

**(RE)PRODUCING THE NATION: THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION IN SERBIA
IN SERBIA IN THE 1980S AND 1990S**

by

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To the memory of my mother

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The dissertation looks at the struggle for hegemonic control over the meaning of reproduction and sexuality in Serbia, 1986-1997, in the context of the ideological and socio-economical changes created by the collapse of socialism. The dissertation focuses on changing meanings of reproduction and reproduction's intersection with the concepts of gender, sexuality and nation. Such a focus is determined by two considerations: 1) gender organization in patriarchal societies is based primarily on different roles that men and women are believed to play in reproduction; and 2) in almost all post-socialist societies, discourses and policies have been produced aimed at changing reproductive practices of specific targeted populations: not simply women, but women belonging to particular groups (ethnic, religious, class).

During the fieldwork in Serbia, multiple methods for data collection were used: archival research, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and life histories. All material was subjected to discourse/textual analysis, while the interpretation combines economic, political and symbolic approaches.

The *population discourses* and closely related *abortion debates* are at the center of the analysis. I argue that for the Serbian nationalism in the 1980s and 1990 demographic issues were associated with the concerns related to continuity of the nation in its temporal and special dimension. Demographic discourses also projected a specific vision of modernity recreating gendered images of the state and nation, of “self” and the “other”. Finally, they contributed to the

processes of the radical social change by redefining the meaning of reproduction and by reshaping gender roles.

This research has also unveiled common epistemological properties shared by population discourses; the dominant discourses on gender and gender relations; and nationalist discourses (about origin and development of nations, and about survival of and threat to the national 'stock'). Consequently, these discourses emerge as not only mutually dependent, but actually, mutually constitutive.

Modernist bias that allowed demography to embrace 'scientific objectivity' in representation of population trends also allowed nationalist discourses to embrace images of 'backwardness' and 'progress'. An inherent gender dimension of this bias allowed both demographic and nationalist discourses to employ the same hegemonic images of masculinity and femininity.

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PREFACE

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I dedicate this book to my mother, Dana Drezgić, who did not live to see its much-awaited completion. After bravely enduring many years of life with a terrible illness, she passed away as this study was in its final stage. Throughout these challenging years for all of us my father, Mile Drezgić, was at her side providing loving care and unabashed loyalty. For that he can never be thanked enough.



Figure 1: Map of Serbia and Montenegro

I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE ORIGIN AND THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The idea for this research developed over time and out of several independent sources, some experiential and some theoretical. The experiential ones are related to the fact that I am a so-called 'native' anthropologist and have lived most of my life in the society I study. Needless to say, the theoretical relevance of some experiences and events and their interconnectedness became apparent only in retrospect. Nevertheless, what follows is, in a way, an attempt to understand not only those individual events that informed my choice of research topic but also my experiences with my own society and culture at a much broader level. The analysis is based on data collected during my fieldwork in Serbia in 1997-99. However, it inevitably incorporates my native knowledge, or cultural capital that was acquired prior to theoretical knowledge, which frames the research. Technically then, the research covers a period of more than ten years (1986-98), the period for which I collected and systematized archival data from documents, books and newspapers and about which I conducted a number of interviews.

For more than a half of that period (1986-92) I lived in Serbia, as a native in what was a society undergoing substantial and dramatic changes. I experienced those changes as an individual variously positioned within the society: a young single woman, an aspiring scholar, a friend, a daughter, a sister, a Yugoslav... After 1992, when I first left for the US, I had acquired yet another position and/or identity during my recurrent summer 2 to 4 month visits, that of an insider looking into her own culture from the outside, and also of someone who had in many

ways been spared the hardships that my interlocutors had had to endure. Throughout this whole period (1986-98), however, I had numerous conversations with family, friends and colleagues about what was going on with “us” (“us” being variously defined, as Yugoslavs, Serbs, intellectuals, etc etc., depending on the time and context) and with the society. Those conversations encompassed many topics relevant to this research. Consequently the research itself is a continuation in a more systematic manner of an on- going dialogue which I as a native and as a scholar interested in certain social, political and cultural issues, have had with other natives for many years.

One of the events that triggered my thinking in the direction of this research is related to my preparations for the first trip to the United States in 1992. I was going on a scholarship, which included health insurance. Anxious about the scope of the medical coverage that my scholarship provided I decided to have a few medical check-ups before the trip. Among others, I saw my gynecologist, a woman of approximately my age. I was in my early thirties at the time and the gynecologist seriously advised me that it was a high time for me to get pregnant if I intended to have children at all. Her tone was scolding and her manner judgmental, suggesting irresponsible behavior on my part.

Only a few days later I met her on the bus going to work and we engaged in a casual conversation. She related to me that she felt very frustrated and upset about a behind closed doors meeting they had had at the clinic with a representative from the Ministry of Health. The Ministry representative advised physicians, particularly gynecologists, to encourage their patients/clients to have more than two children. My gynecologist had no dilemma in her mind that under the current social conditions it was ill-advised to have many children and big families.

She stated that it would have been against her better judgment and her consciousness to advise people otherwise.

These two encounters with my gynecologist recreated discourses and ideologies I was familiar with. There was little dispute in Serbia and Yugoslavia about the meaning of motherhood – it was the most important female role, the core of womanhood and feminine identity. Children were highly valued and family life in many ways centered around them. Most of the family income was invested in children's wellbeing and in their future. The value of children was not measured by their number and/or contribution to family economy. Rather, it was measured by the quality of life they could be afforded and by investments in their future. Thus, the average family in Serbia was small, around two children. Two children, preferably a boy and a girl was the ideal most couples tried to achieve regardless of economic hardships/rationality. Kin relations were highly regarded, thus having at least one sibling was also highly valued. Moreover, in the spirit of socialist modernization which demanded rational organization and management of society including the family, a small family symbolized progress and was afforded both moral and aesthetic value.

I was therefore not surprised that my gynecologist urged me to get pregnant while at the same time she resisted being involved in promoting pronatalism. My age played an important role in the former. It was firmly set in both popular mind and in expert/medical discourses that women should start having children before they turned thirty. The social construction of motherhood was framed by a woman's age, roughly between the early twenties and late thirties.

I was not surprised by the government's attempt to promote pronatalism, either – low fertility among the Serbs, in contrast to the high fertility of the Kosovo Albanians, the largest minority group in Serbia, had been a subject of heated political and professional debates. I was

puzzled, however, by what appeared to be, a “sneaky pronatalism” (see Krause, 2000) by which the Serbian regime tried to influence women’s reproductive decisions.

When, a couple of months later, in June 1992 nine “concerned intellectuals” sent an open letter¹ to the media and relevant state institutions warning about the “devastating consequences of the low birth rates for the nation’s wellbeing and for its survival”, I became even more puzzled. Knowing that demographers had been concerned over low fertility in parts of Serbia for some time I was not surprised by the open pronatalism in the letter. What intrigued me was that these nine intellectuals, all esteemed experts in their respective fields, ranging from demography and economy to medicine, seemed less inhibited than the ruling regime in promoting pronatalism in the name of the well being and survival of the Serbian nation.

Thus, my interest in this research was directed towards the role of the power/knowledge complex in the constitution of the nation-state of Serbia in the mid 1980s and 1990s. More specifically by examining the production of knowledge which aimed to explain and change the reproductive behavior of Serbian women, I explore one of the many ways in which gender and nation are mutually constructed.

The aim of the project is to examine the relationship between nationalism and demography in former Yugoslavia and more specifically Serbia. Leaving individual intellectual motives aside, it will be argued that as a tool of a power/knowledge complex, demography (and other expert knowledge) was instrumental for nationalist struggles. It provided some of the building blocks for both Serbian and Kosovo Albania nationalisms deepening the conflict. In the case of Serbia, demographic discourses created the images of the nation endangered by two

^{1 1} The Publication of this letter entitled Waning (Upozorenje) brought about a proliferation in media coverage of the issue, and from now on thre fertility rate became an all pervasive topic within the public discourses in Serbia. While the topic was far from absent from the media throughout the 1980s, the media attention at the time was more sporadic

enemies from within: Albanians who were occupying and multiplying on what was believed to be the sacred Serbian land; and Serbian women who by refusing to reproduce more allegedly brought the nation to the verge of biological survival. They contributed to the nation's disadvantageous position vis-à-vis Kosovo Albanians who in addition to being more prolific, were also challenging the sovereignty of the Serbian state over a piece of territory considered sacred land and the cradle of the Serbian nation.

1. Nation and population

The connection between demographic concerns for population numbers and reproduction on the one hand and national ideologies on the other is not new or peculiar to Serbia. This is a well established relationship that goes back to the establishment of the field of demography, which coincided with the establishment of the first nation-states in eighteenth century Western Europe (Drezgić, 1999; Kreager, 1994; Macdonald 1993.).

Anticipating some of his own conclusions, Michael Herzfeld sets a passage from Vico's *Principes of the New Science* as an epigraph for his "Anthropology through the Looking-Glass" (1987). Discussing the significance of anthropology in building different European identities and the ways in which anthropology has established its own identity as an academic discipline, Hertzfeld agrees with this eighteenth century philosopher that a shared conceit of nation(alism) and science is a self-perception of longevity and old origin. As Hertzfeld rightly implies, national(ist) ideologies as well as official histories of academic disciplines today, several centuries after Vico, still tend to claim a long existence for their respective social constructs.

Demography is far from being an exception. Thus some authors trace its origin to The Pentateuch, specifically to the Book of Genesis (Gelo, 1987:19), referring to the sentence "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." Demography thereby appears to be at the beginning of

beginnings, implying that population issues are crucially important for the existence of humanity. Furthermore, such an approach defines population issues primarily in terms of reproduction and numbers.

While it is relatively easy to see the logic behind nationalist claims for longevity and historical continuity, if for no other reason than to justify current claims for particular territories, it is more puzzling that an academic discipline would justify its current relevance by claiming an old origin. The consequences, however, are apparent: at the time of their emergence the social sciences were key contributors to the view of human societies and ultimately nations as primordial, static and essentialized. In the face of new “scientific evidence”, it was difficult to question the continuity and common substance of a nation. This common substance, firstly defined in biological-cum-territorial terms as ‘blood and soil’ and then, in cultural terms as a specific language and custom, defined internal belonging and external borders (see Anderson, 1991; 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Smith, 1986, 1991).

European modernity made knowledge available to everybody, developing the major tools of discipline, punishment, and surveillance, and producing at the same time a new type of subjectivity (Foucault, 1979). If pre-modern subjects were disciplined by sheer force and kept from knowing, modern subjects have been constituted and disciplined by knowledge. Social norms were endowed with both scientific and governmental authority. They were scientifically defined and disseminated by governmental institutions.

In different ways, various academic disciplines have been instrumental for the processes of nation building. Ethnography, among others, provided genealogy, historical continuity, and culture as a nation's material substance. What connected demography and nationalism was

population as their shared object of knowledge and management. Herzfeld argues that interest in population reproduction is inherent to nationalist ideologies:

Reproducibility is...something that all national ideologies have in common. It is the formal basis of their frequent appeals to cultural (and racial) continuity, to a common language and shared customs, to the rhetoric of social pathology and normality" (Herzfeld, 1992:76).

As the analysis that follows shows, all these dimensions of the concept of reproduction were incorporated into Serbian nationalist discourses and identity narratives in the 1980s and 1990s. Nationalist ideologies as a constitutive element of nation-state building are intertwined with the power/knowledge complex and informed by specific types of scientific knowledge.

Although historical products of very different purposes, nationalism and social sciences share certain common origins. They share some basic concepts and assumptions by which they picture the world as a conglomerate of discrete and bounded societies (nation-states), and are both interested in historical continuity and cultural identity (Spencer 1992:.290).

The organic metaphors that social sciences generally apply when picturing society have been rather useful for nationalist ideologies. The hierarchy of organic functions could be mapped onto a social hierarchy (Hogan 1995:27), thus insuring not only horizontal, but even more importantly, vertical unification of the nation. This ability of nationalism to obtain vertical unification seems to have been a comparative advantage of nationalism vis-à-vis the other ideologies (communism, for example) which emerged at about the same time in European history. Even more importantly for my purposes here, nationalism played the similar role at the time of the collapse of communist regimes in the late twentieth century Eastern Europe.

(De)constructivism, which in the second half of the twentieth century seemingly replaced positivism as the dominant paradigm in social sciences, does not appear to have changed the

essentialist conceptions of the nation. I agree with Pratt's (2003) assertion that essentialist and non-essentialist discourses co-exist in modern cultures. I also agree with his claim that, while it may be theoretically unfashionable, essentialism is a necessary part of political movements (nationalism included):

the struggle over representations of identity...takes the form of offering one fully constituted, separate and distinct identity [which] does not obliterate other kinds of identity but it does subordinate them generating a view that a person's most important or essential experience is derived from membership of a class or a nation, and conversely that these provide the core framework for interpreting history. This identity is articulated through a narrative which establishes who "we" are through two axes, one of which is biographical and diachronic, while the other is oppositional and synchronic (ibid:182).

I argue that demographic discourses in Serbia in the 1980s and 1990s participated in the production of Serbian identity narrative both in its diachronic and synchronic dimensions. As one of the most empirical social disciplines and rather resistant to new theoretical developments (Greenhalgh, 1995; Raily, 1997; Szerter, 1993), demography proved useful for essentialist representations of not only national but also gender identities.

2. Nation Gender and Reproduction

The intersections between sexuality, gender and nation form an important set of relationships that had largely been neglected by mainstream scholarship on nation(alism) in Europe. Until recently, Mosse's (1985) groundbreaking study which connects nineteenth century nationalisms in Germany and England with protestant notions of sexual propriety represented a rare exception. His example was followed by feminist scholars who began developing new ways to conceptualize nation and ethnicity by making gender central to the analysis (e.g. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989; Yuval-Davis 1991, 1996, 1997; McClintock, 1993; Parker et. al. 1992; Gal 1994; Gal and Kligman; 2000; 2000b; Iveković and Mostov eds., 2000; Bracewell 1996; Korać,

1998; Verdery; 1997; Žarkov 1995, 1999, and special issues of *Feminist Review*, 1997; and *Women's Studies International Forum*, 1997).

Feminist scholars point to many different ways in which categories of nation and gender intersect and to the different subject positions men and women occupy within the nation-state projects. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989), identify five different subject positions that women as producers and reproducers occupy within national collectivities: 1) as biological reproducers of members of national collectivities; 2) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; 3) central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collective and transmitters of its culture; 4) signifiers of national differences – ethnic symbol in ideological discourses used in construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; and 5) participants in national, economic, political and military struggle (1989:5).

Nationalist constructions of masculinity and femininity support a division of labor in which women reproduce the nation physically, culturally and symbolically, and men protect, defend and avenge the nation (Bracewell, 1996; Mostov, 1993; Iveković and Mostov, 2002; Žarkov, 1999).

Feminist scholarship on nationalism, citizenship and the state has revealed the pervasiveness and power of gender relations in shaping state formation, nations and nationalism (Korać 1998). States and nations construct their subjects in gendered ways that constitute a critical part of the process of identity formation (ibid.). Nations themselves are commonly gendered (Verdery, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997, Žarkov, 1999, Gal & Kligman, 2000a, 2000b). Both gender and nation are social constructs and organizing principles of society (Verdery, 1997) and as such they are both products and producers of power relationships that in turn produce difference and are produced by difference (Žarkov, 1999). National difference is represented

though notions of gender difference, justifying hierarchies based on assumed natural gender hierarchy, gender being the oldest known category of difference (Iveković, Mostov, 2000; Scott, 1997).

Since the “oldest known difference” is based on interpretations of roles women and men play in biological reproduction, reproduction is a constitutive element of both gender and nation. In post-socialist Eastern Europe, reproduction has been a site of political contestation through which various groups compete to organize the new national order and ensure their own elite position in it (Rivkin-Fish, 2003:290). Gal and Kligman (2000a, 2000b), discuss four different political purposes served by discourse on reproduction in post-socialist context of Eastern Europe. They redefine the relationship between the individual and society, between the state and its citizens; reconstruct the category of nation and identify groups that belong and do not belong to the particular nation; reconfigure the political legitimacy of the state; and constitute women as particular types of social actors (Gal and Kligman, 2000b:21-22).

There exist even deeper symbolic layers that contribute to a conceptual overlap between the nation and reproduction. Nation is related to "birth" not only through its Latin based etymology (*natio* = to be born), but also because it is a community imagined through metaphors of human reproduction (Verdery 1994:223). National(ist) rhetoric "projects powerful images of hearth, warmth, love, unconditional acceptance, likeness, loyalty" (Verdery 1994:223-4). Reproduction supports the continuity of individuals and social groups and systems (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991, Kligman, 1998) and is fundamentally associated with the identity of the nation and the family (Kligman, 1998). On the other side of the same coin is a possibility of discontinuity which is also often used for different political purposes (Kligman, 1998). Concerns over low fertility and “population decline” have a long history in Europe and North America and are often

associated with a nation's "decline" (Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985). Throughout postsocialist Eastern Europe not only low fertility but also high abortion rates have symbolized discontinuity and decline of the nation.

While abortion debates and their role in political struggles and nationalist discourses in Eastern Europe have been explored in detail by feminist scholars (e.g. Gal, 1994; Verdery, 1995; Zielinska, 1993, 2000; Goven, 1993; Molyneux, 1991; Rosenberg, 1991; Supek, 1992), less attention has been given to demographic discourses and their role in constituting gender and nation. To be sure, pronatalist policies have been critiqued by feminist activists (see Ćetković, 1993a; Zajević, 1994; see also *Politika*, April, 11, 1992) and scholars (Bracewell, 1996). Scholars, however, have focused more on narrowly defined political discourses in their critique of pronatalism and less on the production of a specific kinds of knowledge that shape pronatalist discourses. What is also missing is a systematic, unifying analysis of abortion debates and legislations in conjunction with population policies/discourses.

Gale Kligman's work on Romania represents an exception in this respect. While my research was inspired by and draws on her analysis of nationalist politics of reproduction, there are some important differences that stem from differences between our "study subjects". The first difference is related to the overall historical and political differences between socialist Romania in Kligman's research and postsocialist Serbia in mine. Second, while socialist Romania implemented fully blown, restrictive, population policies, postsocialist Serbia hardly had any social policies. Political and public discourses, however, were permeated by demographic concerns.

Thus, while Kligman focuses on the real consequences of these policies and the strategies people developed to cope with and to resist these policies, I am primarily interested in the

(re)production of discourses at various levels of social organization and their role in (re)shaping gender and national identities. The third difference stems from the diverse configurations of the power/knowledge complex relative to the politics of reproduction. In Romania, the state, i.e. the Ceausescu regime, was the primary force behind population politics. In Serbia, the knowledge part of the complex played the leading role. Its scientific authority was supported by religious morality promoted by the Serbian Orthodox Church and its individual representatives. Milošević's regime responded in various ways at various times, depending on its immediate, short-term political interests. Therefore, my research draws even more on Krause (2000) and her analysis of demographic knowledge production, its media presentations and the resulting effect of "sneaky pronatalism" in Italy in the 1990s. Unlike Krause, however, I expand the analysis to include broader expert discourses and their role in knowledge production which shaped not only sneaky pronatalism, but also sneaky antinatalism, targeting different ethno-national populations. I argue that as in Italy, abundant expert knowledge about "alarmingly" low and "alarmingly" high fertility were not only constitutive of the nation-state project in Serbia, but they also "empowered 'racializing discourses that contribute[d] to the everyday re-production of racism" (Krause, 2000:599).

