again after the Second World War, the Japanese government does not like to emphasize this as it is seen as against 'traditional Japanese values' (Fuess 2004, 6). Even though this is not in fact historically accurate, Japanese culture has embodied the rejection of divorce and socially stigmatized it. This has interesting implications for women in Japan because of the challenges divorce presents to women.

In general, women have a harder time with securing economic stability after a divorce because many times marriage to a man is in and of itself a form of economic stability. However, as women are increasing their levels of education and involvement in the workforce, they gain more bargaining power to decide to divorce if a marriage is unhappy. In general in Japan, women tend to be more dissatisfied with marriage than men (Tachibanaki 2010, 6) and two thirds of women in Japan say they would be willing to seek a divorce if a marriage is an unhappy one (Retherford 2001, 95). While divorce can still be tricky for women depending on their

socioeconomic status and education levels, as opportunities grow for women in Japan so do their options regarding ending a marriage if they decide they need to.

Although some women continue to avoid divorce because of the social stigmatization that comes along with it, cultural values are slowly shifting to allow divorce back into Japanese culture as a viable option. It is interesting that many women choose to divorce once they reach retirement age. This generally happens after a husband has received his pension, to which women are then entitled to half. It is socially acceptable for older women to then take the money and go off adventuring and living out the rest of their lives in the company of other women friends, both divorced and single (Yonemoto 2016; Fuess 2004). It seems that while divorce might continue to be stigmatized for women when they are younger, at older ages these same social penalties no longer seem to apply.

In addition to this, custody rights have changed in Japan with regards to divorce. It used to be that men usually got custody over children but since 1965 it has shifted to where 80% women compared to 15% men get custody over children after a divorce (Tachibanaki 2010, 7). This is a liberating change for women, who now have more access to their children if they do decide to seek out a divorce. While joint custody is slowly becoming more common, many times one or the other spouse is given full custody over dependent children while ties to the other parent are cut completely. This practice is related to the legal system and family registry (Fuess 2004). The changing nature of divorce in Japan is highly reflective of changing gender relations in the country and how important outside influences have been on what values have been adopted and rejected by Japanese society in the past couple of centuries. The rising divorce rate in Japan is making marriage less appealing to many women as it indicates the end of the long-term security that marriage once offered.

Premarital Sex and Cohabitation

As traditional ideals and values surrounding marriage began slowly changing within Japanese society, there has been a huge shift in how premarital sex is regarded within the society. For most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries premarital sex was not allowed especially for women; however, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was an “across the board shift in values relating to premarital sex” (Retherford 2001, 89). This shift happened around the time arranged marriages were becoming obsolete and people began looking for partners based on love. Many couples have begun engaging in premarital sex in Japan and it is no longer considered as taboo as it once was. Thus, ideas about premarital sex have shift drastically in Japan as a result of the changing circumstances within the country in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Even as premarital sex was becoming more accepted within Japanese society, a different story was taking place with regards to couples that desired to live together outside of marriage. Unlike premarital sex, Japanese society values are staunchly against the idea that people can or should live together outside of marriage. Around 70% of married women think that if a couple cohabitates they should just get married, while only 24% approve of cohabitation (Tachibanaki 2010, 121). This is an opinion that seems to be widely held throughout Japan and which is at odds with other highly industrialized countries like the United States and places in Europe, which have high numbers of couples cohabiting outside of marriage.

This too may potentially a part of the reason for the declining fertility rate in the country. In countries like the U.S. and Europe, many children are born to couples that cohabitate even as marriage rates decline. Because Japan does not have large numbers of cohabitating couples, it is much harder to maintain the country’s birth rate. However, younger generations in Japan seem to be increasingly accepting of couples that cohabitate outside of marriage (Tachibanaki 2010,

124). It is likely that the more people who have premarital sex, the more cohabitation is going to transform into an acceptable alternative to marriage in Japanese society in the future (Retherford 2001, 91).

Single Motherhood

Single mothers and their children face strong discrimination in Japanese society and are not common (Yoshizumi 1995, 194). However, in many developed countries there has been a growth in the number of single mothers to the point where it has become somewhat acceptable simply due to sheer numbers (Traister 2016, 190). This does not seem to be the case in Japan. In addition, the rate of childbearing outside of marriage is extremely low in Japan. This means that if the marriage rate in the country is low the fertility rate is also low. This is a big problem that Japanese society is facing today, something that other developed countries do not face because non-married couples in other parts of the world often have children together even outside of marriage.

Summary

Changing household structures in Japan have had a huge impact of the expansion of the category of single women. A decline in arranged marriages has led to the problem of where to meet suitable marriage partners in Japan. It appears that at least a part of the single population in Japan is unmarried because they do not know how to meet someone to marry without familial intervention, something that is no longer very common.

A changing tradition of divorce in the country of Japan is also contributing to rising numbers of single women in Japan. Socially it is acceptable for older women to divorce their husbands creating a subcategory of older single women in Japanese society. While this tolerance is not usually the same for younger women, divorce is once again on the rise in Japan among

women of all ages. Changes in custody laws and shifting norms surrounding the utility and acceptability of divorce are aiding in this increase.

Premarital sex is also on the rise in Japan. This is important because an acceptance of sex before marriage is key to single women's ability to engage in a sexual life without harsh social repercussions. This does not however, translate to an acceptance of cohabitation or single motherhood, two things that are still highly stigmatized in Japanese society. Changing structures in how households are composed is key to a rejection of dominant narratives in the country about what behavior is acceptable for single women.

Present Day

The situation in Japan today with regards to singlehood especially among women is complex. There are lots of stereotypes in Japanese society that refer to single people: a *carnivorous woman* is a term used to refer to women who are looking for sex and marriage, *herbivore man* refers to men who are uninterested in sex and marriage, and *parasite single* is a term that refers to single adults who live with their parents (Nakano 2014, 166; Retherford 2001, 91). There is an assumption within Japanese society that men should be aggressive and women passive, a dichotomy that exist among most patriarchal societies (Nakano 2014, 166).

Recently, new rhetoric has emerged with regards to the desirable traits in a man. The three c's: cooperative, communicative and comfortable have been replaced by the three highs: height, high income and high education (Roberts 2014, 31). These ideas are widespread and are included in much of the literature about gender relations in Japan (Ansari 2015; Roberts 2014; Tachibanaki 2014). This is reflective of the changing nature of relationships in Japan, as well as how neoliberal ideas and values are impacting society. Superficial traits of income and education

have replaced personality traits that might have made marriage more enjoyable, particularly within the context of an arranged marriage.

Singlehood is associated with the falling birthrate in Japan and causes anxiety in society. In general, single women are the main targets of this anxiety because few births happen outside of marriage in Japan. Because women are not getting married and having children at the same rates as they used to, they are perceived by society as being selfish and not contributing to solving the birth rate crisis. This response not only ignores the fact that there are more single men than women in Japan today (Nakano 2014, 166), but it also does not address the reasons women are not getting married and having children, mainly the sexist structure of society that does not allow a woman to live her life the way she might want to after marriage and children. There are lots of theories in Japan as to why people are marrying less or not at all and the majority are focused on women (Nakano 2014, 167). The percentage of never married men is higher than women in Japan, which actually goes against popular belief that women are not marrying anymore (Tachibanaki 2010, 11). Thus, the stories in Japan are strongly against female singlehood, which link the current birth rate crisis of the country to women's decisions to not marry. Although it is true that fewer births are occurring in the country due to lowering marriage rates, it seems unfair to blame women for this problem. Rather this seems to be a larger societal issue.

The prime minister of Japan recently released a new economic plan to increase the numbers of working women in Japan while also trying to “create more opportunities for women's empowerment” (Yonemoto 2016, 217). This plan, commonly known as ‘womenomics,’ was created to try to increase Japan's GDP, and only focuses on women's rights as a secondary concern. “The real intent of Abe's [the prime minister's] policies... is not

principally to address fundamental gender inequality but to revive the Japanese economy by accessing a vast store of underutilized human resources: women workers” (Yonemoto 2016, 218). While this is potentially good news for women and their path to economic and social equality in Japan, legal policies do not always correlate with society’s values and social norms. Thus, many complex and multifaceted things are occurring in Japan, which are leading to the various issues regarding single women in the country today.

Conclusion

Single women in Japan face various challenges as they continue the fight for gender equality and the ability to make decisions about their lives and how they wish to live. The changes to the Japanese economy that occurred after the Second World War opened up space for single women to begin existing. Even though the dominant narratives in the country about appropriate roles for men and women continue to exclude single women, Japanese women persist in the fight for their right to make decisions about their lives. Indeed, the numbers of single women have grown immensely in the country over the past fifty years. However, the growing numbers of single women do not seem to reflect a change towards a more equitable society.

While an increase in female jobs and education has given single women limited opportunities to define what roles they wish to embody in society; traditional social and cultural values placed on women’s work continue to limit the prospects of women in Japan. Economic changes in Japan have allowed more women to join the workforce. However, the wage gap and prevalence of part-time work contribute to a system that makes it much harder for women to remain above the poverty line without help from a second income. A lack of women in managerial positions is also indicative that the patriarchal nature of the Japanese workforce

continues to oppress single women's agency. Thus many economic forces are driving a cultural reproduction of women's status as secondary to that of men's.

The changing household structures in Japan are contributing to social issues in the country. One of the main consequences of Japan's inability to recognize the inequality of the existing system is the falling fertility rate of the country. The current structures in place in the country are causing men and women to have fewer and fewer children. If Japan wants to stop this it has to address the needs of its populations. The norms that expect women to give up work after childbirth, and sometimes marriage, greatly impact a woman's decision to have children. With the increasing levels of education for women in the country, come higher paying jobs and even more incentives to not give up work. While there are still huge gaps between what men and women are paid, having children in Japan can mean the end of any type of income for many women. This opportunity cost can be a big deterrent to having children for women who do not wish to give up their careers. The gendered role expectations that come along with marriage can also be unappealing to many women who do not wish to spend their free time cleaning and cooking for a husband. Men and women require jobs that allow them to maintain their standards of living, especially if they decide to have children. Values surrounding traditional family structures may have to change in order to embrace cohabitation and single mothers. Thus, Japanese society needs to reevaluate the dominant narratives that they have in their country with regards to gender roles. Traditionally marriage has been a way for men to control women. The fact that women are now able to make the decision to abstain from marriage is proof that the power structures of society are changing. So far however, these changes do not represent positives outcomes for Japanese society.

The structural inequalities between men and women need to be addressed in Japanese society. This case study is reflective not only of sexism in Japan but also similar processes that are happening around the Global North. Women in developed countries now have much more access to education and the workforce than ever before. This gives them agency to fight back against long-standing oppressive norms and institutions. While many of the factors that allow women to remain single longer also give them more power to resist traditional values and roles, it is not necessarily an indication that society is becoming more equal. As we will see, similar processes are occurring in Colombia. However, the context that developing countries exist in create much more extreme conditions for single women in the Global South.

Chapter 4: Colombia Case Study

Introduction

Colombia has a totally different culture, language, and history from Japan yet similar processes are happening with regards to single women in both countries. While the situations of women in each country differ, there is as much to be learned from the parallels as from the dissimilarities. Colombia is an important case in contrast to Japan for several reasons. It is still considered a developing country. As such, the economic situation of the country is markedly different from that of Japan. As we have seen, economics play an important role in the daily lives of single women. Colombia's story is also interesting because of the high number of consensual unions happening in the country. As in Japan, the numbers of single women are increasing in the country. However, the same birth rate crisis occurring in Japan is not happening in Colombia. Thus, Colombia offers a noteworthy counter narrative to the processes happening in Japan.

The countries of Colombia and Japan have both faced major conflicts in the past century. Over this same period, women have increased their access to educational opportunities as well as the labor force. Similar structural changes, like rural-urban migration, have taken place in both countries. Yet as similar as these two cases may appear, in reality the way the factors play out in each country are quite different. Women in the Global South face many more disadvantages in their daily lives that women from the Global North do not have to account for. This is because of how the global system is set up. Women in Colombia face a double burden; they must not only overcome difficulties due to their status as women but also as second-class citizens in a global system that privileges people from developed countries. One of the main ways that this plays out is through the process of feminization of poverty. While this phenomenon is seen throughout the world, including among women from developed countries, the effects of it are

much stronger in the developing world. Feminization of poverty is the growing prevalence of women among the poor (Goldberg 2010, 4). This happens in developing countries because of the devaluation of female labor in the labor market, as well as strictly sexist institutions that perpetuate and reinforce the poverty of women. While it is possible for women from developed countries to get pushed into poverty due these processes, it is much, much easier for women from developing countries to be pushed into poverty, especially if they are single. Women in developed countries also generally have more opportunities to escape this kind of poverty; the same is not always true of women in developing countries.

Historical Background

The history of Colombia is unique and also emblematic of the struggles that many developing countries face post-colonization. Independence from Spain was achieved in 1810 (LaRosa 2012, 10), and since then Colombia has been faced with a variety of violent conflicts. These conflicts had a profound influence on every aspect of life for the Colombian people and continue to have effects into the present. Although war and violent conflict are generally thought to be in a man's sphere of influence, the reality is that conflict has an intense impact on women within a society. Colombia's violent conflicts have had a great impact on the lives of single women over the past century.

Conflict in Colombia, although prevalent throughout much of its history, began for earnest in the twentieth century in 1932 (LaRosa 2012, 82). Amid the chaos caused by various social, economic, and political issues in the 1930s many countries throughout Latin America turned to populist leaders, and Colombia was no exception. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was Colombia's populist leader favored to win the election in 1950, when he was assassinated in 1948; he was the only Latin American populist leader to be assassinated (LaRosa 2012, 84). The assassination of

such a popular leader fueled a period of political instability, which preceded the eruption of a fourteen-year long conflict, beginning in 1946, known as *La Violencia* (The Violence). The decentralized structure of the Colombian government, since its independence from Spain, partially led to the inability of the government to control the conflict (LaRosa 2012, 88). The specific circumstances of the political landscape of this period created a social context in which many people believed that the only way for them to achieve political representation was through violence. Due to both an unwillingness and inability on the part of the government, not much was done to prevent the deaths of nearly a quarter million people, 80% of which were young, poor, and male (LaRosa 2012, 85-86). Eventually a partial solution was found, the creation of the National Front. The National Front was an agreement among the political elite where it was decided upon that liberal and conservatives would switch over the presidency every four years. Elections would still be competitive but the competition would be intraparty (LaRosa 2012, 86). Many civilians were disappointed with this narrow political agreement. The many different insurgent groups that would come to characterize the following fifty years of Colombian history would emerge because of this agreement and period of violence.

The 1980s and 1990s in Colombia were characterized by confusion and violence. The violence between paramilitary insurgent groups, *narcotraficantes* (drug traffickers), and the Colombian government reached epic levels before finally calming down in the early 2000s. During this time, the United States sent enormous aid packages to the Colombian government. This money was to help with the fight against Pablo Escobar and other notorious drug cartel leaders, as well as to aid in the development of the country (LaRosa 2012, 87, 92). This money sent to Colombia would have controversial effects in the fight against the drugs lords. Ultimately the drug violence did calm down in the country.

The various conflicts in Colombia have had huge implications in the demographics of the country by creating a marriage squeeze due to unbalanced gender ratios (more women than men) (Jones 2006, 149). Because of the high rates of death among young men due to conflict in Colombia, women's bargaining power was lowered in their search for a partner (Jones 2006, 149). When there are more men than women in a country, it can be much more difficult for women to find marriage partners. Several consequences arise because of this; some women choose to marry younger men, remain unmarried, or engage in informal relationships with men. Men on the other hand choose to marry or engage in multiple relationships with different women (Jones 2006, 150). The problem that arises for women in this scenario is men who are not married have no legal obligation to the mother or if there is one, to the child. This places women, particularly single mothers and their children at increased risk for poverty (Jones 2006, 141). This gender imbalance within Colombia has had negative consequences for women, which have developed over the last fifty years.