Another voice included in my research is that of Serbian feminists as the most persistent critics of the patriarchal claim on women's bodies for purposes of national formation and regeneration (Duhaček, 2002:117). Along the way, these feminists put forward an alternative vision of the nation and modernity which, as I show, has its own internal tensions and contradictions in defining the relationship between the individual and society.

3. *Gender, Nation and Reproduction in this Research*

In this research, I am particularly interested in the ways in which reproduction is implicated in the processes of radical social change of the kind that was experienced in post-socialist Eastern Europe. When the nation-state becomes the only legitimate political framework (Žarkov, 1999, Duhaček, 2002), ethnicity and ethnic differences become privileged forms of identity formation and of social analysis. Like other ex-Yugoslav republics and other Eastern European countries, Serbia exited socialism following the ideal of the nation-state. Reproduction was thus conceptualized primarily as integral to the survival of the nation. This implied a call for selfless dedication and sacrifice of individuals (primarily women) and families, and was in tension with the capitalist model and its bases in the self-interested practices of individuals (see Kligman, 1998:7). Capitalism and the market economy were also set as the model to follow in the restructuring of former socialist societies. This tension between individual and collective interests was integral to discourses on reproduction.

This research also joins scholarship that explores the processes of the mutual constitution of gender and nation in the context of post-socialist changes. The main concern of the research is the struggle for hegemonic control over the meaning of reproduction in Serbia in the context of post-socialist transformations. I explore the changing meanings of reproduction through their intersection with the concepts of gender, sexuality and nation, focusing on the *population discourses* and to them closely related *abortion debates*. Such a focus was determined by two considerations: 1) gender organization in patriarchal societies is based primarily on different roles that men and women are believed to play in reproduction; and 2) in almost all post-socialist societies, discourses and policies have been produced aiming to changing reproductive practices

of specific targeted populations: thus, targeted were not simply women, but women belonging to particular groups (ethnic, religious, class).

The structure of the dissertation is shaped by my interest in change from socialist to nationalist ideologies of gender and nation. Thus I give equal space to the analysis of the politics of reproduction in socialist and postsocialist Serbia. I analyze population discourses and abortion debates over the period of ten years, 1986-1997. While the focus on population in a way singles out demography as a discipline within the power/knowledge complex, I am interested in the workings of broader expert discourses (medical and legal, among the others) and their intersection with political and popular discourses. In addition to analyzing ideological underpinnings of expert, political and public discourses on population and abortion I also explore how these ideas inspired and shaped one rather unusual local-level project aimed at increasing number of births in rural Serbia.

The starting assumption of the research is that both reproduction (reproductive behavior) and demography as a discipline that studies and tries to regulate reproduction, are socially constructed (see Greenhalgh, 1995). Thus, theoretically I draw on a practice approach to social life which analytically brings together political economy, feminism and constructivism (Ibid.). I also incorporate the concept of the politics of reproduction as developed by Rapp and Ginsburg who define it as “complex relations among individual, local and national interests that influence reproductive practices, public policy and exercise of power“(1991:311).² I use the concept of politics of reproduction to explore the mutual construction of categories of gender, sexuality and nation. I thereby bring together scholarship which argues for the theoretical centrality of the concept of reproduction (cf. Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991, 1995) with the scholarship that

² Kligman, who also uses the concept, argues that it implies a focus on “the intersection between politics and the life cycle, weather in terms of abortion, new reproductive technologies, international family planning programs, eugenics or welfare (Kligman, 1998:5)

approaches issues on gender and sexuality as the central topics in the study of nation and ethnicity (Bracewell, 1996; Gal, 1994; Gal and Kligman 2000, 2000b; Kligman, 1998; Mostov and Iveković, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Verdery, 1994; Žarkov, 1999).

4. *Methods and Data Collection*

During my fieldwork in Serbia I used multiple methods of data collection: archival research, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and life histories. All material is subjected to discourse analysis, and for the interpretation I combine economic, political and symbolic approaches.

The data for the research were collected during fieldwork in Serbia in 1997-99. Most of the fieldwork was done in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. I also spent a week in a village in western Serbia where I observed events and conducted interviews related to the visit of a small group of women from Ukraine. The visit was organized by *Seoski prag*, an association “dedicated to rural re-development”. The association undertook a project of finding brides for middle aged bachelors from rural Serbia in order to increase rural fertility as a precondition to development. The program of *Seoski prag*, its activities and this specific event, as well as the response to them at the local and national levels, serve as the basis for a case study.

I collected archival data for the period of 1986-97. This encompassed articles published in the main Serbian daily *Politika* on issues of demography and family planning, contraception and abortion, parenting and family. I also analyze relevant legal documents, a sample of articles published in the journal *Stanovništvo* (Population) during this period, and demographic books and essays addressing issues of demographic trends in Serbia, family planning and population control. During this time frame of over ten years, there were several occasions when issues relevant to this research became prominent subject of the public debate as for example the first

initiatives to ban abortion in 1993, the Christmas message of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church in which he condemned abortion and women who have them and the concomitant Parliamentary debate on a new abortion law. For the periods of these debates, I also analyze relevant articles published in several other dailies: *Novosti*, *Politika Ekspres*, *Blic*, and in weeklies *NIN*, *Vreme* and *Duga*, in addition to reports and comments published in *Politika*.

B. SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: DISINTEGRATION OF YUGOSLAVIA AND SERBIAN ALBANIAN ETHNIC RELATIONS

The broader historical context for the research is provided by postsocialist transformations in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia. This process was marked by the disintegration of the country and formation of individual nation states out of the six republics that had constituted the Yugoslav federation. The country fell apart as individual nationalisms claimed sovereign rights of control over what was defined as the national territory. Overlapping claims to specific territories resulted in military conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia. In Serbia, the exit from socialism brought about an open conflict between Serbian and Albanian nationalisms. This conflict represents a more immediate socio-historical background to my research and for that reason I discuss the history of Serbian and Albanian ethnic relations in some detail.

The first civilian victims on the first night of the NATO air strikes on Serbia were refugees, mostly women and children from Bosnia who had been living in a refugee camp in Kosovo. While their lives, were, no doubt, claimed by NATO bombs, their tragic fate was determined by political and military struggles that had ravaged parts of former Yugoslavia and through which the former country ceased to exist. More immediately, however, once in Serbia, after they had fled the Bosnian war, these and 500.000 other refugees became hostages of the

politics of the Serbian regime under Slobodan Milošević. Those who ended up in Kosovo were also hostages of the demographic politics of the Serbian regime.

While both the Serbian regime and its citizens held an ambivalent attitude vis-à-vis the refugees (Korać, 1998) who came over from not only Bosnia, but also Croatia, nationalists believed that settling Serbian refugees in Kosovo could be instrumental in “fixing” the ethnic “imbalance” in Kosovo. Settling refugees there otherwise did not make much sense. For one, Kosovo was economically the least developed part of Serbia, in addition to having the highest population density³. Moreover, the Serbian regime had no political legitimacy in the Province and was ruling it by brutal police force, which only deepened the already existing ethnic tensions between Albanian and Slavic groups living there. From this perspective, moving people who had fled one region due to ethnic conflicts to another with equally tense ethnic relations, could hardly have been justified politically or morally.

Settling refugees in Kosovo thus never became an official policy of the Serbian regime. Still, a significant number of refugees, mostly those who had no other choice, was directed to Kosovo and into temporary (in refugee camps) or permanent (in newly, built housing⁴) residence.

After the end of the NATO military intervention in 1999 which resulted in the de facto separation of Kosovo from Serbia and the establishment of international protectorate over Kosovo, most of these refugees had to flee again. This time, they fled from Kosovo to Serbia proper because neither the local, predominantly Albanian, authorities nor the international forces

³ According to 1981 census, there were 145 inhabitants per square kilometer in Kosovo. In 1987, according to Avramov, (1992), Kosovo already had 170 inhabitants per square kilometer (pp. 11).

⁴ A friend of mine who worked in a big state owned construction company told me that the company was building houses and apartment buildings in Kosovo for the Yugoslav Committee for Refugees, the official investor of the enterprise. However, according to my friend her company in effect funded the whole project because they were not able to get any reimbursement from the Committee.

were able to protect them from harassment and expulsion. Ethnic tensions in Kosovo remained the same only the power relations once again changed, with Albanians now ruling the Province supervised by the UN appointed international administration (UNMIK). Today a very small number of Serbs still lives in Kosovo in a few isolated pockets. Having been separated both from Kosovo and from the Serbian state and society, most of them are just looking for an opportunity to leave. The worst fear disseminated by Serbian nationalists in the 1980s and 1990s, is coming to fruition: Kosovo the ‘cradle of Serbian nationhood’, in the national imagery, will soon become vacant of Serbs.

Kosovo is a “fertile, mineral-rich, diamond shaped area of land of about 4,000 square miles, the size of Los Angeles county” (Reineck, 2000:359). The region has been inhabited by a mixture of ethnic groups, for centuries. Since about the first half of the nineteenth century, the most numerous have been the Albanians (Duijzings, 2000). Albanians speak a unique Indo-European language. Their ethnic background has been a disputed issue and is difficult to determine with precision. Some Albanian intellectuals claim Illyrian origin for their nation, an argument that extends the Albanian presence in Kosovo longer than anyone else’s. Thus, Albanian nationalists base their claim for sovereign control over Kosovo not only on current demographic dominance but also on the alleged longest presence in the region. This way, the Albanian historical argument overrides the same argument put forward by Serbian nationalists who can trace the presence of their nation in Kosovo “only” to the middle-ages to support the historic right on this territory.

Serbs and Montenegrins make up the second largest ethnic group in Kosovo. They are of Slavic background and speak Serbian. While Serbs and Montenegrins are predominantly Orthodox Christians, “among Albanians there is a threefold religious divide into Muslims,

Catholics, and a substantial community of Shi'a oriented dervish orders" (Duijzings, 2000:10). Two other large ethnic minorities in Kosovo have been Roma and Turks, both of whom speak their own distinct languages. Turks are Muslim, Roma either Muslim or Christian Orthodox.

Serbs and Albanians have shared the territory of Kosovo for many centuries under a variety of rulers and political arrangements: from the Byzantium Empire, to the Serbian Medieval Kingdom, to the Ottoman Empire, to Yugoslavia in all its incarnations. The region was under Ottoman rule from the fourteenth century until the early twentieth century, almost until the very end of the Empire in 1917. For most of the twentieth century (1912-1999), Kosovo was part of Serbia. It is currently under the United Nations protectorate (UN resolution 1244). It has not been granted the status of a fully independent, sovereign state, but it is effectively outside of the jurisdiction of the Serbian state. Kosovo was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbia at the 1912 London Conference at the end of the First Balkan War⁵ and was part of Yugoslavia in its all incarnations: The Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1918-1941; Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1945-1991; Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 1992-2003 (see Jelavich, B., 1983; Jelavich C & B. Jelavich 1977; Vickers, 1998).

The history of ethnic relations between the two most numerous groups in Kosovo, Albanians and Serbs, has been, according to Hayden (2002), marked by competitive coexistence.⁶ Duijzings (2000) argues that the clear cut ethnic divide between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo emerged in the late nineteenth century after the border was established between the newly formed Kingdom of Serbia and the Ottoman Empire. This is the time when "Kosovo

⁵ The First Balkan War was fought between the Balkan Allies (Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia) against the Ottoman Porte. Albanians who had just gained autonomy within the Empire fought with the Ottoman army against the Balkan Allies (Jelavich C & B. Jelavich 1977; Vickers, 1998).

⁶ Hayden argues that in ethnically mixed regions, ethno-religious groups tend to live under the conditions of competitive coexistence which can easily turn into an open conflict when the balance of power relations is interrupted. The underlying condition for open conflict is created by competing claims for sovereign control of a region (2002:161).

became a frontier region, contested between the Ottoman Empire and independent Serbia result[ing] in large population movements and a considerable rise of ethnic and religious tensions” (ibid: 7). Since then, the pendulum of power relations in Kosovo has shifted many times and each shift brought about violence and discrimination of one group against the other. Each group could thus claim the status of victim and blame the other for its oppression at one point in history or another, and thereby justify its claim for sovereign control over the region at the time when the Yugoslav state was falling apart.

Vickers (1998) identifies four shifts in power relations in Kosovo in the period between the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century and the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia in the late 20th century. The first power shift occurred with the integration of Kosovo into the Kingdom of Serbia in 1912. This brought Albanians under Serbian domination. Their subordinate position vis-à-vis the Serbs continued under the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) which was created by the Versailles Peace Agreement at the end of the First World War. As the Kingdom of Yugoslavia which was envisioned as the state of the South-Slavic nations Albanians were guaranteed no minority rights

The Period of the Second World War through 1966 was a period of oscillation in power relations ranging from armed conflict to attempts at political resolution⁷. Between 1967 and 1981 there was an official policy of affirmation of Albanian national identity fortified by the

⁷ During World War Two, a large part of Kosovo was attached to Italian occupied Albania; the rest of it was split between German and Bulgarian occupying forces. In all three regions Albanians enjoyed a privileged status, while the Slavic population was perceived as the enemy within by the occupying administration and by many Albanians. Thousands of Slavs were arrested, deported to labor camps, expelled and killed during the war (see Vickers, 1998:121-2). The period immediately following WW 2 was characterized by the domination of Serbs who made up a majority within the Communist Party in Kosovo. Moreover, there was widespread discrimination and mistreatment carried out against both the Albanian minority in Kosovo and the Hungarian minority in Serbia’s northern province, Vojvodina, by the Federal Security apparatus headed by Alksandar Ranković who was also Vice President of Yugoslavia. Ranković was removed from all posts and expelled from the Communist Party in 1966, partly due to his policy and abuses of power in Kosovo. His removal was a milestone in the campaign by minorities for the assertion of their collective rights in Yugoslavia (see Vickers, 1998:163).

constitutional arrangements of 1974 which granted a semi-republican status to the province. This period was characterized by Albanian political domination and the simultaneous alienation of the non-Albanian population (see Dijizings, 2000; Mertus, 2000; Vickers, 1998).

Finally, during the 1980s and 90s when Serbia re-established administrative control over Kosovo, Albanians responded by establishing a parallel system of government which organized all aspects of social life of the Albanian population in the province (see Vickers, 1998:xiii-xiv). The latest chapter in the history of Albanian-Serbian relations was created after the NATO military intervention.⁸ The province is administratively cut off from Serbia even though it has not been granted full independence. Since then, it has been ruled by a Commission appointed by the UN. Many Serbs fled Kosovo during and after the intervention. Those that have stayed are concentrated in several scattered enclaves. They are often exposed to discrimination, harassment and intimidation by the Albanians that foreign observers usually describe as retaliatory. Their minority rights have not been properly protected; they are inadequately represented in the local governmental institutions. In turn, they often obstruct the decision-making process or boycott decisions made by Albanian dominated political institutions.

Despite ethnic and cultural differences between Slavs and Albanians in Kosovo, there existed layers of common culture and ‘cultural traits’ across ethnic boundaries as a result of centuries of shared living (see Vickers, 1998; Duijzings, 2000). According to Duijzings, for much of its modern history, Kosovo remained largely unaffected by the homogenizing forces of the state due to the fact that it was always located at the state’s periphery. As a result, boundaries between ethnic and religious groups living in Kosovo were more fluid and porous:

⁸ The NATO intervention was preceded by two years of violent conflicts in the Province. An Albanian military insurgency ended the period of stalemate created after Kosovo’s autonomy was revoked by the 1989 Serbian Constitution. The insurgency started in 1997 with Albanian terrorist actions against Serbian police which responded with brutal force against the terrorists but often against civilians as well (see Mertus, 1999, Vickers, 1998; Reicek, 2000)

“These boundaries often faded in more quiet periods and many cultural traits were and still are frequently shared across group boundaries” (Duijzings, 2000:11).

During the socialist period in Yugoslavia, however, social distance between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo appeared substantial when measured by, for example, the number of intermarriages (see Pantić, 1991, 1995). In addition, much of attitudinal research done in the 1970s and 1980s showed that there existed the greatest social distance between Albanians and all the other major ethno-national groups in socialist Yugoslavia (see, *ibid.*). This distance was usually explained by cultural differences in both political and academic discourses. Language, ‘custom’, religion and ethnic origin were named as the most important. If this had been the case, we could have expected a similar social distance vis-à-vis Hungarians, the second largest minority group in Yugoslavia. Hungarians are also of a non-Slavic origin and speak a non-Slavic language. Yet, they were on the opposite end from Albanians on the scale measuring social/ethnic distance. What created the social gap between the Albanians and the others was not mere difference. Rather, it was the fact that the difference was hierarchically constructed. Explicitly or implicitly, Albanian culture and society were situated at the lower levels of social development.

Many features of Albanian society and culture were perceived as ‘traditional’ and ‘pre-modern’ by the others. First, Kosovo was economically the least developed region of Yugoslavia and also the least urbanized. Albanians kept the traditional zadruga type of family structure much longer than their Slavic neighbors (Vickers, 1998) and lived in large, isolated traditional household compounds. Islam, the dominant religion among Kosovo Albanians, has been

regarded by the others in Yugoslavia, as in much of Europe, as an anti-modern religion.⁹ Even though, as noted earlier, Albanians were split between Christianity and Islam, the latter was perceived in Serbia and Yugoslavia as the core of the Albanian culture. Finally, Albanian reproductive patterns were commonly described as “traditional” in expert and popular demographic discourses alike.

The Slovenian demographer Malačić (1986), for example, identifies three types of population reproduction: archaic, traditional and modern. After arguing that demographic transition¹⁰ has been completed in all industrialized countries while the undeveloped ones are in various phases of transition, he describes population reproduction in Kosovo as “traditional”:

[In] Kosovo the traditional type of reproduction dominates over modern reproduction which has been slowly introduced in this province since the 1960s. For now, Kosovo does not exhibit as rapid transition to modern fertility [patterns] as we have shown for other [regions in Yugoslavia]. Due to a rapid decline in mortality rates we can [describe it] as a true population explosion which significantly hinders faster economic and social development. There are marked differences in biological reproduction among the nationalities in this province. The traditional [type] of reproduction has a much stronger influence on the Albanians and Turks than on other nationalities in this province. The same trend exists in Macedonia as well (Malačić, 1986:209).

The meaning of the ‘cultural differences’ here is different from the meaning the expression has in current anthropological theory. Here it serves to distinguish modern societies from traditional ones. Within this dichotomous and hierarchical world view, traditional societies are represented as static, ruled by rigid and often backward customs, while social actors are represented as having virtually no agency. Modern societies, on the other hand, are represented as inherently progressive, continually developing and governed by principles of rational thinking. Thus, social distance vis-à-vis the Albanians in Yugoslavia came about not as a result

⁹ In this respect, the former Yugoslavs were not different from the mainstream academic and popular thinking in Europe and the US. In Serbia, the popular attitudes about Islam were additionally tainted by resentment coming from historical memory of the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰ In the next chapter I provide a detailed analysis of the concept of “demographic transition”.

of cultural difference per se. It was, rather, a consequence of a specific notion of culture which belongs to nineteenth century socio-cultural evolutionism¹¹.