Single Women

Economics

While much of the history of Colombia is marked by violence, other important economic and social changes were taking place during the 20th century in the country. Understanding these transformations, as well as a range of other factors in Colombia, will help garner a better understanding of the situation of single women in Colombia. Starting in the 1920s, Colombia switched to an agro-industrial model, leaving small-scale farmers behind and pushing many people to migrate to the cities (LaRosa 2012, 143). To this day, large-scale farming and industrial agriculture is favored in the country over smaller farms (La Rosa 2012, 144). For many young women, this means moving to the city to work as domestics or in other sectors of the

informal economy. The Colombian economy is currently still dependent on the exportation of primary products such as oil, coffee, bananas, coal, flowers, and emeralds, even though in the past there have been efforts to leave that behind (LaRosa 2012, 144). Since the 1960s, the cut flower industry has grown quite a bit, in part due to the ecological conditions that favors the growth of flowers year round, and also partly due to the many people (women in particular) available and willing to work for low wages (LaRosa 2012, 144; Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 74).

Drug exportation has also dramatically shifted the Colombian economy. Although there are no reliable statistics, at least tens of billions of dollars have come into the country due to these exports (LaRosa 2012, 144). As a result, Colombia is one of the most unequal counties in all of Latin America (La Rosa 2012, 146). The shifting of the economy over the past century has had a profound impact on women in terms of the types of jobs and opportunities that are available to them.

The basis for how the Colombian economy is set up is the same one that dominates global system: neo-liberal capitalism. This system has a patriarchal nature, meaning that the paid economy (male labor base) is emphasized over unpaid one (female labor base) (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 71). For the neoliberal capitalist system to work, there is a strong need for cheap labor to produce the consumer goods sold around the world. One of the main labor forces to be exploited, as this system has grown globally, are women from developing countries. Capitalism builds on preexisting systems of oppression, such as sexism, allowing women to be paid less than men for their work. Not only is women's work in the unpaid economy (i.e. raising children) not paid or valued, their work in the paid economy (i.e. factory workers) is undervalued and frequently underpaid. Single women in Colombia are heavily affected by these systems.

This system perpetuates a dual economy, one where women are expected to perform jobs that are undervalued and often times underpaid in addition to unpaid jobs. Often certain paid jobs are feminized so that it becomes permissible for employers to offer less money to those performing them (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 72-73). One of the reasons the current global system works is because women in developing countries perform extremely cheap labor to certain types of production, generally within low skill, high labor industries. This system came about through the Washington Consensus. The Washington Consensus was a creation of economic and political policies in the late 1980s that created the global neoliberal capitalist system as we recognize it today (Miller 2012, 90). It encourages the growth and proliferation of transnational corporations, privatization, as well as the deregulation of the market (Miller 2012, 90). This system is also centered on flexible labor markets, something that usually leads to the exploitation of workers. Neoliberal capitalism is the basis for how the Colombian economy has been set up since the 1990s (Miller 2012, 90). The Colombian economy takes part in a global assembly line that produces products in the developing world for the consumption of consumers in the developed world (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 37). This type of system prioritizes the wealthy over the poor, regarding those who can pay as the “only ones who matter” (Miller 2012, 90). This is key to understanding the vast difference in wealth that exists between the Global North and South.

The current economic system in Colombia impacts single women in various ways. The switch to an agro-industrial model has pushed many women out of family farms and into work in urban areas as domestics and other service industry jobs. Even more influential however, has been the switch to the neoliberal capitalist system. This system expressly exploits the cheap labor of single women through the use of preexisting sexist structures and institutions. Because the

labor single women provide is undervalued and underpaid, the opportunities for advancement are limited for these women. The neoliberal system encourages Colombia to continue producing primary products, even though this does not really help the country progress. As long as this global economic system continues to dominate the Colombian economy, options for single women within the country will continue to be less than fully liberating.

Female Labor Force Participation Rate

The participation of women in the formal economy in Colombia is a complex situation for various reasons. Because of the gendered nature of Colombian society and its adherence to cultural gender roles, women have had a difficult time entering the formal, paid economy in the country. Although women have increased their educational attainment in recent years, their roles in the unpaid, informal, and care sectors of the economy have inhibited their ability to make as much money as their male counterparts.

Women are employed as house servants, retail employees, gasoline dispensers, flower workers... and childcare providers... Some supplement their salaries by cooking and selling meals, selling cosmetics, working as night guards, and washing clothes... 'Occupational multiplicity' is the norm (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 24-25).

Especially among women from lower classes and without an education, this type of work is customary. Even with an education or a job in the formal sector, women many times supplement their incomes by additional work in the informal labor market. Because women's work is not as valued as men's, many are forced to work several jobs while also taking care of their families to make ends meet. In recent history, "Colombia has experienced rapid unbalanced modernization with widely dispersed growing centers of commerce" (Heaton 1998, 197), greatly impacting the female labor participation rate in the Colombian economy. Although, not all women lose from neo-liberal trade policies, in Colombia specifically, many low-income indigenous peoples, who work at the bottom, are the most exploited by this system (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 73, 82).

The type of work available to women, as well as how that work is valued is generally dictated by the global neoliberal system. In addition, issues such as unemployment, the double burden, and the wage gap continue to impact Colombian women across class and marital status lines.

Over the past ten years, women have entered the formal economy in greater numbers. Participation rate in the labor force for men aged 16 to 65 has remained relatively stable from 2004-2013, at around 81% participation. For women, participation has gone up approximately 5%, over the same period and across all age groups (OECD 2015). This is important for many reasons. For one, “given that women are paid less for the same work than their male peers, incorporating women into the labor market is economically inefficient for the family unit” (Buchely 2013, 321). The fact that women are slowly increasing their numbers in the formal economy, even if it is still significantly less than men, means that slowly norms in Colombia are changing enough to encourage the female participation in the formal economy, without negatively affecting their families enough to make them stop working.

Even with the previous being true, women still participate in much greater numbers in the informal economy, one could even go so far as to say that the informal labor market is generally considered a female labor market in Colombia (Buchely 2013, 313). In Colombia:

Most women are concentrated in unpaid care, most women participate in the educative processes but are underrepresented in well paid professions, most women work in the informal labor market, and when a woman achieves employment within the formal labor market, she often receives lower wages than her peers for the same job (Buchely 2013, 316).

This is generally true for middle-class urban women, with the circumstances being different for women in poor, rural sections of the country where differences in the labor market are even more pronounced. Women and men in rural areas have similar levels of poverty and extreme poverty (Buchely 2013, 319). For single women, work in the informal labor market is key to survival as

it creates a space for women to gain some financial independence separate from their families or husbands.

Care work (tasks that are done in the service of others) is a cultural issue in Colombia, beginning early in childhood inside of the family. By age eight, 70% of girls do care work, while at the same age only 50% of boys perform care work inside the household (Buchely 2013, 320). This learned cultural expectation of preformed gender roles begins at an early age and continues throughout the lifetime of Colombians, impacting the roles society expects men and women to embody. Women in Colombia are expected to take care of their families and others from an early age. Men are not taught those same expectations. The result of this is that men do not always feel a sense of obligation to the children they father, especially if they are not married to the mother. Women on the other hand can feel a sense of cultural guilt, believing that staying single and not having children is a selfish choice:

The point of women's lives: they are meant, and have always been meant, to be dedicated to the giving over of self to others, if not to husbands, and kids, then to priests, to god, to parents, to community. Any time women do anything with their lives that is *not* in service to others, they are readily perceived as acting perversely (Traister 2016, 132).

This quote is reflective of larger culturally held beliefs found around most of the world, predominantly in places that place value of women's family rearing capacities. Socially, in Colombia and in many places around the world it is not acceptable for women to place their own needs over those of others.

Women in Colombia face a triple work distribution: formal paid work in the labor market, family care and reproductive work, and household chores (Buchely 2013, 319-320). Only one of those, formal participation in the labor market, is paid and recognized by the economy. Typically, women do 40 hours of paid work a week and 32 hours of unpaid work. Men spend around 48 hours in paid work and 13 in unpaid work. This means that

typically women work 72 hours a week while men only work 61 hours a week. While this difference is not that huge, it is noteworthy that 44% of women's work is unpaid, while only 21% men's work is unpaid (Buchely 2013, 320). This double burden placed on women is particularly stark for single women and single mothers. As sole providers of capital resources for their children, they must also provide all of the care at home.

Since 1989, unemployment rates in Colombia have been unsteady (Miller 2012, 91), with unemployment rates for women in Colombia being surprisingly high, although they seem to be on the decline in recent years (OECD 2015). Since 2004, unemployment rates for both sexes have generally gone down, with a bit of fluctuation. For men, the overall unemployment rate has declined from 10.7% to 7.4% among men ages 16 to 65. For women aged 15 to 64, that rate has decreased from 18% to 12.7% (OECD 2015). For women, the younger age groups have experienced a much larger decrease: women ages 15 to 24 found that their unemployment rate from the period of 2004 to 2013 decreased from 33.6% to 25.4% while among women aged 25 to 54 the decrease was 14.5% to 10.7% (OECD 2015). These unemployment rates are significant for a few reasons. First, it shows women face more unemployment compared to their male counterparts. It also shows positive decreases within the female grouping, something that will hopefully continue to decrease as women gain more access to the formal economy and begin to change preconceptions about the role of women in society.

Another important factor in the female labor participation rate is the impact of a large wage gap. In Colombia, the wage gap is on average around 23% with a large variance depending heavily on the industry being talked about. The wage gap has not gone down in recent years (Buchely 2013, 319). The wage gap is closely tied to the education women receive, the jobs women occupy, and the value society places on women's work. The wage gap is influential

because it may deter women from even trying to enter the formal workplace. If women already know that they are going to receive less money for their work, many may make the decision to not even bother. This is problematic because it reinforces the sexist nature of the workplace.

Single women face additional barriers to entering the workplace. Many employers regard singlehood as a negative state of being, particularly for women, and may not employ single women or employ them at lower rates of pay (Coavas Blanquicett 2016). One of the ways in which machismo functions is that men are not supposed to be vulgar or openly sexist towards another man's wife. Because once a woman is married she is technically considered the property of her husband, violation or disrespect to her is considered disrespectful towards her husband. Socially these ideas are still widely accepted, it is generally not appropriate for a man to treat a married woman disrespectfully. Marriage conveys a status change in society. This status change is reflected in the hiring and pay processes in companies. The sexist nature of the Colombian economy and its institutions, like the pay gap, creates a hostile work environment for single women.

Single women are greatly affected by the female labor market in Colombia, just as they are able to exist because of it. Although it can be difficult for single women to find well-paying jobs in the formal economy, the informal economy offers single women many different avenues for making money. As it stands today, more and more women are entering into the formal labor market in Colombia, giving single women more opportunities to find better paying jobs. There are still many economic challenges facing single women as they enter the work force. The wage gap and high female unemployment rates can make formal employment undesirable for many women. Social narratives about women's work continue to be a problem for single women who want to work in the country. The emphasis on women's work as predominantly in the care and

unpaid sector make it difficult for women's labor to be valued the same as men's. The status change that accompanies women when they get married can be a problem for single women in the workplace. By not marrying, single women are subject to narratives that devalue them in society. This can have real life consequences in the form of discrimination. While single women are joining the formal work force in greater numbers in Colombia, many obstacles stand in their way on the path to emancipation.

Education

Female education in Colombia has changed significantly in the past century. Since 1950s the majority of Colombian women have received at least some school with most attending secondary school, a fact that would have been inconceivable in the nineteenth century (Heaton 1998, 200). Research has shown that education has a huge impact on a woman's ability to make decisions about her life, and Colombian women are no exception to this rule. When Colombian women have a higher education, they use more birth control and have fewer children (Heaton 1998, 195). In addition to this, as women in Colombia get more education they delay marriage to a 'substantial degree' (Heaton 1998, 203). "Early age at marriage reflects an absence of meaningful alternatives to marriage, as well as a lack of autonomy to make decisions about marriage" (Heaton 1998, 196). Marriage rates are much lower in urban areas than rural ones in Colombia, mainly due to the fact that residents in urban areas have more access to education (Heaton 1998, 203).

Access to education is not a cure-all to the many gendered obstacles women face in Colombia. Improvement in educational opportunities for women does not mean that economically they are better off, due to the fact that Colombia still has a segregated labor market (Buchely 2013, 318). Because women typically study less competitive university programs in

subjects such as nursing, psychology, education, while men gravitate towards jobs in engineering, medicine, and law, women are set up to receive less pay and enter a job market that typically has lower demand in the market, leading to a wage gap as well as high female unemployment rates (Buchely 2013, 318). This is a “manifestation of cultural gender roles” that “ensures that the gap begins during the education process and maintains its effect” (Buchely 2013, 318). Generally, male university graduate students get around 11% more pay than their female counterparts across all professions (Buchely 2013, 318).

In addition, motherhood can force women out of education and into paid employment or unpaid caretaker roles (Madrid 2007, 220). Only 29% of female teens in Colombia can devote their whole time to school; for male teens that number is 36% (Buchely 2013, 320). This exemplifies the difference in value placed on the education of men and women. Whereas in developed countries education (especially higher education) can be a clear path for women to change their socioeconomic class and gain financial independence, in developing countries this path is much more difficult for women. Because many of the same opportunities are not available to women with education in developing countries, education, while still important, play out differently than in developed countries.

Urban vs. Rural Locale

One of the key elements of development is the process of urbanization and modernization. Tracking a country’s population in terms of migration from rural areas to urban ones can be a good indicator of the development process. The process in Latin America is particularly interesting because of the high numbers of young single women who make the move from rural locations to urban ones (Fields 1979, 249). The migration has been occurring since the U.S. food aid program of 1965. The Food Aid program partly destroyed Colombian agriculture,

leading to urbanization and a massive migration of people from rural to ever growing urban centers like Bogotá (Talcott 2004, 469). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Colombia adopted privatization, trade liberalization, and labor deregulation to complete globally (Talcott 2004, 469). A big part of this process was the incorporation of women into the workforce. The ways in which this has manifested for single women are best exemplified through the movement of large groups of women from rural areas to urban ones.

The economic model of migration claims that people migrate to achieve a “perceived opportunity to attain higher economic status” (Fields 1979, 247). They must consider the possible income and the probability of getting a job there. Labor migration in Latin America is highly gendered (Jones 2006, 142); the movement of people from rural to urban locales is generally female, as women look for service industry jobs (many times as domestics) in cities. Often, the women who are able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the service sector of the economy are young, unmarried women-- they have no husband or children to bring along with them-- and can send money back to their families. Because “women are more responsive than men are to economic opportunities associated with migration for sociological reasons” (Jones 2006, 149) the reasons that they migrate to urban areas can be different. Some may move to urban areas in an attempt to try to improve their economic status, some go to get a better future for their children, while others go to find husbands. The migration of young unmarried women from rural to urban areas is an important aspect of the development story of Colombia.

Typically, “women have a higher propensity to migrate in response to a given spatial difference in economic opportunity than do men” (Fields 1979, 261) and do in fact migrate in higher numbers than men in Colombia (Fields 1979, 262). However, due to the sexist nature of

the labor systems in Colombia, moving to urban areas is not always a way for women to better their situations. Many times, working conditions are not ideal and can even be harmful. Yet for many rural women, wage-labor jobs and the service industry are an important alternative to the agricultural and unpaid domestic work they can find in the countryside (Madrid 2007, 218). A great example of this is the flower industry just outside of Bogotá; it is a low-skill labor sector, where poor rural women with poor family formation prospects find an opportunity, albeit one that is unjust in its labor practices (Jones 2006, 149).