1. Kosovo's Road to Modernity and the National Question in Serbia

In many respects, the status of Kosovo in the early stages of socialist Yugoslavia resembled that of a colony, being dependent on, ruled and exploited by the rest of the county and primarily by Serbia (see Rusinow, 1980; Vickers, 1998). Kosovo was one of the least developed regions in Yugoslavia and was not fully incorporated into the socialist modernization project until the 1970s, mainly for political reasons (the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this study). With the change in political climate in the 1970s, and with the change in its internal and external relations and processes Kosovo changed as well. These processes resulted in improved overall economic conditions in the province but also contributed to a widening gap between the two biggest ethnic communities living there. As a result, Kosovo became a contested territory, claimed by both Albanian and Serbian nationalisms.

The pace of economic development and overall modernization in the 1970s in Kosovo grew. Development was primarily based on investments coming from other republics through the Federal Development Fund. Infrastructure improved dramatically, electricity arrived in all but the most remote villages, and many health, educational and cultural establishments were opened (Vickars, 1998: 184). The virtual Albanization of the province came about as a consequence of the politics of 'positive discrimination' in favor of the Albanians: national quotas for political functions were strictly adhered to and bilingualism was a condition for employment in public services. At the same time many Albanians continued to be arrested and prosecuted on charges of nationalism and irredentism (Vickers, 1998). By the end of the 1970s, however, the local Albanian dominated leadership "began to look with tolerance on expressions of Albanian

¹¹ I discuss the various aspects of the concept of culture as applied in demographic research in the following chapter.

nationalism” (ibid:182). This contributed to “Serbs [seeing] a reversion to the days of Ottoman rule due to their perceived deprived status and accompanying physical and psychological pressures” (ibid:182)¹².

In spite of all its achievements, Kosovo’s economy was lagging behind compared to the rest of the country. In the late 1970s Kosovo had the highest illiteracy rate in Yugoslavia for persons over ten years of age (31,5% and 15,1% respectively); the lowest per capita income (\$ 795 in Kosovo; 2,636 in the whole country); the lowest per capita use of electricity; and the highest percentage of population engaged in agriculture, to cite a few examples (see Vickers, 1998:187). Thus, the evidence of relative disadvantage legitimized Albanian claims not only to rectify disadvantages but also claims for secession.

Even though Kosovo’s slower economic development was related to a complex interplay among economic, political social, cultural and historic factors (Mertus, 1999:23), the high fertility in the province were often singled out by both native and foreign commentators as a reason for Kosovo’s underdevelopment.

The high fertility, in turn, was explained as resulting from Albanian cultural characteristics. For example, in her detailed account of Kosovo’s history from the middle ages until 1997, Vickers states the following: “In the late 1970s factors that tended to hinder social progress – such as a high birth-rate, a particular family structure and the influences of various religious communities, especially the clergy, were still largely present in Kosovo” (1998:186).

This line of thought, according to which high fertility and fast population growth curb economic

¹² There is a widespread belief among the Serbs that Albanians had a privileged position within the Ottoman Empire due to the fact that they converted to Islam in greater numbers. The major social division within the Empire was between Muslims and all the others. However, Duijzings argues that “in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the main lines of division were between Albanian landlords and the rest of the population and [that] all groups suffered greatly from the conditions of existential insecurity and violence, regardless of their ethnic and religious background” (2000: 12).

growth, is particularly widespread in the disciplines of economics and demography. The widening of the economic gap thus created tensions not only within the province but also in the federation. Yugoslavia's most developed republics, Slovenia and Croatia, complained that much of their income was being poured into Kosovo (Vickers, 1998) and simply consumed by the ever growing population.

One of the aspects of Kosovo's economic problems in the 1970s and 1980s was a high unemployment rate, again the highest in Yugoslavia. The Serbs' share was higher, both among the employed and among the unemployed in Kosovo, relative to their share of the total population. Continuing education up to the university level was a common channel of diverting the unemployment problem throughout Yugoslavia. Mertus notes that

by 1981, the student population in Priština had ballooned to over twenty thousand – nearly one in ten adults in the city. Kosovo had the dubious honor of having the highest ratio of both students and illiterates in Yugoslavia. The Albanian nationalist movement in Kosovo found its most vocal support and leaders among the young, educated, unemployed (1998:29).

There were two additional reasons that made young, university educated Albanians from Kosovo unemployed and unemployable. First, the University of Priština¹³ specialized in liberal arts, a field which offered only a limited number of employment opportunities in the province. Second, while unskilled Albanian workers from Kosovo could easily find employment in low

¹³ An independent University of Priština was created in 1969 from what had been a branch of the University of Belgrade. The University had separate departments for classes in Albanian and in Serbian. The creation of the independent University in Priština was part of the overall process of political and economic decentralization underway in Yugoslavia since the Constitutional reform of 1963. In addition, it represented a concession to political demands for greater autonomy for Kosovo put forward at the student demonstrations in 1968 (see Vickers, 1998).

paid, manual jobs throughout the former Yugoslavia, young Albanian graduates were practically unemployable in other parts of the country due to the language barrier (Mertus, 1999)¹⁴.

The linguistic barrier between ethnic groups was also widening at the local level. Vickers identifies two reasons for this growing linguistic separation in Kosovo. First, a generation of young Albanians had now been educated exclusively in Albanian at all educational levels and, unlike their parents, did not speak Serbo-Croatian at all. Second, the adoption of the Tosk based standard language of Albania as the official literary language in Kosovo, where Albanians until then used the Gheg dialect, added to the estrangement with their Slavic neighbors who, while not necessarily bilingual, had at last achieved some understanding of the Gheg dialect (1998:177)¹⁵.

The processes of modernization that were intensifying in Kosovo in the 1970s did not bring about an adequate level of economic development in the region, nor did they help integrate the Albanian population into Serbian or Yugoslav society. If anything, the separate roads to modernity contributed to further separation at the local, republican and federal levels. The young Albanian intelligentsia that was coming out of the University of Priština was, as already mentioned, in many ways isolated from the rest of society. They adopted creation myths that were not only different from but also in direct conflict with the creation myths of their Slavic neighbors. These two communities in Kosovo were imagining different nation-states, in different languages and through conflicting myths and histories, and with opposing images of the future. Moreover, Ethnic tensions in the province were increasing daily, particularly after the 1981

¹⁴ Albanians who temporarily migrated or settled in other parts of Yugoslavia were primarily manual workers or artisans. In Serbia many of them owned bakeries and pastry shops; in the coastal area many owned jewelry stores. In the political climate that was created after the 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo, many Albanians were forced to leave Serbia proper. A rumor circulated for a time that Albanians were poisoning the bread in their stores. Their businesses were subsequently boycotted, and there were reports of harassment and attacks on their property. Islami claims that between 1984-1987 there were 267 cases of attacks on Albanian businesses in Serbia proper (1989:57).

¹⁵ Tosks and Ghegs are distinct Albanian groups with different dialects and great variation in historical development and social structure. Albanians of Kosovo belong to the Gheg population, while Tosks live mainly in Albanian (Vickers, 1998).

demonstrations. Everyday life was being transformed into parallel social worlds with increasingly less commonality. By the 1990, “Kosovo exemplified a paradigm of a segregated society, where ethnic communities live entirely separated, in parallel worlds, with as little contact as possible” (Duijzings, 2000:203).

If political and economic developments in the 1970s had been pulling the two communities apart, the final pull and separation came in 1981 with the outbreak of Albanian demonstrations that triggered a serious political crisis in Serbia and in all of Yugoslavia. The response to the demonstrations, initially orchestrated primarily by the federal government and executed by provincial institutions, was not only brutal but did not really address the grievances of neither the Albanian majority or the Serbian minority. Both communities were feeling increasingly insecure and frustrated in their conflicting demands.

If the first open challenge to the Titoist order came from the Croatian “mass movement” in 1971 (see note 12), the first challenge to the post-Titoist order came from the Albanian nationalist movement in Kosovo. Tito was the charismatic leader of the Communist party and a lifelong president of Yugoslavia with significant popular support and with an ability to balance the rivalry among republican party elites. Indeed, his personal power was the only integrative force remaining after the constitutional changes introduced in 1974. Pešić (1996) argues that the backdrop for the 1974 Constitution was formed in the intersection of three important political issues: economic and political reforms; the national question; and preservation of authoritarian Party rule. The transfer of power to the republics, autonomous provinces and communes placed the top Communist leadership, i.e. Tito, outside and above any potential political conflict and at the same time in the role of arbiter in the “last instance” (Ramet, 1992:37).

After Tito's death in 1980, a power void was created at the federal level both in the Communist Party and in the government. The decision making process in Yugoslavia had been effectively confederative. Each social and political issue was thus framed as a national one creating constant and open conflicts among the republican political elites (Pešić, 1996:27). Tito could always, in the "last instance", use his personal power and authority (and he often did) to bring a conflict to an end and to impose some kind of compromise, thus preserving the federal structure. This structure, however, could not hold together for much longer after his death. Even though the country finally disintegrated in 1991 with the international recognition of the secession of Slovenia and Croatia, the process of disintegration started much earlier and less than a year after Tito's death.

2. The Beginning of the End of Yugoslavia

In March of 1981, student demonstrations broke out in Priština and spread throughout the province to include Albanians from all walks of life (see Mertus, 1999). The demonstrations that broke out on March 11 were quickly dispersed by the police only to resume two weeks later, first in Prizren and then again in Priština. The second wave of demonstrations grew violent – demonstrators attacked Serbs and Montenegrins; their homes and businesses were burned and their shops looted (see Vickers, 1998:197). After the third wave of demonstrations in early April, the federal government declared a state of emergency bringing in federal troops to patrol cities, roads and borders. A curfew was imposed and the province was sealed off. But none of this, including police brutality, could stop the demonstrations which continued through May while the federal state continued with arrests of alleged organizers. According to the official reports, up to 300 people were arrested between 1981 and 1982. Albanian sources claim over 1,000 arrests. Official Yugoslav sources reported eleven demonstrators killed during the riots. Amnesty

International reports suggest that the number may have been as high as one hundred, while some Albanians claimed that almost one thousand civilians were killed (see The Kosovo Report, 2000; Mertus, 1999; Vickers, 1998).

Among the demands put forward by the demonstrators was, “Kosovo-republic” (see Kovačević and Dajić, 1994, Mertus, 1999; Vickers, 1998). This meant that Albanians, who held the status of national minority within Yugoslavia, wanted the status of “constitutive nation”, i.e. the right of self-determination (Pešić, 1996:33 n. 46).¹⁶ The demonstrations marked the beginning of open conflict between the Serbian and Albanian nationalisms and the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav state. In Pešić’s words,

it is safe to argue that Yugoslavia was really dismantled in Kosovo; [because] it did not manage to protect its citizens – neither the Serbs nor the Albanians, not holding a single instrument to neutralize and pacify national conflicts (1996:35).

The 1981 demonstrations by Kosovo Albanians and the demand for a Kosovo republic reopened many unresolved issues related to the relationships among the federal units and between them and the federal state. In Serbia, opposition to provincial autonomy which had been smoldered below the surface acquired a new and potent charge (Vickers, 1998:183). The Serbian and Albanian nationalisms were placed into an open conflict with each other that would continue until the 1999 and NATO military intervention.

Serbian nationalism(s), the primary subject of my analysis, emerged from the “underworld” of political and intellectual dissidence (see Rusinow, 1974) and entered not only

¹⁶ “The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-91) was a federation of six republics (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and two ‘autonomous provinces’ within Serbia (Vojvodina and Kosovo). With the exception of Bosnia-Herzegovina, each republic or autonomous province was the area of the greatest concentration of one of the major national groups that comprised Yugoslavia (Hayden, 1996:787). The federal Constitution recognized six constitutive nations with the right of self-determination (Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims, Serbs and Slovenians); a number of nationalities (*narodnosti*) and national minorities (*nacionalne manjine*). Neither nationalities nor national minorities had the right of self-determination. The two biggest nationalities within Yugoslavia were Albanians and Hungarians, while the most numerous minority were Romani (see also Rusinow, 1974, Ramet, 1992).

the high ranks of the Communist Party and government but also the media and broad public discourses in the aftermath of the 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo. It thus further contributed to deepening of the political crisis in the country.

Two things were consequential for the upsurge of Serbian nationalism and particularly for nationalist resentment vis-à-vis the Albanians: the 1981 Albanian demonstrations and the demand put forward for a Kosovo republic. Resentment only increased after the publishing of census results later that year which showed decreasing fertility rates and below replacement population growth in Vojvodina and in Serbia proper on the one hand and high fertility rates and rapid population growth among the Albanians in Kosovo on the other. In addition, census showed increased emigration of Serbs from Kosovo.

These demographic facts made the political demands of the Kosovo Albanians sound even more dramatic in Serbia proper. The issues of state sovereignty and of the nation's biological survival became invested in the project to (re)gain control over Kosovo as "the cradle of Serbian state and of its national being". State building was perceived as a vital characteristic of a modern nation. The affirmation of Serbia's status as a modern, viable nation-state was a recurrent theme in Serbian nationalist discourses. Reproductive patterns served as a measure of the nation's modernity. But in order to fully assert its modern status, the nation-state had to re-instate control over its "historic" and "natural" territories and to maintain demographic domination. Otherwise, the Serbs were going to "become a minority in their own state" which meant assuming a subordinate political status.

The weakened political status of the Republic of Serbia within its own borders and within the federation that was created by the 1974 Federal Constitution, had held a prominent place in dissident discourses in Serbia, not only those of nationalist provenience. One of the most

contested issues created by the 1974 constitutional reform was the status of Serbia's two autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina. While nominally part of Serbia, for all practical purposes the provinces had existed outside of the Serbian institutional system ever since 1974. The political system created by the new constitution attached the provinces (with their separate parliaments, governments, high courts) directly to the federation while separating them politically from Serbia. Moreover, representatives from Kosovo and Vojvodina within the Serbian state structure held a veto power and could influence the decision making process, including decisions relevant for Serbia proper. At the same time the provincial political organization did not allow for any interference on the part of the Republic of Serbia into internal matters of the provinces.

With the 1974 constitution, Serbia had lost sovereignty in practical terms over a significant part of its territory. For this reason, many intellectuals, political and legal experts criticized the constitutional reform from the very beginning. The communist authorities responded by removing many such critics from their teaching positions at the University of Belgrade¹⁷. Many of these intellectuals were also opponents of one-party, communist rule and argued for re-instating multi-party democratic institutions and the principle of "majority rule". As the above analysis shows, however, their understanding of this principle often meant the rule of ethnic majority.

Both the Serbian and Albanian nationalisms claimed Kosovo on historic grounds. They both claimed a long presence of their respective nations in this region and, even more importantly, they stressed the historical and symbolic significance of Kosovo for the process of constituting their own ethnic group into a modern nation.

¹⁷ Among those who lost their job at the Law School was Vojislav Koštunica, who later on became one of the leaders of the opposition movement against the Regime of Slobodan Milošević. Koštunica helped topple down Milošević by winning the federal presidential elections in October of 2000.

As mentioned earlier, by claiming Illyrian descent, Albanians asserted the longest presence in the region. In addition, the Albanian movement against the Ottoman Empire was founded not within the territory of current Albania, but in town of Prizren located in Kosovo. The League of Prizren,¹⁸ was formed in Kosovo in 1878 (see Vickers, 1998).

At the same time, in Serbian national consciousness, Kosovo symbolizes the “glory of its medieval state and culture”. The province harbors some of the most important Serbian religious monuments, churches and monasteries, to witness to this glory. Among them is the patriarchate of Peć, where the Serbian Orthodox Church, which plays an important role in Serbian national identity, established autocephality vis-à-vis Constantinople in the mid fourteenth century. Kosovo also symbolizes the “great national defeat” and the beginning of the “five hundred years of suffering under the Turks” which was ushered in 1389 after the Battle of Kosovo Field, located outside of Priština the capital of the province. At the battle, the army of Serbian feudal lords was defeated by the Ottoman army on its advance into Europe. The battle and its outcome symbolize not only the national but also the Christian martyrdom of the Serbian people. In accord with orientalist scholarship¹⁹, Ottoman rule in the Serbian popular imagination is perceived as a rupture in the nation’s overall development and the time during which the nation was “unnaturally disconnected from Europe”. Serbian history and mythology are saturated with references to the Battle of Kosovo – from the epic cycle which commemorates the battle to numerous history books and novels.

If both Albanians and Serbs could find strong enough arguments for their conflicting historical claims over Kosovo, Albanians had a clear advantage in putting forward a demographic claim. As mentioned earlier, Albanians had dominated the region demographically

¹⁸ Prizren is a town in southern Kosovo.

¹⁹ For the persuasive critique of orientalist representations of the Balkans see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden (1992) and Todorova (1997)

in ever growing proportion since the nineteenth century. According to the official census statistics, Albanians made up 77% of the total population in Kosovo in 1981. Albanian political and intellectual leaders claimed over 90%. Serbian counterparts, of course, denied the latter percentage. More importantly, they suggested that the growing population gap in the province was a result of conscious policies created by the Albanian political and religious leaders. It was also implied that Albanians were not capable of governing the province on their own and that Serbia should reinstate control over Kosovo.

The significance of demographics for both Serbian and Albanian nationalism is illustrated by the fact that Albanians in Kosovo boycotted the collection of census data organized by the Federal Census Bureau in 1991.

The rapid ethnic homogenization of Kosovo²⁰ was widely believed in Serbia to be a result of conscious demographic policies concocted by Albanian political and religious leaders. Public discourses became rife with stories on alleged illegal immigrations²¹ from Albania to Kosovo, the forced emigration of Slavs from Kosovo and the assimilation of Kosovo's Turks and Roma. These "unnatural" migrations, together with the "population explosion", i.e. Albanian high fertility was described, by many politicians and experts in Serbia, as consistent with expansionistic politics of the Kosovo Albanians. It was argued that Albanians were at the same time "ethnically cleansing"²² Kosovo of non-Albanians and "over-breeding" in order to establish

²⁰ This is apparent from the census data which show a steady increase of the gap between the number of Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo: 67:24 (1961); 74:21 (1971); 77:13 (1981)

²¹ In Serbia, politicians and historians argued that around 30,000 illegal immigrants from Albania have settled in Kosovo since the end of the Second World War. They allegedly never acquired Yugoslav citizenship but participated in censuses. They were blamed not only for widening the demographic gap in Kosovo but also for being the instigators and ideologues of Albanian nationalism in Kosovo. Islami (1989), however, argues that since World War 2 only 1,543 people immigrated from Albania and that according to the official registers only 704 of them were still living in the province at the end of the 1980s.

²² The expression "ethnic cleansing" widely used later during the war in Bosnia to describe the actions of the army of the Bosnian Serbs, was actually first used in Milošević's propaganda to refer to the migrations of the Slavic population out of Kosovo. It served to reproduce the image of forced expulsions rather than economic migrations.

absolute control over the province and ultimately to secede from Serbia and Yugoslavia. These three themes were interconnected but they played different roles in Serbian nationalist ideologies at different times.