Household Structures

How households are structured in Colombia are of interest for various reasons. The traditional structure of the extended patriarchal household and idealized gendered roles, come from the time of Spanish colonization. Over the past century or so, the traditional structures have begun to come apart and new patterns have emerged with the onset of modernization. Formal marriages have started to be replaced with consensual unions as marriage instability has grown in the country. The impacts of this are seen acutely for mothers, especially single ones. In addition, there has been change regarding the use of contraception and family planning. These things have profound impacts on single women and the choices they make with their lives.

Divorce

Colombia is a traditionally Catholic country and so it may come as a surprise to many that the divorce rate in the country is high (Jones 2006, 143; De Vos 1987, 503). About a quarter of first marriages end within the first twenty years, mainly among women in urban areas who marry young (Jones 2006, 143). Although the remarriage rate is high in the country, the divorce rate shows that the Colombian people are comfortable pushing the traditional ideals of their

culture. Even though marriage is still an important aspect of Colombian culture, it seems that people are no longer willing to stay in an unhappy marriage.

Consensual Unions

One of the responses of the Colombian population to the high divorce rate (as well as other factors like the marriage squeeze) is the prevalence of consensual unions outside of marriage (Jones 2006, 150; De Vos 1987, 503). Although these unions are prevalent among all class groups in Colombia, they are particularly common in rural areas with women who have little education and children outside of marriage (Jones 2006, 143). Among these lower income households, women tend to be the heads of household and have children who are fathered by a various collection of different men (De Vos 1987, 504). The implications of this can be positive as women begin to take over roles traditionally held by men. Somewhere between 14% and 21% of all households are headed by women in Latin America (De Vos 1987, 517). As women begin to exist outside of traditional marriages, they gain autonomy over their own life decisions, how they want to raise their children, etc. They also have more freedom in the choices that they make with their bodies. On the other hand, being a single mother is extremely difficult and can push many below the poverty line. Especially in a patriarchal country like Colombia, single mothers likely will have a much harder time finding sufficient employment and support from employers to be able to provide for their families.

Contraception

Trends in reproductive behavior in Latin America have changed much over the past century. As Colombia modernizes it also seems to be shifting away more and more from the traditional values held by the Catholic Church, with regards to divorce and contraception. While abortion remains illegal and highly stigmatized unless a pregnancy poses some sort of threat to

the mother, birth control and sexual education have expanded drastically all over Colombia. In general, the more education a woman has, the more likely a woman is to increase the use of contraception and safe sex practices (Heaton 1998, 204). The rate of female education has increased in Colombia, a fact that is reflected in the fertility rate of the country. This is somewhat more positive than the falling birthrate in Japan. In Japan the birth rate has reached negative levels, meaning there are more people dying than being born. This is not the case in Colombia. Colombia's falling birth rate is positive because less children means it is easier for families to stay above the poverty line and provide better for the children that they do have.

Since the 1960s Colombia's fertility rate (children being born) has been cut in half (mainly due to contraception). In addition, the government started supporting family planning in the 1970s something that also helped bring the fertility rate in the country down (Heaton 1998, 197). In Colombia, the first women to use modern birth control methods were the ones with the most education (and likely higher classes) (Heaton 1998, 205). It then filtered down to women with lower levels of education, starting in urban areas and then moving to rural ones (Heaton 1998, 197, 211). Today, contraceptive use has increased significantly among lesser-educated women (Heaton 1998, 204) and fertility rates have dropped significantly for the demographic (Heaton 1998, 208). In terms of contraception, use of 'traditional' methods is low in Colombia (Heaton 1998, 204). The ability of women to make their own decisions about childbearing is instrumental in raising the status of women. It is also instrumental in the ability of women to remain single. For one, getting pregnant can often result in marriage. Access to contraception lowers the rates of these types of unions (Ali 2003). Contraception also lowers the numbers of single mothers, granting more women power and the ability to remain above the poverty line.

As women, have been increasing the education they receive and moving to more urban areas, they have also been increasing their use of contraceptive methods (Ali 2003, 669). Even though traditional values in Colombia place a high value on women's virginity before marriage, since the 1980s young single women have been becoming more sexually active at younger ages (Ali 2003, 659). This increase in contraceptive use in conjunction with the lower age at sexual intercourse does not balance to fully protect everyone from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies (Ali 2003, 664).

The probability of premarital conception before age of 20 is around 15% in Colombia (Ali 2003, 660). In the late 1980s, almost half of premarital conceptions were 'legitimized' by marriage, which is to say the parents married before the child was born. By the late 1990s this trend had declined. Only 31% couples in 1999 married once they realized they were pregnant (Ali 2003, 668). This means that fewer women are choosing to get married as a way of coping with pregnancy outside of marriage. The implications of this are two-fold. Single women are taking control of their own lives and are no longer forced to marry if they become pregnant. The stigmatization of single mothers has changed enough over the past century to allow women to make their own minds up about marriage and what is appropriate in that situation. However, single mothers are much more vulnerable to poverty. Thus, the shifting social circumstance in Colombia are both empowering women and making them more vulnerable.

Family Composition

The composition of families in Colombia is somewhat surprising for a culture that places high value on the institution of marriage. Between one fifth and one fourth of women aged 45-54 head their own household (De Vos 1987, 513). In the middle of the 1970s, a woman headed 17.4% of all households in Colombia; with the statistic being that the older a woman is the more

likely she is to head her own household (De Vos 1987, 513-514). This is partly a result of the high marriage instability in the country (Jones 2003, 146). A single parent heads around four in ten households in Colombia; three out of those four are headed by women, typically single mothers (Buchely 2013, 316). This is important because of the risks single mothers face with regards to poverty, something that is acutely true in a system that does not value female participation in the paid sectors of the economy. It is also interesting to note that most households in Colombia revolve around familial relationships; the only unrelated individuals that live together are young unmarried women in urban areas (De Vos, 1987, 517). This is tied to the high rates of migration of young women from rural to urban locales.

Employers favor married women over unmarried women, something that is reflected not only in who gets jobs but also by how much money they are paid. This is known as a marriage wage premium, which is basically the idea that since marriage is so highly valued in the society, women who are married make more money than unmarried women (although it also applies to men). For example, in 2008 married workers made 27.2% higher wages than unmarried people (Coavas Blanquicett 2016, 80). This is something that is seen in many countries that have traditionally valued marriage highly. It is something that needs to be addressed if unmarried women are to have equality within society.

Another important impact of cultural expectations in Colombian society on single women is the motherhood penalty that exists in Colombia. Women without children tend to make around 1.73% more money than their counterparts with children (Coavas Blanquicett, 2016, 72). Due to the traditional value placed on the role of motherhood as a woman's only job, in addition to the flexibility in work schedule needed to raise children, women who are raising children and trying

to work at the same time face serious obstacles. These impediments are especially difficult for single mothers.

Summary

The processes happening in Colombia with regard to single women and household composition are striking. Recently, the number of divorces and the number of consensual unions have increased in Colombia. This raises an interesting dilemma with regards to single women choosing control over poverty. Many times a divorce or the end of a consensual union can push women into poverty. However, separation from a man can also offer a woman more control over the decisions she wishes to make with regards to child rearing. Thus, a rising rate in both of these phenomena signifies a desire by single women to control their lives. This is also exemplified by the increasing number of women as heads of household throughout Latin America.

Increasing use of birth control and sex education are having positive effects for women in Colombia. Through family planning single women are able to exert more control over their bodies and the decisions they wish to make with them. Pregnancy no longer signifies marriage for many women. While this is positive because women have more control, it can also be negative as single motherhood can push women into poverty. Changing household structures in Colombia are representative of changing circumstances for single women in the country. Although there are several parallels to women in Japan, the processes occurring in Colombia are context specific.

The Cut-Flower Industry

Changes are occurring in Colombia, many of which open up new spaces for single women to exist. The neoliberal economic system has created an economy in Colombia that focuses on the exportation of primary products and the exploitation of the cheap labor of women.

This system encourages increased participation of women in the formal labor market, while continuing to emphasize the social roles of women as caretakers, allowing single women more opportunities in a limited fashion. Changing household structures in Colombia reflect a greater desire of women to have more control over decisions that affect their lives. All of these processes are illustrated in the cut-flower industry that has grown greatly in recent history.

The cut-flower industry is an important aspect of the Colombian economy and has interesting impacts on women, particularly unmarried ones. The industry gives a concrete example of how women are being impacted by the economic, cultural, and social changes occurring in both Colombia and the larger global context. The effects of globalization, along with the specific history of the country, are clearly exemplified through the industry. In the way it offers women new opportunities while creating negative repercussions for them. Many single women are employed by this industry; it offers a route into the paid economy for women, something that is not readily available for many women that come from rural areas of the country. In many ways, this industry represents new opportunities for single women while also perpetuating oppressive structures.

The story of the cut-flower industry is a relatively new one. Around 1965 a large portion of the cut flower industry in the U.S. and Europe moved south to places like Colombia, Kenya, and Ecuador to lower production costs (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009; Madrid 2007). The environmental conditions of these equatorial zone countries give them stable climate, meaning that no heating or cooling of the greenhouses where the flowers are grown is needed and cheaper materials can be used to build said greenhouses. The fact that the Colombian flower region receives twelve hours of daylight all year and is located close to highways that lead to the international airport of Bogotá give the country an advantage in the production of flowers

(Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 49). Exports started in 1968 at a value of less than \$1 million a year. By 2004 exports were valued at \$703 million a year (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 74). Today, around 95% of the fifty different types of flowers that are produced are exported, mainly to the U.S, Germany, and Canada (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 2). About two thirds of all flowers sold in U.S. supermarkets come from Colombia (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 2). Colombia is the second largest flower exporter worldwide after the Netherlands (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 46).

The flower industry is a labor-intensive industry that employs about ninety thousand people directly and an additional fifty to eighty thousand people indirectly (i.e. packaging and transportation) (Madrid 2007, 217). 65-70% of the labor force in this industry are women. Some are young women from Bogotá, but most are poor peasant migrants from the rural countryside and surrounding areas who come to the flower farms in search of opportunities. This high rate of female laborers is similar to other global assembly lines that rely heavily on female labor participation (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007,74).

The increasing flexibility of production and distribution of goods and services underlies the expansion and adjustment of capitalism to new forms of production, labor, accumulation of capital, and consumption patterns. Fresh-cut flowers embody all aspects of this complex and fast expansion, now called globalization (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 2).

The relatively new history of this industry and the real life impacts it has on poor women in Colombia make it an important industry for understanding the story of single women in developing countries. The salaries of most of the workers are below the poverty line, including overtime work (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 74-75). Thus, even though women see these types of industries as a way to escape the rural poverty they come from, many times they are not a legitimate escape from poverty. Globalism is probably the single most important factor in the

lives of single women in developing countries because of the opportunities it offers as well as the lack of prospects for advancement that it presents.

There is a large debate within existing literature about whether or not this industry perpetuates patriarchal relations of reproduction or whether it is instead a catalyst for social change and female empowerment (Friedman-Sanchez 2009, 5). This debate is essential for single women in Colombia in their relative decision making ability to manage their own lives separate from husbands and societal expectations, and their relative inability to demand fair labor standards in a global system that values them for their cheap labor. By exploring the structure of the industry as well as the disadvantages and opportunities that it offers women in Colombia, insights into how the global economy affects single women in developing countries can be better understood. Much of the literature on the Colombian flower industry is highly critical of the industry and for good reason. While labor conditions are not ideal and human right violations are rampant throughout the industry, understanding why the industry is also a good thing for many women is equally important. By looking at the negative aspects of the industry and its impact on single women, as well as the opportunities that the industry offers women, can help explain larger global processes. Understanding the structure of how the flower industry is set up is fundamental to understanding how it offers women untraditional resources. This can be broken up into three general areas: the historical roots of the flower farms, the division of labor on the farms, and the labor that occurs off of the farms.

The history of the flower farms begins with the story of the *hacienda*. A *hacienda* is an agricultural plot of land that has an owner and a dependent labor force working the land. Historically, production on this land was for capital accumulation and the promotion of the owner's social status. Now a day, *haciendas* have been replaced by “agro-industries such as

floriculture largely to become more profitable, or else their lands have been divided and sold” (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009,14). *Haciendas* are important because they are the basis for labor relations on flower farms to this day, even though they have disappeared for the most part. The production of flowers on these farms is labor intensive, most of the work is not mechanized, instead it relies on manual labor. It is interesting to note that many tenant laborers from former haciendas now work on flower farms (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 15). Thus, in a sense former *haciendas* have transformed into what we now recognize as the flower industry. The historical roots of flower farms are important when trying to understand where the division of labor in the industry comes from.

How labor is divided up on these farms, and more generally who gets what jobs, is key to the critique of the industry. The historical roots of oppression of women and indigenous populations is seen clearly even today when you look at who gets what jobs on these farms. In general, there are three divisions of labor on plantations that are determined by class, race, and gender: management, supervision, and manual labor (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 75). Owners and management are almost exclusively men. Men are also in the decision-making positions, such as supervision, as well as heavy labor jobs. Women have jobs that involve following directions, attention to details, and low level administrative positions, although some do make it into supervision positions (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 75- 76). This gendered division of labor is highly reflective of ideas about gender in Colombian society. It also reflects the strict hierarchy that exists in Colombian society. Professionals in law and medicine tend to be at the top of the hierarchy followed by artists and intellectuals. The working class (service, clerical, technical occupations) and manual workers (*campesinos*) are typically at the bottom of the pyramid. Those of afro or indigenous descent are typically locked tightly into their lower classes

while it is not as hard for those of European descent to move classes (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 19-20). This hierarchical structure is reflected back throughout the flower industry and has deep historical roots of racist and sexist oppression.

The labor that occurs off the farms is also important to understand when trying to get a holistic understanding of the industry. One key type of labor that happens off the farms is childcare work. When women who work on the farms go to work they typically leave their children with 'community mothers'. Since the flower industry has a largely feminized workforce, community mothers are essential to the function of the industry (Talcott 2004, 478). Because of their essential role, they are sometimes funded partly by the state. However, because they are classified as 'voluntary' workers by the state they receive no pension, salary or social security (Talcott 2004, 481). These women earn about half the minimum wage.

Over 50% of flower industry workers are migrants (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 11). Because this industry offers rural people an opportunity that they likely would not find in the countryside, many move to these areas in search of work. However, because the industry is tax-exempt, a huge burden is placed on local governments and infrastructure to provide for the many who migrate to the area (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 53).

Labor unions, or lack thereof, is another key aspect of the Colombian flower industry with real world impacts for women working in the industry. In general, many of the workers on these farms are hired on the basis of short-term contracts. These non-permanent labor contracts allow employers to fire problematic workers who unionize, complain to the government, or require sick or maternity leave (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007,78-79). This instability of workers causes any real organization of workers that want to demand fair working conditions to fail (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 79). Farms have many strategies to ensure the failure of

independent labor unions: giving better contracts to non-unionized laborers, creating their own management-controlled unions, firing unionized workers, and refusing to bargain with unions (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 79). Thus, only a few labor unions exist in this industry although there are movements to try and change this around Colombia (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 80). Because the flower industry is such a highly-valued industry in the Colombian economy, there is not much pressure that comes from the government or the global system to change the labor conditions. The women working in these types of global assembly lines, both in Colombia and around the world are considered 'disposable' by the system (Wright 2006). The wellbeing of the women is considered less important than the products they are producing.

The idea of 'female jobs' from the feminization of labor theory is key to understanding the flower industry. 'Female jobs' are created by the global economy to feminize or worsen conditions within an industry to replicate traditional jobs held by women (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 72). The short-term, unstable, and precarious conditions in the Colombian flower industry represent this type of feminized work, although this argument is valid mainly for the low-income indigenous peoples who work at the bottom of the hierarchy (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 73).