The metaphor of migrations was an important element in Serbian nationalist discourses and served a very specific purpose. It symbolized the loss of the territory of Kosovo to Albanians. It also contributed to the image of victimhood which has been a powerful emotional force in all Yugoslav nationalisms in the 1980s and 1990s (see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, 1992; Denich, 1994; Žarkov, 1999). In this work, however, I analyze only those demographic discourses that focused on fertility and population growth. More specifically, I explore the demographic discourses created around the issue of differential fertility between Albanian and Serbian women. This aspect of population discourses, as well as the accompanying abortion debates, illuminates the central role of reproduction in concepts of gender and nation and more importantly the ways in which these two concepts intersect.

II. POPULATION THEORY AND PRACTICE

A. DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION “THEORY” AND POPULATION POLICIES

Demographic transition theory that was formulated in the early twentieth century offered a universal explanation of fertility changes and developed methods of predicting their direction. It has been successfully disputed as a universal explanation of fertility changes (see Tilly 1978, Schneider and Schneider 1984, Gillis, Tilly and Levine 1992, Kertzer 1993,) but to this day, the concept is widely used as a descriptive model and as a tool of social policy at the global and national levels (see Szreter, 1993)²³.

In the 1960s, when East European societies were experiencing steep decrease in fertility levles, demographic transition model was at its peak. It was a dominant model in social sciences in the United States, lead by the Princeton Project, in Western Europe and within international population institutions. It influenced research agendas and analytical models of demographic research throughout the world, including socialist countries and Yugoslavia.

Yugoslav demography represented a hybrid made up of Marxism as a universal theoretical/explanatory model, and demographic transition as a descriptive model and a dominant research scheme (see Besemers 1980; Breznik, 1980; Miljanić, 1992/93). Yugoslav demography

²³According to Szreter (1993), the reference to “theory” of demographic transition was in decline in professional writings since 1984, but the concepts of “demographic transition”, and “fertility transition” remained widely used. The latter became very popular after A. Coale re-introduced it in an article published in 1973 (658; 700, n. 118)

at the time was more influenced by the older version of demographic transition, according to which overall socioeconomic and cultural development always precedes a decline in fertility. The later, modified version, however, reversed this relationship, at least for the “underdeveloped” world. Szterter (1993), argues that during the 1950s,

an intellectual orthodoxy developed concerning the relationship between national economic development and population growth solidified among social scientists, economic planners, and political leaders in the West... Within this orthodoxy, the dominant line of thought tended to emphasize the extent to which relatively rapid population growth can obstruct the potential for economic growth in less developed countries (1993:659).

The “orthodoxy” persisted as a dominant orientation throughout the second half of the twentieth century, together with its corollary, a more pro-active family planning. The older version, of demographic transition theory dominant in the 1940s, claimed that economic development precedes falling fertility. According to the transformed demographic transition model that dominated after the 1950s, decreasing fertility and low population growth represent a precondition for economic growth. Thus, economic development plans must include family planning policies aimed to foster a fall in fertility rates. Otherwise, the increased food consumption would consume also all potential for capital growth (ibid. 680).

Since classic transition theory failed to explain and predict the decline in fertility relying on socio-economic indicators like industrialization, urbanization, literacy and infant mortality, demographic transition theory turned to more ideational, cultural factors:

Cultural settings influenced the onset of and spread of fertility decline independently of socio-economic conditions. Proximate areas with similar socio- economic conditions entered the transition period at different times, whereas areas differing in the level of socioeconomic development but with similar cultures entered the transition at similar times (Knodel and van de Welle, 1986:412).

Culture is incorporated in demographic research, however, usually as yet another variable in multivariate models which represent closed and abstract systems (Greenhalgh; 1988, 1995a; Szerter, 1993; Kretzer and Fricke, 1997). In addition, the domination of structural-functional perspective in social sciences in general, including anthropology at the time, prevented demographic research from employing the concept of culture in heuristically more productive ways. Moreover, demography has kept this outdated, static, conception of culture as kinship and structure alone even after new theoretical developments within anthropology brought about a radical re-definition of the concept of culture. Demography still has a difficulty in seeing culture as a dynamic category, as a context that influences and is influenced by human action (Kertzer and Fricke, 1997:18)²⁴

The theory of demographic transition was designed to explain a change in the regime of high fertility and high mortality to patterns of low mortality and low fertility that some of Western European countries experienced in the nineteenth century. The theory assigned a universal meaning to population trends that were specific to the development of some Western European nation-states.

The phenomenon of demographic transition itself was interpreted as being inherent to universal processes of modernization. Demographic transition theory is a product of the modernization theory which is based on ahistorical, Eurocentric and apolitical presumptions (Greenhalgh, 1996:27). It is also a product of positivistic, policy oriented social science which makes no distinction between scientific study of social and natural phenomena. Within this perspective, explanation and prediction are closely related. Thus, to explain something, gives a power to control it (Szerter, 1993:690; Kertzer and Fricke, 1997). In other words, as policy

²⁴ On recent theoretical developments in anthropology and demography that promise to bring the two disciplines closer together in their attempt to understand fertility changes in all their complexity see articles in Greenhalgh (ed.) 1995; and Kertzer and Fricke (eds.) 1997.

oriented social discipline based on positivistic methodology demography aims to explain, predict and regulate reproduction.

Ideas of social evolutionism and functional-structuralism connected demographic transition model with the modernization theory (Szreter, 1993; Greenhalagh, 1995a; Kertzer and Fricke, 1997; Rivkin-Fish 2003). Thus, according to the model, each society moves from a pre-to a post-industrial state of demographic equilibrium (see Szreter, 1993:662)²⁵. Between these two stages of demographic equilibrium is the stage of rapid population growth. Rapid population growth is a condition created by the combined forces of lower mortality and still high fertility rates. At this stage of social development, mortality rates drop as a result of improved living standard and public health.

High fertility which had compensatory role at the times of high infant mortality still remain high. Together, low mortality and high fertility rates create rapid population growth. The continuation of modernization, as stated by this theory, brings about fertility control and a subsequent decrease in fertility and in the rate of population growth. The level of fertility control therefore becomes a measure and symbol of economic development and cultural modernization:

Although there was nothing historically inevitable in the process, in order to industrialize and modernize, a country must pass through the stages of demographic transition with the appearance of fertility-controlling behavior marking the advent of the final stage, and the general spread of such behavior confirming successful sociocultural adjustment to the conditions of modernized, economically developed nation (Szreter 1993:662), see also Greenhalagh, 1995a; Rivkin-Fish 2003).

According to Greenhalagh (1995a), demographic transition theory represents the process of fertility change as not only inevitable but also irreversible. Within this theoretical framework, demographic transition is a long-term, progressive, irreversible and desirable process. It

²⁵ Demographic equilibrium describes a low population growth which characterizes both pre- and post- transition societies and comes about as a function of differences between the levels of mortality and fertility.

homogenizes different elements in the society and brings closer together various societies in a common trend toward Americanization and Europeanization. (see also Rivkin-Fish, 2003).

The functionalist paradigm that informs demographic transition comes to rescue whenever fertility change does not follow the prescribed model. Deviations from the model are deemed pathological and disruptive for the overall social development. High fertility and rapid population growth in developing world, for example, have been constructed as “population problems”. They are believed to curb economic development of individual nation-states and to increase crime rates due to the overpopulation. As a result international population agencies have been established in order to create and together with local governments implement policies aimed to control fertility levels and cut down the growth rates in the so-called Third World.

In essence, however, these policies are motivated by the widespread fear of immigrations from developing into the developed world. This fear is multidimensional and beyond the scope of this research. Suffice it to say that massive immigration of this kind is often perceived as potentially disruptive for cultural identity for social cohesion of the host countries. Thus, techniques and practices that are invoked and implemented in the Third world countries are meant to, among other things, maintain social cohesion in the so called First world. This stress on social cohesion prevents demographers from including power relations and conflict within and outside of family in their analysis of fertility (see Szerter, 1993; Greenhalgh 1995a; Rivkin-Fish, 2003).

Put more broadly, the theory of demographic transition as well as analytical models and public policies derived from it belong to the neo-colonial and orientalist discourses that construct the world as a hierarchically organized continuum made of more, less and un-developed states and nations. The development is here primarily defined in economic terms and based on

standards specific to the industrialized West. These standards are uncritically applied to measure the achieved development and the developmental potential throughout the world. Fertility rates being used as a measure of development and civilization constitute but one example.

Even though in the early twentieth century, and specifically during the economic crisis in the 1920 and 1930s, many politicians and demographers in Western Europe and the USA were concerned about the “declining birth rates” in their respective nations (see Teitelbaum, S., J.M. Winter, 1988), low fertility remained a symbol of progress and development. Additionally, within the analytical model national populations have been, to this day, divided into the “natural fertility” populations and the “controlled fertility” populations.

The distinction became particularly popular after Coale’s re-introduced the concept of the “fertility transition” (see note 23 above). The concept was meant as an improvement of the classic theory of demographic transitions, as supposedly being more measurable, more precise and more easily studied. Szerter, however, argues that this model suffers from the same methodological limitations as the model of demographic transitions. The process of change, according to him, is reduced to variation between arbitrarily defined two types of fertility and no variation is recognized within the types (see Szerter, 1993:700 n.118).

Furthermore, the metaphors of “nature” and “culture” (i.e. man-made and controlled) carry a specific type of symbolism. They are hierarchically organized and belong to a broader system of binary oppositions²⁶. The metaphor of nature always represents the bottom of this conceptual grid. This system of hierarchically organized binary oppositions marks a male-centered, euro-centered and imperial society and social theory and has been successfully criticized by several theoretical developments in the twentieth century from feminism to post-

²⁶ Some other common pairs that emerged against this conceptual background are: mind/body; abstract/concrete; rational/irrational; ideal/real; culture/nature, to mention a few.

structuralism and subaltern studies (see Asad, 1973; Fox Keller, 1978; Greer, 1978; Rich, 1976; Ortner, 1994; Said, 1978; 1985; Taussig, 1987, among others). I argue that concepts of “natural” vs. “controlled” fertility carry the same type of symbolism and same political implications when applied to different ethno-national groups.

Demography in general, and demographic transition model in particular, remained largely unaffected by these theoretical developments (Greenhalgh, 1995a; Sizer, 1993) or by anthropological approaches to population dynamics which promote situating population processes within specific historical, political, economic and cultural arrangements (see Greenhalgh, 1995a, 1995b; Kertzer and Fricke, 1997; Schneider and Schneider, 1995, 1996).

To say that a certain population has “natural fertility” deems that population not only economically undeveloped, but also unprogressive, even primitive. Within the conceptual framework of dual oppositions, control of nature including human sexuality is a measure of civilization. Thus a population with “controlled fertility” is not only at the advanced stages of modernization it is also more civilized. Political implications of such a conceptual framework are manifold. To the very least the framework justifies hierarchical world order and unequal power relations ethno-national groups. It also contributes to the processes of “othering” of groups and nations that do not follow the prescribed model of fertility change.

The modified version of demographic transition model was developed in the mid of twentieth century through research that focused on explaining and controlling high fertility levels or “population explosion” in the Third World. This approach resulted in neo-Malthusian international population policies designed by international population agencies. The aim of these policies was to initiate or speed up demographic transition in the Third World countries and by this to allegedly contribute to their economic development.

The “population explosion” is here explained by “older taboos” which according to this model of demographic transition theory, prevail in “traditional” societies and which lead people to accept high fertility passively (see Kreager, 1997:161). The emphasis on traditional culture assumed that these cultures are manipulable and that family planning can target selected cultural obstacles at the local level (ibid.:161). As a result demographic categories and measures have been constructed and used to establish the “traditional identity” in many a research from Khanna Study to KAP survey (ibid.:161)

Eastern European socialist states, at the time, were faced with quite different “population problem”. The second stage of demographic transition in Eastern Europe did not bring about population equilibrium and balanced growth, as assumed by the model. Fertility continued to fall and reached below replacement levels of population growth. Thus most of Eastern European socialist countries, skipped the second stage of demographic transition. Many Eastern European governments responded developing and implementing pronatalist policies.

B. SOCIALISM AND PRONATALISM

Classical Marxism, which informed all official socialist ideologies, had an optimistic view on population issues.

On population growth an optimism prevails among Marxist writers that is based on considerations relating to low population density and belief in human progress, in general, and the progress of science and technology in particular. An anti-Malthusian attitude underlies this optimism which is basic to the debates on fertility and fertility control (Macura, 1981:34. see also Besemeres, 1980, David, Goldberg, 1993; Heitliger, 1980; 1974, Macura 1974, Potts et.al., 1997).

It was believed that, unlike capitalism, socialist society would be able to absorb high population growth due to the restructuring of economic resources and improvement of living

standard of the working class. Moreover, it was believed that socialist economies, envisioned as continuously growing, would also need a growing labor force. Thus, micro and macroeconomic elements together would motivate individuals to keep large families and no population policies or restrictions were necessary. Consequently, socialist countries were going to avoid problems related to different stages of demographic transition: rapid population growth of the ‘transition stage’ and low fertility of the final stage.

The process of intensive and rapid modernization that all socialist regimes undertook in what were predominantly agrarian societies (except for Czechoslovakia), worked against this optimistic demographic view. Relative increase in living standard lowers infant mortality and it also brings about a change in a perceived relative costs of childrearing; the equality of women and high employment make for a moderate rate of population growth; rural-urban migration associated with the shift from agriculture to industrialization also tends to reduce fertility; legalization of abortion is yet another element in keeping fertility rates low. According to standard theory of demographic transition, all these elements are bound to bring about a steep “population decline”²⁷. While the basic premises of the theory of demographic transition are debatable, as discussed below, almost all socialist countries in Eastern Europe did experience a steep decline in number of births in the 1950s which prompted many governments to reconsider their social and population policies. In many cases it resulted in adoption of pronatalist policies.

As already mentioned, socialist, state run modernization, according to Marxist theory, was going to avoid the demographic transition and the resulting problems associated with potential labor shortages in its later stages when fertility continues to fall reaching below

²⁷ The “population decline”, here is in a way a “native concept”. It is widely used in demographic literature to describe a decrease in population numbers and negative population growth. Even though, the term “decrease” has more neutral meaning and would be more appropriate, I have kept the “native concept” and use it interchangeably with the “decrease”.

replacement levels. This demographic optimism embedded in Marxist theory which predicted the continuation of high fertility in socialism was challenged by demographic developments of actually existing socialisms. This practice brought about a different, and from the perspective of ambitious state run modernization project which relied on a large labor force, grimmer demographic reality.

The Post World War Two baby boom was followed by decreasing fertility throughout the war-affected world. This decrease started earlier in Eastern Europe and reached below replacement levels sooner than in other areas (see David, 1999; David and R.J. McIntyre, 1981, Macura 1981; Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985)²⁸. Tables 1-3 provide some comparative data on reproduction and fertility rates in Eastern and Western Europe for the late nineteenth century and for the twentieth century.²⁹

²⁸ Decrease in fertility resembled the processes in the West during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

²⁹ The rate of reproduction and total fertility are considered good indicators of the potential for future growth of the population. The rate of reproduction at the level of 1.0, and total fertility of 2.1 maintain zero growth, i.e. population growth at the replacement level.

Table 1: Crude Birth Rates 1870-1978³⁰

	1870	1880	1900	1930	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1978
Albania	-	-	-	-	44.5	43.4	35.2	32.5	27.4	-
Bulgaria	-	33.7	42.2	31.3	20.1	17.8	15.3	16.3	16.6	15.5
Czechoslovakia	40.5	37.4	36.6	22.7	20.3	15.9	16.4	15.9	19.6	18.4
GDR	38.5	37.6	35.6	17.6	16.7	17.2	16.5	13.9	10.6	13.9
Hungary	42.1	43.1	39.3	25.2	21.4	14.7	13.1	14.7	18.4	15.7
Poland	-	-	-	32.3	29.1	22.3	17.3	16.8	18.9	19.10
Romania	34.4	38.5	38.8	35.0	25.6	19.1	14.6	21.1	19.7	19.1
Soviet Union	49.2	49.7	49.3	-	25.7	24.9	18.5	17.4	18.1	18.2
Yugoslavia	44.8	40.7	42.4	35.5	26.9	23.5	20.9	17.8	18.1	17.3
Western Europe	-	-	-	21.1	18.3	18.4	18.5	16.2	14.2	13.4

Table 2: Gross Rates of Reproduction, 1870-1978

	1900	1930	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1978
Albania	-	-	3.41	3.39	2.75	-	-	-
Bulgaria	3.18	1.90	1.17	1.12	1.00	1.05	1.08	-
Czechoslovakia	-	1.19	1.38	1.16	1.15	1.01	1.20	1.15
GDR	-	-	1.13	1.16	1.20	1.07	.75	-
Hungary	2.60	1.39	1.36	.98	.88	.95	1.16	1.01
Poland	-	-	1.74	1.44	1.22	1.06	1.10	1.07
Romania	-	1.81	1.49	1.12	.98	1.40	-	-
Soviet Union	-	-	-	-	-	1.18	-	-
Yugoslavia	-	-	1.53	1.36	1.32	1.11	1.10	-
Western Europe	-	-	1.23	1.30	1.31	1.16		

³⁰ Tables 1 and 2 adopted from David, McIntyre, 1984:8 Note: Western Europe = an unweighted average of 17 Western European Countries; Figures for years 1870-1930 are for whole Germany (DDR), European Russia (USSR), and Serbia (Yugoslavia)

Table 3: Total Fertility of Women Born in 1940 (Selected Countries) ³¹

Country	Total fertility
Austria	2.17
Denmark	2.30
France	2.49
FRG	1.99
Great Britain	2.38
Holland	2.26
Norway	2.47
Sweden	2.07
Switzerland	2.11
Bulgaria	2.11
Czechoslovakia	2.22
GDR	2.01
Hungary	1.90
Romania	2.36
Poland	2.47
Yugoslavia	2.41

Declining fertility and the consequent below replacement population growth were met “with surprise, often incredulity, and always with disapproval” (David and McIntyre, 1981:77) by the Communist governments. Many among them redesigned their population policies in the mid 1960 aiming to counteract those tendencies that had reduced fertility and brought about below replacement population growth. Policies were changed and new measures developed in Romania (1966, 1972, 1979), Bulgaria (1967, 1968, 1973, 1975), Hungary (1965, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972,

³¹ Adopted from David and McIntyre, 1984:15

1973, 1974) Czechoslovakia (1964, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1979), East Germany (1967, 1969, 1972, 1976); [and] in Poland (1971, 1972, 1974, 1978) (Macura, 1981:39)³²

Macura, adds that “policies designed to encourage fertility had to operate in a rather complex framework” (ibid.:35) because, most of the social norms that resulted from Marxist population optimism were rarely questioned in debates on population policies. The issue was, according to him, even “further complicated by aspirations and demands of individual members of society” (ibid.:35) and by the newly adopted concept of human reproductive rights after the 1974 World Population Conference in Bucharest³³.

At the Conference “the right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children’ was adopted as a fundamental principle in the World Population Plan of Action” (ibid.: 35; see also Szbody, 1977). Macura (1981) argues that all socialist governments adopted this principle. The principle was built into the Yugoslav constitution of 1974, and subsequently into all Republican constitutions. Yugoslavia was at the time one of only three countries in the world to write the right to free choice in deciding about number and spacing of children into their constitutions (see Besemres, 1980:366 n. 20)

Following the World Population Conference Declaration, most East European governments resorted to fiscal, stimulating measures, rather than to legal-administrative restrictions³⁴. These so called ‘positive incentives’ (Besemers, 1980), included birth grants for the first child, family allowances, larger allowances for the higher order children, paid maternity leave or unpaid leave with job guarantees (see Besemers, 1980 David and McInture, 1981;

³² “The Soviet Union was a laggard in this arena, adopting new pronatalist measures only in 1981...[T]his reluctance was in part a consequence of political sensitivities arising from the simultaneously low fertility of the Slavic majority and the higher fertility of the Muslim minority” (Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985:115).

³³ The first World Population Conference took place in Belgrade, in 1965.

³⁴ Heitlinger argues that the contrast between these two policy instruments (fiscal and legal administrative) is not as great as terminology implies and that there is a considerable overlap between them (1987:25).

Heitlinger, 1987; Macura, 1981), to name a few. Only two countries, Poland and Bulgaria, imposed a childlessness tax.

While the aim of these policies was to stop further decrease in fertility or to reverse its levels, the measures themselves were not much different from the welfare policies introduced in most Western European countries after 1965. In Western Europe, however, the measures were introduced without reference to demographic objectives (Heitlinger, 1987; Macura, 1981, Teitlebaum and Winter, 1985). The measures included legislation related to marriage, family and divorce laws regarding the protection of mothers and children; regulation of health services; provisions for crèches and kindergartens; legislation on contraception and abortion; family allowance systems; facilities and grants for childbirth; maternity and post maternity leave; and specific employment arrangements for working mothers.

As argued by Heitlinger (1987), each state has a form of population policy – sometimes it is explicit, sometime more hidden. Thus, she states, there were many similarities and differences between capitalist and socialist population policies. Fiscal measures (i.e. positive incentives) dominated in both systems and were relatively ineffective because they tended to be perceived and accepted by the population as social welfare measures rather than as pronatalist ones

It is seems safe to argue that the only potentially effective pronatalist policies introduced by socialist regimes were those which restricted access to abortion and contraception. Most socialist governments, however, demonstrated moderation in abortion restrictions. “Except for the unique Romanian actions in 1966, abortion restriction has been pursued with considerable caution and restraint, reflecting a complex web of concern with public health, public opinion, and ideological implications” (David and McIntyre, 1981:17). Nevertheless, a few socialist

countries disrupted the regular supply of contraceptives during the 1960s” (David and McIntyre, 1981; David, 1999; Macura, 1981:46;).

With the exception of Yugoslavia and Hungary, almost all socialist regimes restricted access to modern contraceptives by disrupting the regular supply. The state thus used its distributive power (see Verdery, 1997) in order to limit access to effective contraception. This was probably politically safer because, according to Verdery, the socialist state maintained its legitimacy through the process of distribution of goods and resources. Socialist citizens on the other hand, developed many strategies in order to overcome the constant shortages of consumer goods. Connections in the country, and friends and family members living abroad were two major alternative supply channels. Both of these channels, however, had a limited utility for obtaining contraceptives. Since most socialist countries neither manufactured nor imported contraceptives, connections were of little help. Getting them from abroad was expensive. In addition one had to overcome quite a bit of embarrassment in order to bring up a subject of sexuality and contraception in a conversation with friends and family. While sex is one of the most common subjects in jokes, it is considered inappropriate for a “serious” conversation, and even more so if a discourse on sex and sexuality is personalized.

In Yugoslavia and Hungary, where allocation of goods and resources was increasingly done on the market, the state did not have the same distributive power. More importantly, however, neither government developed policies aimed at limiting the contraceptive supply. To the contrary, in both countries regular supply and education about effective contraception were proclaimed a part of population, i.e. family policies (see McIntyre, 1985 on Hungary; Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999 and Rašević, 1993, on Yugoslavia). As I show later in the section on abortion, while policies designed to increase the usage of effective contraceptives were

successful in Hungary, they failed in Yugoslavia and abortion remained the major method of family planning throughout the country.

In the absence of migrations, East European pronatalist policies in the 60s and 70s were focused exclusively on fertility. In at least five socialist countries (DDR, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia) policy promoting fertility was given the most prominent place. While none of these countries had explicit statements on fertility objectives, their common feature was to encourage the birth of a third child per family (see Macura, 1981:42). The above mentioned economic measures were accompanied by educational programs and polices designed to influence public opinion about demographic concerns (David and McIntyre, 1981, Macura, 1981, Teitlebaum and Winter, 1985).

Since all socialist economies were labor intensive, demographic concerns and pronatalist policies were framed and justified by economic reasons, primarily by predictions of future labor shortages and the aging of the population (David and McZnure, 1981; Macura, 198; Teitelbaum and Winter 1985). Unlike in Western European countries, socialist regimes could not count on immigration to solve labor shortages. This partially explains why all population policies focused on increasing fertility. Macura, a prominent Yugoslav demographer who in the 1990s became a leading advocate of Serbian pronatalism at the time, suggested alternative solutions for both capitalist and socialist governments in their approach to falling fertiltiy.

A hypothetical absolute shrinkage of the working-age group might be compensated in Western societies by greater involvement of women, which might call for some adjustment of social institutions. In the socialist societies the compensation could be sought in the growth of productivity, perhaps requiring adjustment in economic policy measures (1980:107)

Macura here suggested economic adaptation to demographic change rather than the creation of policies to influence them (cf. pronatalism and antinatalism)³⁵. The proposed approach, however, was inconvenient if not impossible in socialist states for ideological, as well as for economic reasons. Increased productivity always brings about a labor surplus, which would run counter the ideological commitment to full employment. Moreover, none of the socialist governments had the necessary investment capital required to undertake a project of increased productivity even if they had wanted to. Thus, pronatalism seemed to be a suitable solution. In addition to the above mentioned ideological reasons tied to economic development, pronatalism was a powerful ideological tool in the processes of homogenization of socialist nations. This was particularly true in Romania (see Gal, Verdery) and to a lesser degree in Czechoslovakia (see Heitlinger, 1987)

In the short term, the pronatalist policies seemed to be working in Eastern Europe. The most dramatic change occurred in Romania, in the first year after abortion was banned. In all other countries with openly pronatalist policies, increase in general fertility rates was recorded in the early 1970s. Poland, which did not have either pronatalist policies or as generous allowances as other countries, however, also recorded an increase in fertility levels which makes it difficult to estimate the real influence of pronatalist measures elsewhere.

In addition, as early as the mid 1970s fertility started to decline again, and has not reversed the direction since, save for small yearly variations (see David, 1999; Macura, 1981, Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985). The short lived increase of fertility levels in countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary which had the most developed population policies indicates that the favorable economic conditions created by those policies only influenced the timing of

³⁵ For more on differences between adapting to demographic change vs. measures to influence them, see Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985.

reproduction within the specific generation and not the increase in general fertility (Rašević Miroslav, 1986).

1. Yugoslav "Family Planning" Policies

Socialist Yugoslavia, while promoting many of the fiscal measures described above, did not have an openly pronatalist policy. In 1969 the Federal Assembly passed a Resolution on Family Planning but no demographic objectives were stated. The Resolution endorsed a liberal principle of family planning stating that parents were entitled to decide for themselves the number and spacing of children. The state, on the other hand, was proclaimed responsible for maintaining a regular supply of contraceptives and for promoting education about them (Besemers, 1980; Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999 Macura, 1974, 1981; Rašević, 1993).

Population policies were reconsidered in a 1975 document³⁶ on developmental policy. This document proposed that efforts be made to lower infant mortality and emigration. Unlike other East European states Yugoslavia had a liberal emigration policy and actually encouraged temporary emigration of its citizens to Western Europe as a way of resolving the problem of increasing unemployment (see Besemeres, 1980; Woodward, 1985). An additional benefit that temporary emigration brought to the state was a steady influx of much needed hard currency.

At the time most of those temporary employed in the West were sending their savings back home and keeping them in Yugoslav banks. At its peak there were around one million Yugoslavs temporarily employed abroad. Their remittances in 1978 amounted to \$ 2.8 billion (see Besemeres, 1980:39). After 1970, Yugoslavia made bilateral agreements with many Western European countries which regulated the legal status and social security rights of those

³⁶ The document was titled "Osnova zajedničke politike dugoročnog razvoja SFR Jugoslavije do 1985 godine [The Foundation for the Common Politics of the Long-term Development of SFR of Yugoslavia until 1985]. It was first published in the form of suggestions for public discussion as a supplement to the daily *Borba* in October 1974.

workers abroad and also provided for supplementary schooling for their children (Besemeres, 1980; Woodward, 1985).

Reference to emigration in the section on demographic issues in the 1975 Development Document was little more than lip service to several pressures coming from inside and outside the country. The inside pressures were coming from the two economically most developed republics, Croatia and Slovenia. Croatia, together with Serbia, had already reached below replacement fertility in the early 1950s. Slovenian fertility, while falling, remained longer above the replacement level (see Table 4).

Table 4: Cumulative Fertility (cohort 45-49), for Serbia and Slovenia, 1953-1981 ³⁷

	1953	1961	1971	1981
Serbia	3.08	3.00	2.37	1.93
Slovenia	3.0	2.63	2.22	2.06

Still its economy was the only one in Yugoslavia that at the time was experiencing labor shortages. In addition, citizens of Croatia and Slovenia³⁸, made up the highest percentage among those who, according to the official rhetoric, were “temporary émigrés”, but in reality were settling permanently in the West in ever greater numbers.

For these reasons, the Croatian and Slovenian leaderships were promoting the idea of designing social and economic policies that would cut down further emigration and possibly bring back some of those who had left. Additional pressures in the same directions came from the Army which was concerned about the defense consequences of the loss of able-bodied men

³⁷ Adopted from Breznik, 1990/91

³⁸ Citizens of Slovenia and Croatia made up, at the beginning of the emigration process, between one third and one fifth of all émigrés from Yugoslavia (see Besemeres, 1980).

ages 20-45 to economic emigration. For the Yugoslav strategic doctrine of total or general defense (*opštenarodna odbrana*) the number of men who could be drafted for the military service was crucially important. This age group made up a majority of the émigrés. None of these internal pressures, however, produced a systematic state policy aiming to bring back significant numbers of émigrés. Moreover, when some of them did return due to the economic recession in the West following the oil crisis when many Western governments introduced limitations on the inflow of foreign workers, the Yugoslav economy was not ready to absorb them in a productive ways if at all (see Besemers, 1980, Woodward, 1995).

Another important demographic issue that was considered in the 1975 document on general development was related to differential fertility. ‘Population homogenization’ was estimated as satisfactory in the document, which meant that fertility was decreasing throughout the country reaching very similar levels in the most developed republics and regions (cf. Croatia, Serbia proper, Slovenia and Vojvodina). Moreover, this decrease in fertility would, according to the projections adopted in the document, bring Yugoslav reproduction closer to those in the “developed countries” within a ten year period (see Table 5 and Figure 2).

Table 5: Crude Birth Rates and General Fertility Rates in Yugoslav Republics & Provinces ³⁹

Region	1950	1960	1966	1968	1970	1972	1975
<i>Crude birth rates</i>							
Yugoslavia-total	30.2	23.5	20.3	19.1	17.8	18.3	18.2
Bosnia	38.6	43.1	28.7	24.6	21.4	21.5	19.8
Montenegro	30.0	28.1	25.1	21.4	20.3	20.0	18.9
Croatia	24.9	18.4	16.2	14.9	13.9	14.8	14.9
Macedonia	40.3	31.7	29.0	25.4	23.2	22.7	22.5
Slovenia	24.6	17.6	17.9	16.9	16.0	16.5	16.8
Serbia- total	29.5	21.2	18.6	18	17.5	18.1	18.5
Serbia prop.	28.0	18.0	15.2	14.8	14.8	15.1	15.6
Vojvodina	25.5	17.8	15.1	14.1	13.0	13.6	14.5
Kosovo	46.1	44.1	40.3	38.5	36.5	37.1	35.1
<i>General fertility rates</i>							
Yugoslavia-total	111.7	91.9	91.2	72.0	66.4	68.7	68.5
Bosnia	149.2	133.0	105.6	90.3	80.3	80.6	72.6
Montenegro	123.1	115.3	97.1	82.7	79.0	78.4	71.5
Croatia	87.2	71.1	63.9	56.2	51.3	55.9	56.6
Macedonia	168.1	133.0	110.7	101.1	90.4	88.1	86.4
Slovenia	86.0	68.3	73.3	64.9	60.5	63.2	65.3
Serbia- total	108.4	83.1	70.1	67.6	64.4	66.8	69.6
Serbia prop.	100.7	68.8	56.0	45.1	52.1	53.6	56.8
Vojvodina	90.9	68.7	56.8	52.2	47.5	49.7	93.7
Kosovo	214.4	200.5	176.7	173.1	165.4	168.9	157.2

³⁹ Adopted from Breznik/Todorovic, 1990/91

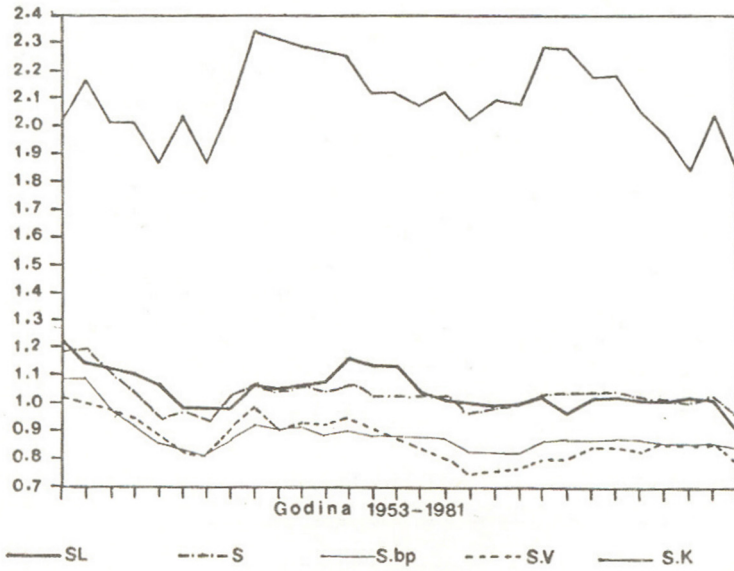
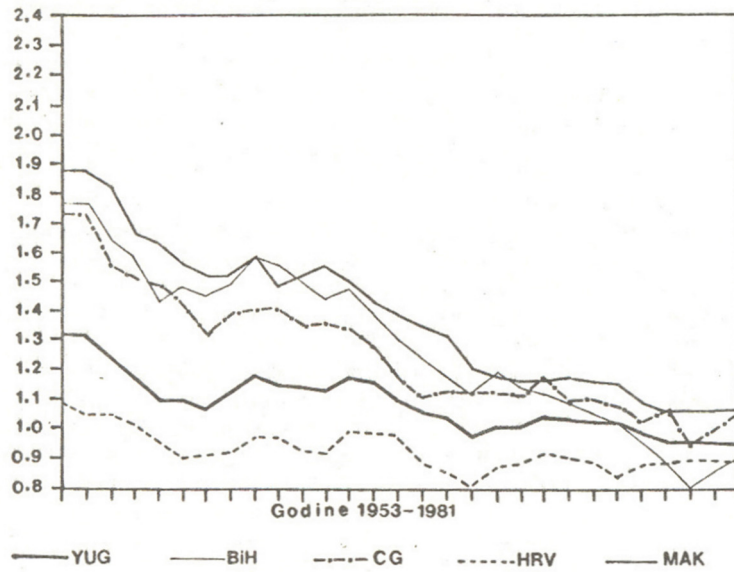


Figure 2: Net Rates of Reproduction in Yugoslav Republics, 1953-1981⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Todorović, 1990/91:61 NOTE: BiH=Bosnia&Herzegovina; CG=Montenegro; MAK=Macedonia; SL=Slovenia; S=Serbia; S.bp.=Serbia proper; S.V.=Vojvodina; S.K.=Kosovo

This “calming down” of population growth, it was stated, would encourage economic and social development (see Besemers, 1980:236). At the same time the document recognized that the “decline” of fertility in some regions (cf. Croatia and Serbia) had already far outrun those in “developed countries”. The document thus proposed that “fertility be increased in regions where it is below replacement level, while being decreased in areas where it is deemed to be excessive” (see Macura, 1981:41).

With the last statement the document suggested, though cautiously, a more direct state intervention in the realm of fertility control and proposed that population measures should be differential. It should be pointed out that the latter proposition was absent from the first draft of the document. It was included in the version which was passed in the Federal Parliament only after a public debate⁴¹ of the initial draft during which the most prominent role was played by medical and demographic experts.

While the “homogenization” of birth rates became one of the normative principles of demographic discourses in Yugoslavia it was never operationalized into specific policies at the Federal level. The dominant view was that “family planning” and “population policy” were conceptually different. Here is how Breznik, one of the leading Yugoslav demographers explains the difference and advantages of the family planning:

Family planning policy is one thing, population policy another. The goal of the former resides more in personal sphere enabling the person to exercise the right to freely decide on birth of children with the social services providing the necessary prerequisites for this. [I]n a broader sense family planning as it is understood in Yugoslavia, can have an effect on population development [...] However, family planning policy should not be an

⁴¹ The institution of the “public debate” in socialist Yugoslavia was designed to maintain a broad participation of its citizens in creating laws and regulations. Drafts of proposed laws, regulations and resolutions were sent out to relevant political institutions at all levels of social organization. In addition, they would be also sent to relevant (expert) institutions, and published in major newspapers. Individuals and institutions could send their criticisms, comments and suggestions. While individual citizens rarely used this opportunity to participate in the decision making process, interested institutions (depending on the issue) often did and it was not uncommon that the final version of a document included suggestions that were made in during the “public debate”.

instrument for achieving demographic objectives [...] Society must seek other ways to achieve its demographic policy objectives and not to restrict the right to freely decide on childbirth. It must employ social, economic, health, educational and other policy measures to influence the birth rates, migrations or demographic structures (Breznik, ed. 1980:259-60)

The difference between the “family planning” and “population policy, reflects the contrasting views on the relationship between economic and demographic developments. Family planning is associated with the view that economic and social developments provide solution for “population problem” however defined. Population policy, on the other hand, stems from the belief that development is not enough and that legal and economic stimulations and/or pressures need to be used to in order to onset fertility transition. At the global level, the latter approach has dominated international population institutions in their attempt to solve what was defined as “population explosion” in the Third World (see Besemeres, 1980; Sen; 1995; Simon and Zinmeister, 1992; Szreter, 1993).

The essential difference here is between policies oriented to providing services that individuals and families can use in order to achieve a desired number of children and maintain a certain level of living standard, on the one hand; and policies aimed to influence (often in a restrictive manner) the very decision process in order to achieve socially desirable fertility levels. Sen (1995) distinguishes between a “collaborative” and “override” approach to population “problem”: “One involves voluntary choice and a collaborative solution, and the other overrides voluntarism through legal or economic coercion” (pp.106).

Breznik’s notion of “family planning” shares the socio economic conception of development with the demographic transition theory. Within this conception, fertility is the ultimate dependant variable and is directly affected by socio economic changes. Consequently, family planning is merely an adjunct to the implementation of development programs (see

Szerter, 1993:674). This perspective resonated well with economic determinism of Marxist ideology which informed all Yugoslav social sciences. Thus it was well suited to serve as a foundation for meta-population policy in socialist Yugoslavia.