In addition to this structural violence created by 'female jobs', severe health problems exist for workers in this industry. Due to the pesticides used for the production of flowers many women working with the flowers but also the wives of men who mix and spray these pesticides face miscarriages, stillbirths, and delayed pregnancy (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 77). In some cases, women are given pregnancy tests before being hired, many times contracts will not be renewed if women are pregnant as the employer does not want to pay for maternity leave (Talcott 2004, 476). Severe physical problems also exist for people in this industry. Due to the

physical position needed for this work, the long hours, and the extreme pressure to be more productive many people face health problems. In addition to all of this women face sexual harassment by male co-workers and daily verbal abuse by supervisors (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 77). Abrupt temperature changes in greenhouses can also cause women who work in this industry to get sick (Talcott 2004, 472). Thus, the human rights violations that exist in this industry have harsh consequences for the people who drive production. A lack of strong labor unions and the structure of the global economy make it unlikely that these conditions will change anytime soon.

While the conditions within the flower industry are not ideal for workers, flower growing is an important alternative for rural women to the agricultural and domestic work they can find in the countryside (Madrid 2007, 218). Getting wages for work in the flower industry is typically much more attractive to women than the unpaid labor that exists for them in the countryside. Wages in the flower industry are higher and come with basic benefits that the informal sector of employment or work as domestic servants, cooks, dish and clothing washers and childcare providers cannot provide (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 55). This industry can be positive for women because it gives women more options and possibilities in life. “[A] steady income can provide women the means to challenge the patriarchal definition of the marriage contract- that is, the expectations of male and female roles...” (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 4). Not only does this industry provide women with a means of making their own money and gaining a degree of economic freedom, it also allows them to challenge traditional male domination in society through wage income and property ownership. These jobs also offer women a route to resist domestic violence and traditionally held household roles. It is interesting to note, that women in this industry do not work more unpaid hours, doing chores, cooking, childcare, etc., than women

who are not in the flower industry. Conversely, men in the flower industry tend to work more unpaid hours than men who do not participate in the flower industry (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 52). This is significant because it shows how this industry is creating more equitable conditions between men and women with regards to the unpaid economy.

The flower industry employs “one of the most disadvantaged groups in central Colombia: rural women...” (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 9). By hiring these women, the industry is affirming the value of these women’s work. Although, 94% of workers in the industry are considered base workers and have limited options for advancement, having an income allows women to gain more bargaining power, self-esteem, and social networks (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 6, 72). For women this is one of the only employment options they have especially if they have a lower education (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 56). Women join this industry, and stay, for various reasons: economic factors, personal autonomy, fulfillment, and self-empowering and stimulating work (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 57-58). Since mid-90s, more permanent positions have become more available in the industry; some jobs are becoming relatively stable and long-term (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 61-62). This is significant because it means that this type of work is becoming increasingly valued by the Colombian economy. The more valued it is the better the outcome for the women in the industry and the more negotiating power they hold.

The relationships that happen between men and women who work in this industry are also important. Although men abandoning the homes is common in households around this industry, women are typically better set up to be heads of household due to their income (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 51). These jobs in the flower industry offer women some financial security, meaning that they are not reliant on men to provide for their families but will be able to more or less provide for themselves and their children.

Men in the industry typically have less options due to lower education, excepting men in supervisor positions who have higher levels of education and will only accept a high level positions at the farms. For many men this industry is a last resort, while for many women the flower industry is a viable career (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 56). 80% of workers, both men and women, have at least a 5th grade education while only 17% have a high school degree (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 56). No longer do young single women dominate this industry, only around 36% of the female workforce is single (23% being single mothers and 15% without children). Three-fifths of women report being married while only three-quarter men report the same thing (Friedemann-Sanchez 2009, 63). This means that as the industry expands, women are able to consider this a viable occupation to sustain them through life. There has been a decline in young women moving from rural areas to these farms to find temporary work. Although, the migration of young single women to these areas in search of work still occurs, this industry has been around long enough to where women are settling down in these regions to raise their families. Among the limited options for uneducated rural women, it seems that the Colombian flower industry has transformed into a permanent occupation for many. This industry is still a limited option for Colombian women because of the lack of opportunities for advancement and remains in stark contrast to the 'real' careers options available to women in the Global North. This industry appears to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and prevents women from being able to change their circumstances.

Wage-labor can be good for women and gives them some independence from their families and husbands. However, the way this industry is structured, women are not getting the full benefits of their wage-labor (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 80-81). Oppressive, racist, and sexist structures are manifested in the way that the industry is set up which does not necessarily

allow for the improvement of a women's place in society or the betterment of her children. Many times, women's lives are still considered less important than the needs of the plantation (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 80). Wage labor takes away from a woman's time to invest in her children and community. Women in these jobs tend to have a hard time balancing public and private spheres, because they make a wage that is below poverty line they cannot afford health care, child care, or education (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007, 78). The industry has many benefits as well as drawbacks for the women participating.

Prior to the existence of this industry, and others like it, there were not many opportunities for rural women to engage in wage-labor. The cut-flower industry presents an interesting conundrum for gender equality in Colombia. On the one hand, the industry has a host of problems. The wages are generally below the poverty line, labor conditions are appalling, human rights violations are rampant, female labor is undervalued compared to men's, and labor unions are virtually nonexistent. Yet this industry also presents rural unmarried women opportunities that did not exist before. Wage labor is an important alternative to rural farm work for many single women. It gives them the power to push back against dominant narratives about women's role in society, it helps foster equity between the genders with regards to unpaid labor, and it is beginning to offer women a viable long-term job. Over time, this industry has evolved from a place where young single women came to in search of temporary work into a practical career path for older married and unmarried women. This industry is no longer an escape path for young rural women, rather it has transformed into a clear path to survival for a host of Colombian women. While conditions still need to be improved in this industry, it does offer benefits to women today as it is.

In conclusion, the global economy and neoliberal systems of trade have created a new industry in Colombia. The impacts of this industry have serious effects on the local populations in Colombia, specifically the single women in these regions. The feminization of labor in agricultural production has created new opportunities for women while also exploiting them. The flower industry is a clear example of these processes playing out in Colombia. The Colombian flower industry represents a complex culmination of international processes playing out in real women's daily lives in the Global South. This is different to processes happening in Japan and other Global North countries. The economic and work opportunities in the Global South are barely enough for women to survive on. Lifetime careers below the poverty line are considered viable options for women in the Global South; many times it is impossible to find anything more than that. Whereas in Japan women must fight to maintain their standards of living, the fight for single women in Colombia is much more of a struggle to make sure their basic needs are taken care of. It appears that in both countries an increase in single women is not necessarily representative of more gender equality in the countries.

Conclusion

The story of single women in Colombia is fascinating, especially in contrast to a developed country like Japan. The way that global processes are playing out in both countries with regards to forces like the economy and gender relations are different and yet remarkably similar in many ways. Many of the same factors like economics, labor force participation, education, and household structures impact single women in their daily lives in both countries, and yet the way that these factors play out are incredibly different. The context in which women are offered more opportunities has a great effect on the viability of those offers. While more education might be a good thing for single women, without a labor market that allows them to

use that education, the opportunity for advancement is limited. Initially, it seemed like a rise in single women around the world might be indicative of growing gender equality around the world. As it turns out, the processes are much more complicated than that.

The global market system has a surprising impact on single women in developing countries. Not only do single women in Colombia face discrimination based on their sex and marital status, they also face many obstacles to their advancement in society based on the way that the global system is set up. Even within industries such as the cut-flower industry that offers women new chances to be paid for their labor and that would not exist without neoliberal capitalism, the real impact is somewhat negated by the limited opportunity for advancement. Whereas in the Global North, education offers women a path to change their socioeconomic status, the power of education in Colombia is much more restricted in its ability to offer women that same path to economic betterment. Although education still has amazing effects like the increased use of contraception and a higher age of marriage, it does not seem to have the same ability to empower women economically.