According to domestic as well as foreign commentators, the Yugoslav policy “tended to promote ‘human and rational’ reproduction “appropriate to a socialist self-governing society” (Macura, 1981:41; see also Besemeres, 1980; David and McIntyre, 1981; Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999 Macura,) and did not contain specific demographic goals. While general objectives were shared, (i.e. population homogenization) the policy was decentralized and specific measures, which had to be differential, were predominantly in the hands of the republics, autonomous provinces and communes (see also David and McIntyre, 1981; Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999; Macura, 1974; Rašević, 1993).

The general liberal framework and meta-population policy, defined and promoted by Federal institutions, put some limits on social/population policies at the lower levels (cf. republics and communes). Yugoslav liberal population ideology, according to Besemeres, had several sources. First, it was a reflection of the regime’s overall exceptional political liberalism, as compared to other East European countries. Second, labor surpluses and unemployment inclined federal authorities against pronatalism advocated by some experts and political elites at republican levels. Finally, the antinatalism also promoted by some experts and politicians, was even more ill-advised due to the political sensitivity related to the overlap between fertility levels and ethno-national identities (Besemeres, 1980) – see Table 6.

Table 6: Cohort Fertility in Yugoslav Republics & Provinces, 1950-1989
(number of live births per 1000 women)⁴²

		15-49	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-40
Yugoslavia	1950	111.7	38.7	198.4	201.2	166.3	92.3	46.1	10.8
	1955	100.8	42.0	186.2	176.1	113.4	78.9	30.3	7.7
	1960	91.9	51.8	178.4	155.8	94.2	51.8	26.4	4.4
	1965	82.2	48.3	188.6	152.1	85.8	42.7	14.9	4.9
	1970	66.4	51.4	161.5	124.6	71.9	34.0	10.8	1.5
	1975	68.5	54.2	162.2	126.2	67.4	30.7	9.4	1.1
	1980	66.0	47.5	160.8	119.8	62.3	25.9	7.5	0.9
	1985	63.3	43.8	154.6	123.1	58.3	23.2	5.7	0.6
	1989	57.3	38.6	142.6	116.7	35.5	19.4	4.7	0.4
Serbia proper	1950	100.7	46.1	207.4	185.5	121.8	51.0	22.9	5.7
	1955	82.6	48.3	177.7	138.5	66.5	37.8	11.5	2.7
	1960	68.8	64.1	161.2	108.9	48.7	18.8	8.6	1.4
	1965	56.0	64.1	157.1	105.1	44.8	15.4	3.9	1.1
	1970	52.1	67.3	151.9	90.8	43.3	14.2	3.2	0.4
	1975	56.8	67.4	155.1	99.1	15.0	15.0	3.5	0.3
	1980	55.0	58.8	152.7	98.9	44.2	13.6	3.1	0.3
	1985	53.1	55.1	148.3	103.2	44.3	15.0	2.8	0.3
	1989	48.5	48.2	139.0	100.2	43.3	14.2	3.1	0.3
Kosovo	1950	214.4	46.1	329.3	342.8	348.5	250.8	156.4	66.9
	1955	193.3	58.1	273.6	258.9	232.4	232.4	156.4	66.9
	1960	205.7	78.4	288.8	267.6	267.6	195.3	132.4	42.1
	1965	186.5	62.2	288.8	246.7	246.7	166.6	83.5	48.1
	1970	165.4	58.2	270.0	218.8	218.8	158.9	70.3	16.1
	1975	157.2	56.5	254.0	227.2	227.2	139.4	63.9	12.7
	1980	150.0	50.7	239.7	209.8	209.8	136.4	51.0	9.9
	1985	133.2	39.8	215.0	186.6	186.6	111.0	38.4	5.9
	1989	117.4	35.1	191.0	151.4	151.4	83.1	24.8	4.1
Vojvodina	1950	90.0	56.2	193.3	161.7	100.0	48.7	19.3	2.2
	1955	77.7	55.4	197.9	135.1	71.6	33.3	9.6	1.2
	1960	68.7	61.9	176.6	121.1	52.7	22.0	6.3	0.5
	1965	60.0	56.2	183.4	112.5	46.2	16.4	4.0	0.4
	1970	47.5	53.9	137.3	86.6	40.6	12.8	3.4	0.2
	1975	53.7	57.7	145.8	101.2	41.7	13.6	2.6	0.2
	1980	54.8	51.9	152.9	105.9	45.3	12.1	2.7	0.2

⁴² Adopted from Basha, 1990/91:92

Vojvodina continued		15-49	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-40
	1985	53.9	42.0	151.9	99.3	41.5	16.5	3.5	0.3
	1989	48.1	28.0	137.9	105.1	40.0	13.8	3.1	0.1

Both pronatalism and antinatalism implied a move away from “family planning” and towards “population policy”, an orientation that went against the current meta-population policy. On the following pages I analyze the ideological underpinnings of this policy. I focus on the intersection of ethno-national differences and differential fertility from the perspective of the socialist ideal of equality which I argue had two important components: national equality and women’s equality (see also Woodward, 1985; Žarkov, 1999). The official ideology treated these two aspects of equality separately. In practice women’s and national equality, however, always overlap though often in conflicting ways (see Žarkov, 1999).

Marxist ideology defined these two ideals of equality as “questions” to be solved through the socialist revolution. These two ‘questions’, according to Marxist theory, resulted from the nature of the capitalist mode of production and patriarchal social relations associated with it. Socialist revolution was designed to solve these ‘questions’ with the aim of building a more equitable and just society. Both ‘questions’, however, were seen primarily through the prism of class struggle, and were to be solved automatically once the proletariat came to power. National question was to be solved through the internationalization of the labor movement and the worldwide proletarian revolution that would bring an end to the system of nation-states. The woman question, on the other hand, would be solved by the incorporation of women into the labor force. Since socialist revolutions did not bring about the disappearance of the nation, most of the socialist governments had to address both of these “questions”.

2. *Population Dynamics and the “Woman’s Question”*

Commitment to gender and national equality was built into the constitutions of all East European socialist states. In addition, special legislation and social policies were developed in order to support and promote both gender and national equality. While all socialist regimes inherited economic and political subordination of women, albeit in varying degrees, and an overarching patriarchal gender ideology, the ‘national question’ was more prominent in ethnically mixed states (cf. USSR and Yugoslavia) than in those with a more homogeneous ethnic composition (cf. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia).

Socialist constitutions granted equal rights to men and women. In addition, special legislations guaranteed equal access for women to education and employment, as well as equal pay. Progressive family laws were passed in order to transform the status of women in the family – women and men were given equal rights with regards to divorce, inheritance and custody of children (see Denich, 1974, 1977; Godberg, 1993; Heitlinger, 1980, 1993; Kilgman, 1992; Korać, 1998; Woodward, 1985; Žarkov, 1999).

All socialist regimes in Eastern Europe promoted policies of women’s employment motivated by ideological and even more importantly by economic factors. Except for Czechoslovakia, socialism was introduced into societies with previously low levels of industrialization and with economies dominated by agriculture. At the same time, all regimes followed the Soviet model of rapid and intensive industrialization focusing on labor intensive heavy industry. Hence, from the very beginning, socialist economies were faced with labor shortages which resulted in campaigns designed to mobilize the rural population and women for industrial employment. All regimes succeeded, in a very short time, in mobilizing great numbers from the rural population and of women for industrial labor creating dramatic changes at the

micro and macro levels of society. As women gained economic autonomy, dramatic changes occurred in family organization and structure. Patriarchal power relations in the family, however, seemed not to be affected by the change in women's status (see Denich, 1974; Einhorn 1989; Heitlinger, 1980; Molyneux, 1984; Woodward, 1985).

Socialist regimes, which initially promised a socialization of women's household roles, never challenged either the patriarchal division of reproductive roles, nor gender relations within the family. Failing to fully socialize household roles, regimes turned to the family and made it a central place of 'social reproduction'. Consequently, while women's employment and new family legislation did change the family structure and improved the legal status of women, the traditional allocation of gender roles and gender relations within the family, remained for the most part unchanged. The theoretical concept of "working woman" was thus, through the practice of 'really existing socialisms', replaced by a more ambiguous notion of "working mother" (see Sklevicky, 1989; Wolchik, 1985; Žarkov, 1995).

The notion of "working mother" was "constructed upon a shared presumption of femininity as (re)productive: the female body contributing to the state and society by producing both offspring and industrial goods" (Žarkov, 1995:6). This meant that socialist women's emancipation, rather than challenging patriarchy, became a part of it (see Heitlinger, 1987; Jancar, Sklevicky, 1989; Wolchik, 1985; Žarkov, 1999), creating the infamous phenomenon of the double or triple burden for working women, which in turn kept most women not only in low paid jobs but also outside of the political and economic power structures. Despite all the improvements that socialism brought to women's lives there is an agreement among many authors that gender equality was never fully achieved under socialism neither in the private nor in the public realm (see Einhorn, 1989; Heitlinger 1980, 1987; Jančar; Mieczkowski, 1985;

Molyneux, 1984, 1985; Sklevicky, 1989, Wolchik, 1985; Woodward, 1985). It should be added that, comparatively, women in socialism enjoyed greater equality than women in capitalism. Equal pay for equal work is one of many examples.

The issue of women's inequality in the presence of the double or triple burden was further complicated in those socialist countries which had open pronatalist policies. McIntyre argues that "[i]n the context of general acceptance of the double burden and the lack of very substantial efforts to change the uneven division of labor within the household, national programs that attempt to increase the number of pregnancies are inherently discriminatory" (1985:285). He thus questions the legitimacy of pronatalism when pursued by governments committed to gender equality (ibid.)

The socialist governments did make a conscious effort to solve this tension between women's employment and their reproductive roles, introducing legislation and social policies aimed to help women balance their productive and reproductive roles chiefly by means of extended paid and unpaid maternity leaves with guaranteed return to jobs. These efforts, however, were often criticized by local policy makers and enterprise managers as well as by local and international feminist commentators. While at one level the state measures helped women balance their multiple roles, prolonged maternity leaves at the same time served to reinforce traditional gender roles. At the enterprise level they were particularly problematic in branches of the economy with a heavily female work force. Finally, prolonged maternity leaves were one more hurdle placed in the way of women's greater participation in managerial positions and career jobs as well as politics

Only in Hungary and in Yugoslavia in the early 1980s, some maternity benefits were extended to fathers. For a combination of cultural and economic reasons, however, only a few

families if any opted for paternity instead of maternity benefits (see Heitlinger, 1987 on Hungary). Prolonged maternity leave added to other reasons for an open preference for male employees on the part of enterprise managers in socialist Yugoslavia (Besemers, 1980, Woodward, 1985), further contributing to higher rates of female participation in unemployment.

While adhering to the ideology of female employment as a key to women's emancipation, the Yugoslav Communist regime was faced with a labor surplus from the very beginning (Woodward, 1985). Consequently, the pressures on women to join the labor force characteristic of other socialist regimes in Eastern Europe were never present in Yugoslavia. In the late 1970s women made 33% of the labor force in Yugoslavia, making Yugoslavia closer to Western European countries than to the rest of Eastern Europe which had higher participation of women (ibid.: 245). Moreover, the shift to a market economy in the early 1990s ended the government's commitment to full employment giving preference in employment and income to highly skilled workers (ibid.:245)⁴³. Thus, women in Yugoslavia in addition to being employed mainly in low accumulating sectors of economy, like in other socialist countries, had also been disproportionately subject to unemployment. Yugoslav women sought employment unsuccessfully in far higher numbers than men since the mid 1960s (Ibid.:245). Woodward argues that

women enter the labor market at times of economic recession or stagflation, when purchasing power declines, in order to supplement family income. That is, women enter the job market for reasons related to a family's economic necessity, not self-liberation, and at a time when jobs are particularly scarce (1985:247).

This is in agreement with Denich's claim that within the family, the prevailing view was desirability for wives to have jobs (1977:224). Even though female employment was primarily

⁴³ During the early decades of socialist development, women had a considerably lower level of skills. This gap between men and women gradually narrowed and practically disappeared by the 1980s (see Milić, 1994)

instrumental for family survival, occupation served as a basis for women's social identity as much as men's (Ibid.: 265). "The Yugoslav working wife [was] an employee who [did] housework on the side" (Ibid.:268). Nevertheless, motherhood remained the most important social role for women and was essentially synonymous with womanhood (Žarkov, 1995, 1999).

The dominance of motherhood for the conception of womanhood did not, however, result in big families. On the contrary, the dominant model in Yugoslavia was a two child family, and fertility was rapidly falling in many parts of the country since the early fifties. Considering that fertility began to fall at different times and from different levels, some regions reached below replacement levels sooner than the others and regional differences in fertility have remained prominent to this day. Even though the socialist emancipation variously affected women, with urban, educated women representing the biggest beneficiaries, while rural women and unskilled industrial laborers were barely affected by it, (see Korać, 1991; Woodward, 1985; Žarkov, 1991) fertility varied little across social groups. Much greater and more important were regional differences, i.e. those between national groups (see Besemeres, 1980; David, H.P. and R.J. McIntyre, 1981; Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999).

3. *The Politics of Differential Fertility⁴⁴ and the "National Question"*

Differences in fertility between the regions and national groups in Yugoslavia came about for a combination of historical, religious, cultural and economic reasons. The intersection between fertility levels and ethno-national differences made population issues in Yugoslavia, much like in the USSR, politically sensitive. According to some commentators (cf. Teitelbaum, S., J.M. Winter, 1980; Sztreter, 1993), its political sensitivity prevented both the Soviet and Yugoslav leadership from pursuing any open demographic policy.

⁴⁴ Differential fertility is a concept that describes fertility variations between women of different age groups, classes, ethnic, racial or national background, to name a few.

The potentially discriminatory character of pronatalist policies vis-à-vis women, did not prevent other socialist governments from designing pronatalist policies, but only resulted in their moderation. The Yugoslav and the Soviet governments, on the other hand, refrained from open pronatalism because any pronatalist policy in these two countries would have had to target various national groups differently which could be perceived as discriminatory. For example, to give bigger child allowances to the members of low fertility ethnic groups and not to those whose fertility was considered too high, would have been perceived as discriminatory by the latter.

The anti-natalist measures that would selectively target only rapidly growing populations would have been deemed even more discriminatory. These fears proved realistic in Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 90s when the general ideological atmosphere changed and both pro and anti-natalist discourses started to flood the public/political spaces as inherent elements in national programs and as ideological tools in inter-national struggles. Demographic issues have certainly been a prominent topic in Serbian national discourses and a divisive issue in the political struggle between the Serbian and Albanian nationalisms ever since the early 1980s. I analyze the relationship between the nationalist and population discourses in Serbia in the following chapter.

Demographic trends in socialist Yugoslavia were a carbon copy of global demographic trends. In the most developed regions (cf. Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia proper and Vojvodina) the onset of the fertility transition dates back the late nineteenth century.⁴⁵ The below replacement population growth in these parts of the country were reached by the early 1950s and mid 1960s.

⁴⁵ The available data for Slovenia for the 17th and 18th century show the crude birth rates of 35-40 per thousand population (see Todorović, 1990-91:65). In Serbia the crude birth rates were between 42-45 per thousand population until the 1880s, the period which is considered to mark the onset of fertility transition in Serbia proper (ibid.:65). The level of decline in birth rates, however, varied in different regions of Serbia proper. While in 1905 the crude birth rates in central and southern regions of Serbia proper were at the level of 41, in the city of Belgrade and in eastern parts of the country they were at the levels of 22-31 per thousand population (see ibid.:69).

In the less developed republics (cf. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia) this process began later and their fertility in the 1960s was still above the replacement level. Finally, Kosovo, one of two autonomous provinces within Serbia, and parts of western Macedonia had at the time relatively high (the highest in Europe), though falling fertility levels.

Since fertility started to decline much later (two decades after the end of the World War Two) in these two regions and after a prolonged period of falling mortality rates, their populations were growing rapidly (see Avramov 1994; Besemeres, 1980; David and McIntyre, 1981; Kapor-Stanulović, N., David, 1999). Both in Kosovo and in western parts of Macedonia the high fertility and rapid population growth were specific to the population of ethnic Albanians who already made up a majority there.

The differences in fertility levels between the most and least developed regions of Yugoslavia in the second half of the twentieth century reflected demographic differences at the global level, those between the developed West and the economically less developed Third World. It is not surprising that some of the most contentious issues in the global population debate were reproduced in Yugoslav political and expert discourses (Besemeres, 1980). Szreter argues that an “intellectual orthodoxy” that was developed during the 1950s regarding the relationship between economic development and population growth persisted long into the 1980s and 90s. According to this perspective, which was accepted by a majority of social scientists, economic planners and political leaders in the West, “rapid population growth can obstruct the potential for economic development in less developed countries” (Szreter, 1993:659; see also Cromartie, 1995).

A corollary of this “orthodoxy” was implementation of family planning policies in order to promote economic growth of individual nations or segments of society. It is believed that

otherwise the increased food consumption would also consume all potential for capital growth (Szerter, 1993:680). International population agencies, supported by the United Nations and the IMF set out to create family planning policies in some Third World countries (ibid). Many of these programs were introduced in societies and communities with substantial Muslim population. The policies were often permitted on the assumption that cultural and religious values in these societies directly caused high fertility and rapid population growth. The rapid population growth was often described as “population explosion” and blamed for impeding economic development. The fact that Albanians in Kosovo and in Macedonia are predominantly Muslim, only added to the global flavor of the population discourses in Yugoslavia⁴⁶.

Yugoslavia in the 1960s was in many ways among the countries that Szerter describes as “those that looked predominantly to the liberal democracies of the West” (1993:695). Yugoslav social sciences were certainly leading this trend in the 1960s and 1970s. Marxist orthodoxies were criticized in many areas and the society was increasingly more open to ideas coming from the West. Yugoslav and Serbian demography was strongly influenced by the dominant paradigms within the international population institutions⁴⁷, including neo-Malthusianism. Besemers, quotes a Slovenian author who

writing in the party newspaper, draws explicit comparison between the perils of the world population explosion and the situation in Yugoslavia and issues a transparent warning

⁴⁶ In 1971 a group of researchers published projections of population growth by republics, provinces and nationality to the year 2030. According to these projections, Albanians would make up 16% of the total population in Yugoslavia in the targeted year, as compared to 4.9% in 1961. The researchers expressed concern that such a development may affect ethnic and republican borders, living standards of individual ethnic groups and relations among these groups in the future. The study (Živković, Stojkov, Todorović, Džumhur, *Projekcije stanovništva SFR Jugoslavije do 2030 godin*) was done by group of authors, published in Sarjevo, and according to Besemers was given prominence in the Slovenian and Croatian Press (1980:199 and 325 n. 46).

⁴⁷ Since 1977, much of demographic research in Yugoslavia was done in cooperation with the United Nation’s Fund for Population Studies. The last project supported by the Fund, “Reproductive Behavior and Women’s Statuses in Yugoslavia” started in 1991 but was discontinued in 1992, after the Security Council of the UN imposed international sanctions against Serbia due to its governments involvement in wars in Croatia and Bosnia (see Mitrović, Petrić, 1994).

that diligent and tidy peoples with the small families cannot be expected to go on paying the ‘irresponsibility’ of the overfecund” (1980:213).⁴⁸

While neo-Malthusian ideas in their extreme forms could find their way to a party publication at the level of republics there was no political will within the Communist party at the federal level to implement any kind of population policies. As already mentioned, both pronatalism and even more anti-natalism (or neo-Malthusianism) were considered potentially disruptive for the policy of ‘brotherhood and unity’ of the Yugoslav nations.

Yugoslav communists came to power in the wake of World War Two not as a result of the Soviet intervention, but due to their ability to mobilize significant numbers of the population for the struggle against foreign occupation and for the socialist revolution. The liberation movement in Yugoslavia went hand in hand with the civil war between the communist led partisans and sectional and profascist groups. What gave the communists a comparative advantage over the profascist groups was their commitment to national equality. The Yugoslav communist leadership remained committed to the national equality ideal throughout its 50 year long rule. It had a unique approach to the ‘national question’ in the East European context. A federal structure, along with political and economic decentralization were designed, among other reasons, in order to foster ‘brotherhood and unity’ between its many nations and ethnic groups. “Brotherhood and unity” was to be achieved by recognizing and appreciating differences between major ethno-national groups that made Yugoslavia. Politically, this ideal was going to be maintained through a decentralized federal state organization. Each federal unit (the republic) represented the home of the most numerous nation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Besemerer cites from an article published in Slovenian in the journal *Delo*, September 9, 1992, signed by I. Popit.

⁴⁹ Only Bosnia-Herzegovina did not have one most numerous nation. While it was the home of the Muslim nation, Muslims comprised less than a half of its population (Hayden, 2000:182 n.2)

In the following passage, Besemers gives an accurate and succinct description of the Yugoslav national policies and resulting political arrangements connecting them to the country's population policy:

The Yugoslav regime has sought to give a genuine content to Marxist-Leninist traditions on nationality policy. [From the very beginning] there has been no one dominant ethnic group that can succeed in bending the principles of nationality policy to its own perceived advantage. The political significance of ethnic numbers...has become overwhelmingly evident. If economic equality, at least in per capita terms, has remained elusive (largely for demographic reasons)⁵⁰, political equality has been gaining in reality almost continuously. The main ethnic groups are now accorded almost veto power over the activities of the federal organs – certainly in theory and often too in practice. And the 'national key' is being progressively applied to more and more spheres of life. The control system aspires to check only more extreme chauvinistic elements. But it does it at least to some degree in relation to all ethnic groups. Ethnic patriotism and consistent struggle for causes which are socialist in form and ethnic in content has been virtually legitimized throughout the federal system. The Yugoslav leadership has evidently arrived at the view that the only way to eliminate the perils of nationalist sentiment is to legitimize it and build it deep into the country's political structure (Besemer, 1980:189).⁵¹

Yugoslav communists, according to Denich (2000:43) revived the nineteenth century ideas of national identity and rights. Moreover, they created an institutional structure which provided a framework for fostering individual national identities and for protecting ethnic rights. Within such an ideological and institutional system, all social issues had to be framed as national issues and often in opposition to other ethnic groups. Population policies provide a good example.

While the Federal government consistently pursued liberal population policies, with unavoidable reference to women's emancipation and individual rights, at different times in different republics "the energetic campaigns of alarm [were] conducted by scholars and

⁵⁰ With this short note in parenthesis, Besemer, recreates the position, dominant in Western demography, according to which economic development is undermined by rapid population growth.

⁵¹ For more on the Yugoslav federal structure and the conflicting relations between the republican political leaderships see Hayden, 1992, Ramet, 1992, Rusinow, 1974.

publicists, often moved by fears for the survival of their own ethnic communities” (Besemers, 1980:176). For example, nearly all work on economic emigration in the late 1960s and early 1970s was done in Croatia. As mentioned earlier, Croats made up the biggest percentage of ‘temporary’ economic emigration from Yugoslavia. Initially Croatian anxiety over emigration, according to Besemers,

was thinly veiled in the form of disinterested concern over Croatian capacity to contribute to overall Yugoslav development [but] later, in 1970 and 1971 it became more and more openly nationalistic (1980:176)⁵².

In republics and regions where dominant groups felt threatened by a more prolific minority (cf. Serbia and Macedonia) anti-natalism, while absent from the popular press, was often found in scholarly works in the 1970s and sometimes took a virulent form (see Besemer, 1980:213). Within the limitations set by the general ideology defined by the Federal state individual republics pursued various population policies. Croatia and Slovenia had the most developed measures of social policy which might have had demographic consequence (generous child allowance payments and maternity leaves). While Serbia proper was lagging behind these two republics, Kosovo had child allowance payments that were higher than in Slovenia. With the exception of Macedonia, which had developed differentiated family planning policies, no vigorous antinatalist campaigns were designed in other parts of the country (Besemer, 1980:244-245).

⁵² The nationalist wing within the Croatian League of Communists was the leading force in the processes of economic and political decentralization of the federal state in the early 1970s. They mobilized and made ties with political emigration in the west creating the Croatian “mass movement” which revived the concept of separate Croatian nationhood focusing on language as a point of difference (see Denich, 2000). While the movement was defeated and the Croatian Party leaders expelled, many concessions were given to their nationalist demands. First concessions came with the constitutional amendments brought in 1972. They were later on reaffirmed with the new Constitution in 1974. The new constitutional arrangement granted to Yugoslav constitutive nations the same kind of protection that sovereign nations enjoyed in the international context. At the same time the Federal state lost almost all levers of political and economic power, but the Party monopoly over the state was preserved (see Denich, 2000; Hayden 1992; Pešić, 1996; Ramet, 1992; Rusinow, 1974).

Analyzing the Yugoslav press, Besemerer (1980) concludes that even though liberal population ideology was dominant throughout the country, other demographic voices, those arguing for a more active population policy would from time to time reach the media. This also varied among the republics so that public discourses in Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia had more references to population policy than in other republics.

According to Besemerer, the press in Serbia virtually never reported on the need for an active population policy. The only pronatalis reference he encountered in the Belgrade press was an article in the 1970s published in the daily *Politika* on French fertility (1980:363 n.78). Like in other parts of Yugoslavia more proactive population policies remained more or less contained within expert discourses (cf. demography and medicine) in scholarly journals and conferences. This however, changed almost abruptly in the early 1980s in Serbia and elsewhere. What, used to be confined to expert discourses spilled out and flooded the political and public discourses in a close association with rising nationalist ideologies. The change came about with the final collapse of federal governmental and party institutions that followed President Tito's death in 1980.

At that time, demographic discourses became an inherent part of Serbian-Albanian political struggle over the territory of Kosovo and over the national and state borders. In this book I analyze demographic discourses in Serbia as part of broader nationalist discourses. I argue that demographic discourses were not only instrumental but also constitutive for the processes of nation-state building in Serbia. With its focus on reproduction of ethnic populations, demographic discourses created very specific gendered images of "self" and the "other". I also discuss how the new politics of reproduction that emerged against the backdrop of demographic discourses reshaped the ideas of gender and gender relations in post-socialist Serbia.

In the following chapter I analyze the ideological turn in Serbian and Yugoslav expert discourses on population that brought about a replacement of the “family planning” orientation by the “population policy” orientation. I argue that political change, marked by the ideological shift from the dominant communist to nationalist ideology was concomitant with an ideological and theoretical shift in population studies.

These two processes are paradigmatic of ideological paradoxes of socialism and postsocialism in former Yugoslavia. As I showed in this chapter, population policy in socialist Yugoslavia was individual/family oriented. It insisted on rights and freedoms of citizens to decide about their offspring. As is well known, the political system of socialism was not based on the principle of individual rights and freedoms. Political changes brought about by the collapse of socialism were going not only to reintroduce free market competition but also to introduce individual rights and freedoms as the basic ideological principle which also assumes a greater and more efficient political participation. Yet, as I show in the following chapters, parliamentary democracy came about together with a challenge posed to reproductive rights and freedoms of individuals and families as well as ethno-national groups. Through this challenge, individual and collective identities were re-shaped in ways unanticipated by the “natives” and by the majority of foreign observers.

III.FERTILITY AND THE CRISIS OF SOCIALISM

In his study on the constitution of reproduction and welfare as objects of the power/knowledge complex, in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, Horn (1994) argued that “the crisis of political rationality called liberalism was (at least in part) a crisis of a way of conceiving (and policing) the relations between wholes and parts, the juridical and the moral, risk and responsibility” (1994:12). As the analysis that follows shows, similar dilemmas were revisited at the end of the twentieth century with the crisis of political rationality called socialism throughout Eastern Europe.

With the hegemonic advent of nationalist ideologies, reproduction became one of the dominant sites of political contestation and a struggle among various political options. For those Serbian and Yugoslav demographers and other experts who, like their Western colleagues, believed that demographic transition theory not only showed what had happened in the West and what could happen elsewhere but also what ought to happen (Szerter, 1993), the new context provided an opportunity to pursue more active population policies and thereby satisfy what had until then been frustrated policy objectives.

While Hodgson (1983), argues that there are times when demography and its practitioners are focused less on understanding human behavior than on changing it, Szerter (1993) claims that the demographic transition model is inherently policy oriented. According to him, in policy oriented research there is less attention to the influences of social structures on individual behavior and more mechanical attitude, an attempt to find the necessary behavior or action needed to affect a particular change.

In Serbia in the 1980s and 1990s, majority of demographers and other experts wanted to change reproductive behavior of their fellow citizens. They produced alarmist discourses about the “population problems” in Serbia and also had clearly established goals for solving these “problems”. I argue, however, that experts failed to produce systematic population policy or to offer innovative solutions. Still much research was done and many conferences organized in order explain the “population problem” to promote the idea of population policy and suggest some specific measures. Particularly active in this respect was the Council for Population, Family and Children that Serbian government formed in 1994. In 1999, the Council was transformed into a Ministry that lasted for about one year – it was dissolved in 2000 after Milošević was toppled down at the Federal presidential elections.

The overall stated goal of proposed population policy was to homogenize fertility rates and bring them to the generation replacement level throughout the territory of the republic. This goal required diversified policies – pronatalist for Serbia proper and Vojvodina province on the one hand, and antinatalist for Kosovo on the other. Their research was shaped by the categories of demographic transition theory, either in its classic or modified form, as described in the previous chapter. In this chapter I show how the latter approach, which gives primacy to ideational versus structural variables in explaining reproductive behavior, gained a hegemonic status resulting in focus on education, propaganda and consciousness raising as population policy methods with rather vaguely defined specific measures.

Demographers persistently argued that more research was needed as a background for population policy development and the regime of Slobodan Milošević proved accommodating in that respect. Much demographic research in the 1990s was directly funded by the government. While the majority of this research reproduced the hegemonic demographic discourses,

government also funded a few studies based on feminist critique of demographic transition, its theoretical shortcomings and political implications (cf. Blagojević, 1995, 1997; Petrović, 1995).

Thus the political support given to population policies promoted by dominant demographic discourses did not reflect the regime's interest in public policy. Rather, demographic discourses were successfully incorporated into nationalist ideology and identity narratives. According to Krause, "alarmist discourses of demographers, if not blatantly racist, enable racist ideological projections and hence help maintain homogenic views toward..."others" (2001:595). This is particularly the case when an over-reproducing "other" is juxtaposed to the non-reproducing "self". In the case of Serbia, this type of demographic discourses served to reinforce an already racist conceptions of culture that dominated in the region (see Han 2000 on racist conceptions of culture), as well as the closely related Herderian outlook on the nation that also had a hegemonic status throughout Yugoslavia at the time (see Denich, 2000 Hayden, 1999). Within this conception of nation, political borders of a nation have to overlap with its cultural borders.

This nineteenth century borne, European conception of the nation is founded on essentialized images of the nation as a bounded entity whose members are connected through common decent, language and culture. It assumes a dominance of social (national) interests over individual ones and also organizes relationships among various ethno-national groups hierarchically. Moreover, the relationships between different national groups are perceived as marked by conflict over dominant or exclusive control of specific territories and polities. Through this conflict the better adapted and equipped nations survive, thus contributing to the overall progress of the humanity (see Cohen, 2002).

As the analysis that follows shows, demographic discourses in Serbia were a constitutive part of the conflict between Serbian and Albanian nationalisms. Together with other expert discourses, they provided (national) identity narratives with “scientific” and thus “objective” knowledge. Rivkin-Fish (2003) argues that Russian demographers used transition theory to counter pronatalism and to defend liberal reforms in Russia. They embraced transition theory, she further argues, not for its ideological properties but because they believed it to be “objective science” (2003: 298-99). While she does not spell it out, Rivkin-Fish implies that pronatalist Russian demographers may not be lead by the ideal of the “objective science”.⁵³

My analysis of demographic discourses in Serbia, however, shows that pronatalism, antinatalism (neo-Malthusianism) as well as family planning orientation described in the previous chapter were all informed by demographic transition theory. Moreover, demographers regardless of their preferred form of population policy were motivated by the ideal of the “objective science”. Thus, I agree with Krause (2000), that the very epistemological properties of demographic transition theory that disguise it as objective, neutral science and “truth” have dire social consequences. In order to understand these consequences we need to critically unveil the epistemology (ibid:578).

I argue that demographers in Serbia embraced transition theory for the very same reason of “scientific objectivity” and in that respect I do not question the motives of individual demographers. However, knowledge that demographers produced served as “scientific” fodder for nationalist ideologies. In demographic discourses, reproductive behavior emerged as a marker of ethno-national differences within a hierarchically organized system of nations. Low fertility thus placed Serbian culture within the mainstream of European development.

⁵³ Rivkin-Fish does not provide an insight into theoretical underpinnings of the work of pronatalist Russian demographers.

Simultaneously, the high fertility of Kosovo Albanians situated them outside of European progress. Among other things, this served to justify the Serbian regime's ambitions to regain political control over the province and thus to bring progress to all.

In the same vain, the very approach to and definition of "population problem" were framed by hegemonic perception of the nation-state, described above. Serbia is the only European area where two models of reproduction coexist: Vojvodina and Serbia proper with fertility levels 20% below replacement and Kosovo, which has very fast population growth rates so that generations almost "double in size" (Avramov, 1990-91:239⁵⁴ - see figures 3 and 4).

⁵⁴ Fertility in Kosovo began to drop in the second half of the 1960s, but the overall population growth remained unchanged during the 30 year period (since the 1950s). Population growth in Kosovo began to decrease only in the early 1980s (see Breznik, 1980: 61; 1986:61). See table also 6 and figure 2, above

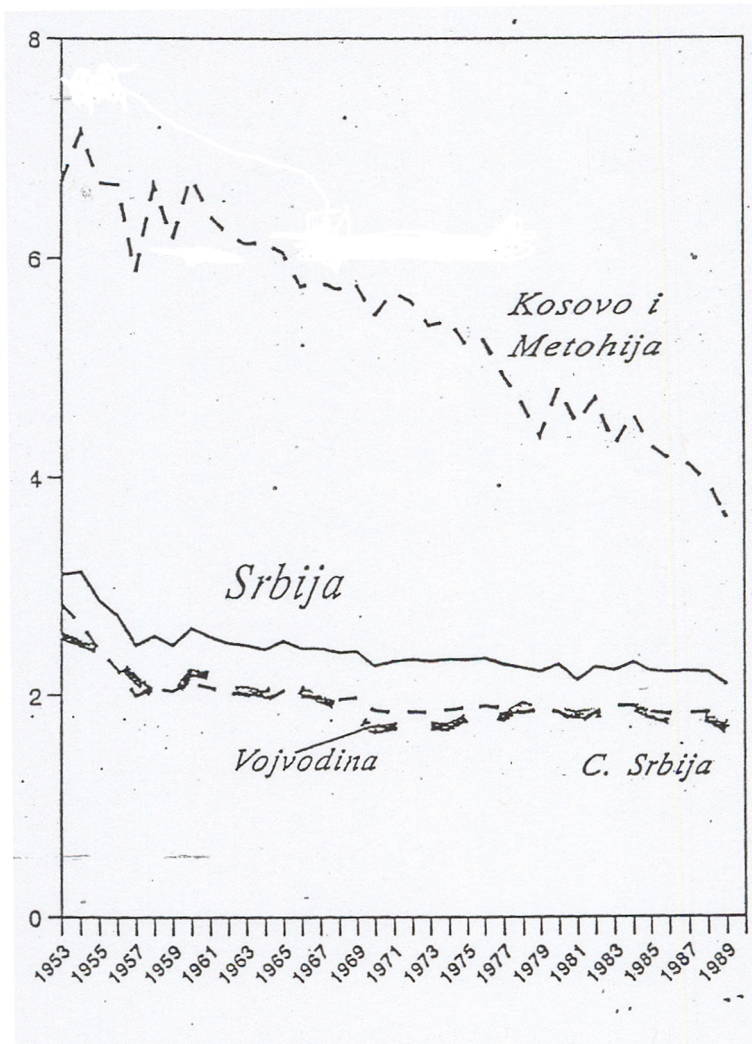


Figure 3: Total Fertility Rates in Serbia, Serbia Proper, and Vojvodina, 1953-1989⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Council for Population, Family and Children, Report, 1994-1996:26

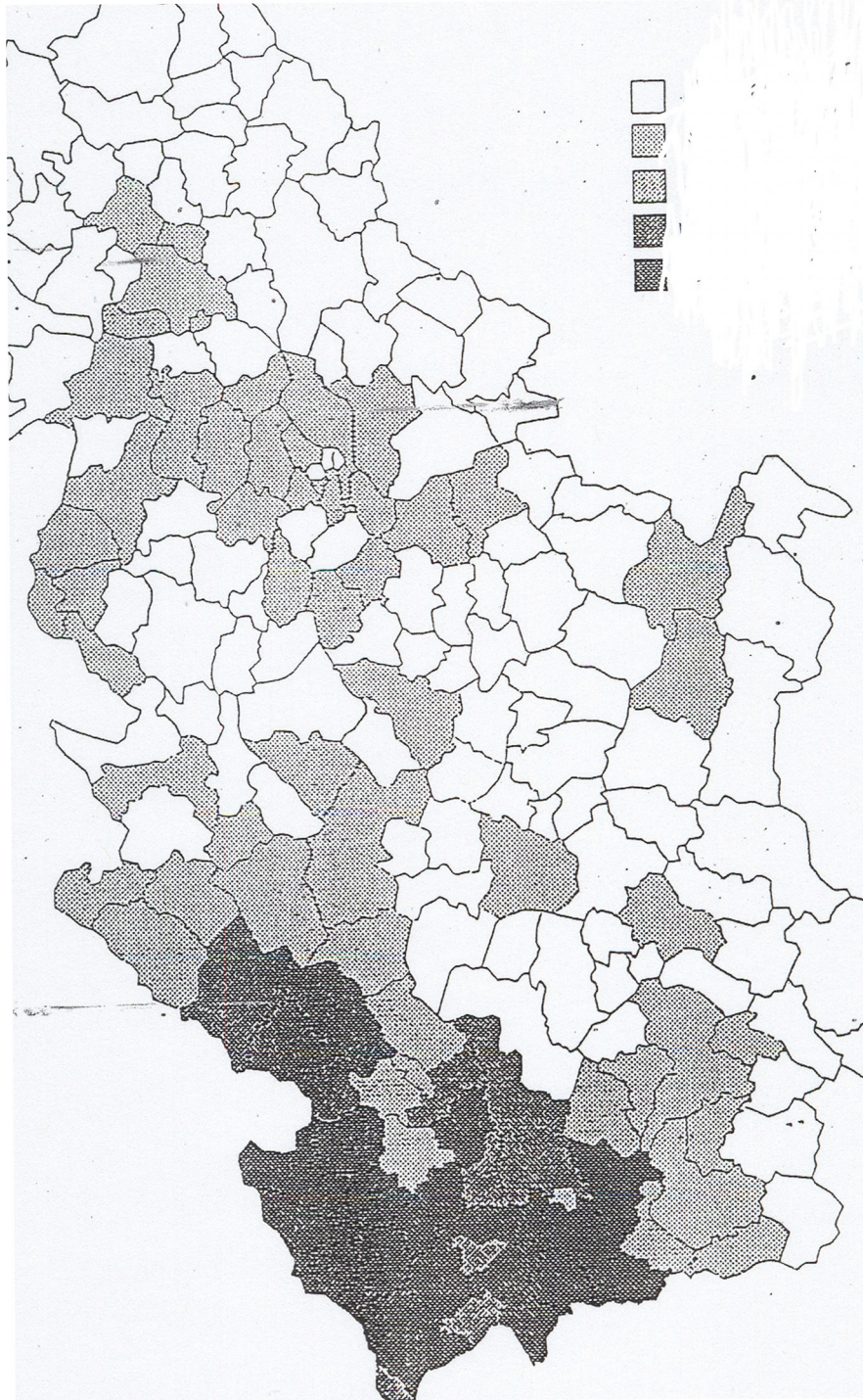


Figure 4: Population Growth in Serbia, 1991⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Council for Population, Family and Children, Report, 1994-1996:26 White fields represent below zero population growth, while the darkest fields (mostly of tlocated in Kosovo) represent municipalities with the growth rate of 200 and over, per thousand population.