Women's entrance into the labor force in Colombia is likewise limited in that it pushes many into the informal labor market, excluding many women from attaining benefits or fair wages for their labor. Many women continue to be marginalized through the institutions in the country. The gender expectations in Colombia likewise continue to impact women and what they perceive their role to be in society. While somewhat similar processes are happening in Japan, the ability of women to fight back against this discrimination is much more limited in Colombia.

The fight for women's rights in Colombia is different than that in Japan. The fight in Japan is much more about equality with men within society, whereas in Colombia the fight continues to be one of survival. This is important to remember when talking about women's

rights around the world: the specific situations of women are dramatically different in different countries. For example, it is easy to say that women's education is a cure for poverty, yet if a woman is unable to get a well-paying job with her education; the education is obsolete in its ability to bring about change. The argument is not that education is bad, but rather that it is important to remember the context with which one speaks about different things.

Single women very well may be an indicator of improving rights for women in developed countries; however, the same statement cannot really be said for single women in developing countries. Many times, being single in a developing country is much more indicative of the phenomenon of feminization of poverty within the country. Thus, while single women remain an important unit of analysis for the improvement of women's rights, what they represent is highly contextual based on where they are situated in the global economy.

From a glance, it might not make much sense to compare a country like Japan to Colombia. Yet, it is from comparisons like this that interesting discoveries can be made. In particular, the impact that global economic systems have on gender within developed and developing countries is highly relevant to the fight for women's rights around the world. The lens of single women opens up new discussions about how women's roles are changing around the world. With these changes come huge implications for global production and consumption as well as global population growth. By looking at a largely ignored group of people, single women, around the world, important discoveries can be made about how global policies are playing out in the daily lives of people.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis covered a vast group of categories through which the circumstances of single women around the world were explored. What began as an investigation into the idea that later marriage might be an indicator of greater equality between men and women in a country does not appear to be true in the different contexts of the Global North and South. The economic situation of a country and whether or not it is developed has a great impact on what singlehood means to women. In general, women in Japan have more choices in their lives than women in Colombia. The economic situation of Japan as a developed country offers more opportunities to women. Although many of the same phenomena are occurring in both Japan and Colombia, such as increased female education levels, increased numbers of women in the workforce, and lowering rates of marriage in both countries, the lived realities between women in both countries are different. Processes in both countries are dissimilar but part of the same large phenomenon. Thus, the increase of single women in both countries is more indicative of changing global processes (i.e. globalization) than an increase in gender equality.

The global economic neoliberal capitalist system impacts people all over the world, single women is one lens through which this structure can be examined. While the situation of single women is context specific, it can also be representative of larger economic processes happening on a global scale. Japan's case shows how a developed economy that excludes women leads to a rise in single women and a culmination of larger social issues such as the birth rate crisis. In Colombia, the exploitation of cheap labor by the international neoliberal system is what leads to a rise in single women and high cohabitation rates. This is significant because while many problem exist for single women, they also gain more bargaining power within an oppressive system by not marrying. In Japan, the dominant social narrative in the culture is that

women are supposed to stop working after having children. This is both unrealistic and not a desired result for many women, leading to a decrease in the number of children being born in the country. The bargaining power that this affords women has resulted in government policies such as womenomics. In Colombia, as marginalized rural women gain access to wage labor, they are afforded the power to renegotiate gender expectation in their communities. The flower industry is a great example of this bargaining power playing out in real life. While my initial hypothesis was not totally incorrect, it is an increase in bargaining power that women gain access to through remaining single, not an increase in overall gender equality in the traditional sense.

One of the most interesting occurrences to emerge from this study is the relationship that class and economics have on marriage. As was seen in the case studies of Japan and Colombia, the context of class and economic standing has a huge impact on how women are leading their lives and how they are able to remain single. In Japan, middle-class women are abstaining from marriage as a form of resistance to the unequal gender roles in the country. Marriage is still a highly valued institution in the cultural and social norms of the country. The economic context of Colombia creates a different circumstance for women in the country; instead of abstaining from marriage altogether, many participate in consensual unions instead.

What is really interesting about these findings is how they relate to studies done in the United States with regards to declining rates of marriage among low-income people. Gibson-Davis (2005), Edin (2000), and Schneider (2015) all conducted studies to try and explain why single mothers from lower socioeconomic classes in the U.S. were marrying less often than their more affluent counterparts. “In the short term, marriage usually entails more risks than potential rewards” (Edin 2000, 113). Risks include the lack of financial stability that a partner might be able to provide (and the fact that a woman might have to provide for a husband if he stopped

working), the potential for domestic violence, the potential unfaithfulness of a partner, a loss of control over childrearing decisions, etc. these risks are exacerbated for women with fewer economic resources. Even after the birth of a child together, many couples cohabit as a form of 'trial marriage' instead of getting married (Gibson-Davis 2005). What is highly interesting about this is the fact that this same trend towards cohabitation over marriage is happening in Colombia today. It is curious that an economically poorer country in the world has a trend toward cohabitation over marriage, similar to what is happening in the U.S. among lower class women, while those same trends are not occurring in the more affluent Japan.

It is impossible to say whether or not this is simply a coincidence or if larger patterns of economic trends with regards to marriage and cohabitation are happening on a global scale. Untangling the economic and cultural differences with regard to cohabitation and marriage rates might be tricky. How cultural norms impact the views on cohabitation have a great effect. Whether or not economics has a greater influence is worth examining. The patterns of marriage between rich and poor countries can be quite different. It would be interesting to continue this study further to investigate whether this coincidence is actually something that is happening all over the world, and why.

There are several ways that this study could be further expanded. All of the data included in this study comes from secondary sources. While secondary sources are an important aspect of any type of research, the voices of single women from both Colombia and Japan are missing from this analysis. Due to budget and time constraints as well as language barriers this was unfortunately not possible for this thesis. If I were to expand on this research in the future, actually including the voices of women from Colombia and Japan as well as opinions from other experts in this field would be of great interest to me.

Much of the analysis of this thesis is built on comparing huge groups of people, including entire nations. While understanding the differences between the Global North and South is important to gender research, such large comparisons can leave out much of the nuanced details that exist in the circumstances of single women in different contexts,

The search for elegant explanation can obscure important aspects of the contingent and multiple processes through which empirical reality unfolds... By bringing sex, gender, reproduction and (hetero)sexuality into explicit relation with time and space at multiple scales, work in the arena of 'gender and globalization' forces us to contend with the complexity of the political and thus to describe it in theoretical terms that reveal rather than cut through the multiplicity of power relations at work (Salzinger 2016, 441).

The literature that exists with regards to gender and globalization add a new dimension into understanding the processes affecting the expansions of single women around the world. Given more time I would have like to explore this avenue of academic literature further in order to develop my study of single women in a globalized world more.

Understanding the impacts of globalization on gender is incredibly important because of the obstacles still facing women around the world. Globalization has an important impact on how gender relations and marriage are transforming. Some of the way in which this plays out for single women is through the global transnational dimensions of migration and economics. "The literature on globalized work, migration, and gender has been crucial for underlining the complex ways in which global economic processes are gendered, while also delineating how women partake in them and are affected by them" (Desai 2016, 341). While important for all women, applying these ideas to single women can have interesting results. Thus, as the study of gender and globalization moves forward, it is important to take into consideration the place single women occupy in the world.

Understanding the neoliberal policy impacts on different groups of people, whether they are male, female, single, or married, is important to comprehend moving forward as the world

tries to address the inequalities created by the existing system. Humans are becoming more and more interconnected everyday,

At a time when the world seems to be both dangerously fragmented along religious, national, and other lines—as well as increasingly integrated through economic transactions and social media—we think there is more that gender and globalization scholarship can do to enhance understandings of global processes (Desai 2016, 338).

As changing norms are proliferated around the planet, vulnerable groups of people are being impacted by global policies. There should be global concern in making sure that all of the people on this planet are cared for and their basic human needs met. Single women are a relatively new global demographic. Understanding how they are exposed to different dangers around the world is important for the improvement of women's rights around the world. As the globe moves forward and works on increasing equality between the genders, single women need to be a part in the conversation.

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