It would seem logical to assume that these extremes could balance out each other. Common sense and demographic data⁵⁷ suggest that social problems usually associated with “overpopulation” and “population decline” could easily be solved by internal migrations.

Avramov (*ibid.*), however, argued that migrations are laden with many problems and she pointed to two of them. First, according to her, immigrations only affect the volume of the population but do not change the age pyramid. Unfortunately Avramov does not clarify this argument. She might have based the argument on the emigration pattern of Kosovo Albanians: adult men going for work to other parts of Yugoslavia or abroad leaving wives and children behind and in care of extended family. Second, and for my purposes here more importantly, Avramov argued that cultural incompatibility between the Serbs and Albanians made migrations a bad solution:

Ethnic Albanians have language, religion, value standards and norms conspicuously different from the population in the regions [to which they] would potentially migrate. A degree of cultural separation between [two] populations represent a barrier to higher mobility and [better] integration (Avramov, 1990-91:240).

Thus Avramov concluded that the only solution to population problem in Serbia was “overcoming deviations” in population reproduction (*ibid.*). There was an almost universal agreement among Serbian demographers about this. Both low and high fertility were perceived as deviations from “rational reproduction”. Therefore, policies were needed to “correct” these deviations. The assumed cultural distance and incompatibility between Serbs and Albanians,

⁵⁷ For example, regional differences in fertility rates among women of the same national group: the total cumulative fertility of Albanian women (ages 45-49) who in 1991 lived in Kosovo was for 1.3 children higher than fertility rates of Albanian women who lived in Serbia proper and Montenegro. Similarly, Serbian women who live in Kosovo have much higher fertility rates than Serbian women from other parts of the country. In 1991, total cumulative fertility of Serbian women in Kosovo (ages 45-49) was 2.8, while in Central Serbia it was 1, 8 (Penev, 1998:21, see also Breznik, 1990-91; Todorović, 1991).

prevented a majority of Serbian demographers from even considering migrations as a possible solution⁵⁸. In this respect, Avramov's discussion, even though she rejected migrations as a viable solution, represented an exception. Other demographers do not even consider migrations as a possibility.

Thus, the aim of proposed population policies was homogenization of fertility at the level of generation replacement or zero growth. In order for this goal to be achieved, fertility levels had to be increased, i.e. "rehabilitated", in Serbia proper and decreased, i.e. "modernized" in Kosovo. Even though Serbian demographers were well aware of a very limited success that both types of population policies had in historical and cross-cultural perspective (see Macura, 1980; Rašević Miroslav 1986), many of them argued all along that Serbia had to incorporate proactive and differential population policies in its developmental plans. As discussed in the previous chapter, differential proactive population policies could not get political support at the time of dominance of the ideology of "brotherhood and unity" of the Yugoslav nations. Once this ideology was replaced by the policy of national confrontation, however, proactive population policies gained political support as well.

In this chapter and the one that follows, I analyze the professional demographic writings and newspaper coverage of demographic issues in Serbia. The analysis is based on a survey of (number) monographs, collections as well as articles published in the journal *Stanovništvo*⁵⁹ (Population) for the period of 1981-1999. I also collected a number of articles from several dailies (*Politika*, *Ekspres Politika*, *Večernje Novosti*) and weeklies (*NIN*, *Duga*, *Vreme*) for

⁵⁸ Krause (2000), notes a similar attitude of some Italian demographers in the 1990s. They argued, for example, that foreign "immigrants are not capable of carrying forth Italian civilization" (2000:597).

⁵⁹ *Stanivništvo* is a scholarly journal, published by the Demographic Research Centre, Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade.

approximately the same period. While my research focuses on the period between 1986-1996, in this chapter I reach a bit further back in history for several reasons.

First, in demographic discourses the Serbian ‘non-reproducing’ national “self” was always defined vis-à-vis the ‘over-reproducing’ Kosovo Albanian “other”. To this closely related issue was the beginning of the open conflict between Serbian and Albanian nationalisms in 1981. I treat this conflict as a discursive event which not only brought demographic issues to the fore in Serbia, but also shaped them in a specific way. Finally, I follow the changes in demographic discourses as the conflict between the Serbian and Albanian nationalisms intensified and intersected with other competing nationalisms, resulting in the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation and the creation of separate nation-states.

This chapter focuses on two population resolutions: the population resolution passed in the parliament of Serbia in 1983; and the resolution intended for the Kosovo province but never passed in the Provincial Parliament. The resolutions are illustrative of the intersection of expert and political discourses on population and reproduction. In addition, the research which was done in preparation and which informed the resolutions offers a succinct illustration of the type of knowledge production that was behind the proposed pronatalist and antinatalist policies. Throughout the chapter, however, I also include illustrations of specific positions from other sources.

A. THE 1984 POPULATION RESOLUTION FOR SERBIA PROPER⁶⁰

In late 1983, the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Serbia passed the Resolution on Population Development Policy (*Rezolucija o politici obnavljanja stanovništva*) for Serbia

⁶⁰ The analysis of the Resolution is based on the report submitted by the Coordinating Board of the delegation of the Republic of Serbia at the 1984 conference “Population Policy in Yugoslav Socialist Self-Managing Society”. The report was published along with other conference proceedings in Alinčić et.al 1986

proper. This document, for the first time in Serbia's socialist history, formulated the aims, tasks and measures of a population policy. The document marked a shift from a policy of family planning to a population policy orientation.⁶¹ The shift, however, did not indicate repressive measures. Rather, the resolution resembled population policies of other socialist countries, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, relied on positive incentives and indirect economic measures as well as on education and propaganda in their attempts to stimulate births.

The Resolution on Population Policy was integrated into the Development Plan for 1981-1985 for the Republic of Serbia. The work on Resolution, according to a published report of the Parliamentary Committee, began only after the research for the Development Plan showed that "the population [was] not growing [in] sufficient [numbers]". The government then entrusted the Economic Institute to further research the "problem" (Koordinacioni odbor:1986). The ensuing research could only confirm the already established facts that demographers had been warning about all along: fertility had been below replacement levels in some parts of Serbia proper since 1956. The number of births per 1,000 inhabitants in Serbia had dropped from 18 in 1961, to slightly below 15 in 1981.⁶² Infant mortality had also decreased (from almost 69 per 1,000 live births in 1961 to 23.5 in 1985) but was still comparatively high. Nevertheless, total population numbers in Serbia proper were not decreasing due to immigrations and longer average life expectancy.

The study estimated, however, that by the year 2010 the population in Serbia proper would begin to decrease and that the number of older cohorts would increase both in absolute

⁶¹ I have explained the difference between these two orientations in the previous chapter.

⁶² The crude birth rates (i.e. number of live births per 1000 of total population) are not a very good indicator of the population's replacement potential. I assume that the authors of the document used crude birth rates because of their simplicity. As is apparent from Table 6 and Figure 2, above, other better indicators of the potential for future population growth could have safely been used in order to make the same point. Net rates of reproduction (Figure 2), which account not only for current fertility rates of women of reproductive age, but also for their current mortality rates are considered to be the best indicator of future population growth.

and in relative terms (ibid). The authors concluded that the population trends in Serbia indicated that consumerism and egoism (*samoživost*) prevailed in the society. Thus, “the dominant life philosophy does not maintain population growth even at the replacement level” (Kordinacioni odbor:1986).

For all the above reasons, the authors of the report recommended a proactive population policy:

Our findings suggest that the population growth in the Socialist Republic of Serbia will continue on a downward trend. It is unrealistic to hope for a halt in this trend or its reversal in a spontaneous manner in the near future [...], because all the required elements for that are missing (ibid.:168, stress added).

The Parliament passed the Resolution on Population Policy with the following aims: maintaining population growth at the replacement level; maintaining social conditions that would ensure “free and responsible parenting”; (greater) socialization of domestic roles; increased solidarity and socialization of the costs of parenting and of population growth (ibid.).

The specific measures proposed in the Resolution belonged to the category of positive incentives and resembled population policy measures developed in other socialist states several decades before. This included benefits for families with small children, longer maternity leave and other socioeconomic measures. In addition it was proposed that a Social Council for Family and Population should be established at the level of the Republic with a mandate to coordinate population policies. Finally, the document stated that the citizens need to be better informed about population issues and their significance: “We need to nurture a [type of social] consciousness that would recognize and accept [reproductive] norms which maintain normal population growth” (ibid., stress added). “Normal population growth” was established to be at the replacement level.

The Population Resolution passed in the Parliament of Republic of Serbia did not bring a radical change to population policy. It proposed a shift from family planning to population policy orientation and pronatalism, but suggested measures remained within the framework of positive incentives that are usually interpreted by the citizens as welfare policy measures and that have been proven ineffective for stimulating births. The Resolution, however, had a new and significant ideological undercurrent – it suggested a conflict of interests between individuals and families on the one hand, and society on the other. Moreover it suggested that individual interests have been corrupted by ‘wrong values’ and their consciousness blinded to the interests of the whole society.

Demographers were joined by other experts who argued that value systems, value orientations or life styles play an important role in reproductive decisions and behavior. This marked a shift in Serbian demography from old to transformed version of demographic transition theory as a dominant framework of analysis. Categories like value orientation and life style are usually beyond the scope of the older version of demographic transition theory but according to Szreter they may hold the key to satisfactory historical understanding of the processes of fertility change (1993:629). These categories hold a potential to incorporate the concept of culture in a heuristically productive manner for understanding reproduction and reproductive practices of specific populations.

Demographers, however, tend to approach the category of value orientation as yet another variable within an abstract and closed system. Even more importantly, value orientations are often approached negatively. Thus, as argued by Kreager even with the modified version of transition theory, specific cultural values or religious affiliation are assigned a negative

significance, for having a lag effect on fertility transition (1997:161). Serbian demographers created a mirror image of this relationship claiming that certain characteristics of value system and life style represented inhibitors that worked against higher fertility in Serbia proper and in Vojvodina. It was argued that materialism, consumerism and egoism, as “side effects” of modernization, prevent people from having more children.

Jakšić (1986), a psychologist, for example, stated that many elements of value systems relevant to reproductive behavior had been identified and that they operated at the national, family and individual level. Jakšić unfortunately leaves reader to wander which specific elements of value system was alluding to. He is more interested in exploring the relationship between “deformations” of the value system and “deformations” of reproductive behavior (1986:47).

Mihailo Marković (1997), a philosopher and member of the Praxis group, who was one of the leading dissidents under socialism but later joined Milošević’s socialist party and became one of its leading ideologues, proposed a name and explanation for this “defective” value orientation:

The problem [of the low birth rates] rests in consciousness. It results from an attitude that can be characterized as “possessive individualism”. [The problem] results from a life philosophy that exhibits some important characteristics of hedonism. The modern civilization forces brutal competition for material goods, power, success, social status. People view material wealth, comfort, carelessness [and] pleasure as compensation for their efforts. Freed from [obligations to] the patriarchal family, authoritarian state, and traditional church [...] they have developed an onedimensional need for freedom [which is not accompanied by] the sense of responsibility; everywhere they see only their rights but not their duties. Hedonism yearns for immediate pleasure and avoids everything that brings about worry, reduces material comfort and may cause pain and suffering (1997: 152 stress added).

Miladinović (1997) also blamed hedonism and consumerism for low fertility levels. He concluded that:

Married couples and parents do not want to give up comfort and they do not want to “waste their time” caring for children. It is unsettling [to learn] that one [can] reject natural, moral/humanistic and national duties and responsibilities (1997:161)

Consumerism, hedonism and egosim/individualism were popular explanations among social scientists in Serbia in the 1980s for various “social problems” including low fertility rates. As a consequence, the proposed pronatalist policy measures were voluntaristic in nature and focused on education and propaganda. They also attributed an important role to the state, church and media in the processes of “consciousness building” and educating the citizens about the “seriousness” of the “population problem” and their duties and responsibilities relevant to this “problem” (see Belić-Belopavlović, 1992; Macura, 1986, 1987-88, 1997; Rančić, 1990; Miroslav, 1994 among others).

Since reproduction is primarily associated with women, this conflict between individual and social or national interests had a pronounced gendered dimension and women were often singled out for pursuing their own, individualistic interests at the expense of the interests of the overall society. In a paper presented at the above mentioned conference in 1984 (see note 2) Ruža Petrović⁶³ a professor of demography at the University of Belgrade stated that

family planning in our society is treated as a personal or family decision, as individual freedom and a right of the woman not to have children if she does not want to [at all] or in a specific moment. [This is] one more example of pushing [decisions about] reproduction into the family and individual framework [while] ignoring the fact that it is a social process (Petrović, 1984:28 stress added)⁶⁴.

On the other side of the same coin lays the idealization of feminine sacrifice for

⁶³ Petrović had a prominent place in demographic debates in Serbia in the 1980s. She also conducted a survey among Serbs from Kosovo who had immigrated to Serbia proper. The survey was done under the auspices of the Demographic center of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and it reproduced the discourse on forced migrations of Serbs from Kosovo (see Petrović, Blagojević 1989).

⁶⁴ The general mortality rate in Kosovo dropped from 17 per thousand in the years following World War Two, to 6 per thousand in the 1980s. Actually, a very young population structure contributed to Kosovo’s low mortality rates. Kosovo had the lowest mortality rate in Yugoslavia in the 1980s (see Breznik, 1986:61).

her family and the nation (Blagojević, 1997). Since women are ultimately the sex-gender whose reproductive behaviors figure most centrally in demographers calculations (Krause, 2000), even reference to “selfish and egoistic parents”, implicates women more than men.

Blagojević (1997) a sociologist interested in demographic issues was among the rare voices who tried to offer an alternative interpretation of low fertility in Serbia proper. She argued that status of women within the patriarchal family and society offered the key for understanding low fertility in Serbia proper. She asserted that patriarchal male domination is complemented by family matriarchy in which women maintain domination through self-sacrifice for the well being of the family and its individual members. Self-sacrifice sustains woman’s domination, and vice versa, recreating thus global patriarchal structures. The process is marked by exploitation and exhaustion of women’s psychophysical resources to which women respond by limiting the number of children. By not bearing (more) children, according to Blagojević, women even the score with patriarchy (1997:248-249).

I agree with Blagojević that two children per family represent the manageable maximum for women in a society in which they are the primary, if not the only caregivers while also being full time economically active outside of household. Still, I think that interpreting this as women’s revenge comes from a common theoretical mistake of defining social agency primarily through resistance. I believe that agency is more commonly expressed through strategizing and muddling than through resistance. In addition, in this particular case we would have to assume that patriarchal family, which is the primary site of making reproductive decisions, has an interest and/or desire for greater number of children. Only then we could interpret small(er) number of children as an expression of women’s resistance.

As discussed in the previous chapter a combination of socio-economic reasons together with the changing value of children (from instrumental to psychological) resulted in limiting the family size during socialism throughout the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, a firm norm of two children per family had been established as a symbol of rational family planning with strong moral overtones. Thus, regardless of their individual socio economic circumstances families desired to achieve the two child norm (Blagojević, 1991, 1995; Petrović, 1995). Even in those cases when a second child created serious pressures on family's resources. In the same vain families with abundant resources and sufficient housing space would rarely opt for a third child. Anything more or less than the prescribed norm went counter the hegemonic attitude of the immediate social networks and surroundings. This makes Blagojević's (1995) criticism of the dominant expert explanation of low fertility as an expression of egoism and individualism well placed. She argued that individual rationality was overridden by collectively established norm of a small family (see also Petrović, 1995).

My research supports this argument. Among twenty five women that I interviewed collecting life-reproductive histories only one, Slobodanka, had three children aged between two and eight years. She and her husband initially wanted to have the usual two. They were both employed and together made a decent income but could not afford to buy or rent an apartment. They used to live in extended households first with her and than with his parents in what would be an equivalent of one bedroom apartment in the United States. When Slobodanka's husband's company offered low interest loans for housing purchase⁶⁵ to employees with three children, two of them decided to size this opportunity. As Slobodanka conveyed to me, their families (overcrowded living conditions nevertheless) and friends were caught by surprise and less than supportive of the decision.

⁶⁵ At the time, due to the collapse of the financial system it was not possible to get bank loans.

Even though the Parliament of Serbia passed the Resolution on Population, the Resolution did not turn into a full blown (pronatalist) population policy. As in Russia (see Ravkin-Fish, 2003), pronatalists in Serbia complained of being ignored by policy makers, yet, again like in Russia (ibid.), they gained hegemony in public discourses. Or in Krause's words:

Demographic writings carry weight because of their authorship by demographers, who are authorised to speak scientifically about population. The proliferation of demographic studies on low birth rates is a type of knowledge production that serves as a sneaky sort of pronatalism (Krause, 200:599).

The lack of specific pronatalist measures and policies in Serbia stemmed from several theoretical, practical and political problems associated with them. To begin with, pronatalism is in a way inconsistent with the ideal of small family which is implied in the demographic transition theory, small family being at the same time a result and a symbol of progress and modernization. In order to create low fertility as a problem, demographers had to turn the whole logic of modernity upside down (Krause, 2000)⁶⁶. This logical inconsistency, however, was solved by setting "normal" reproduction at zero level population growth. Still, demographic transition theory, traditionally interested in developing policy measures aimed at decreasing fertility did not have much to offer in terms of ready-made policies.

In addition, pronatalism is usually associated with totalitarian regimes of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. By avoiding discussion of specific pronatalist measures, Italian demographers and politicians avoided uncomfortable ties to fascist demographic campaign (Krause, 2000). In Serbia, similar political concerns resulted in similar kind of "sneaky" pronatalism. A majority of demographers while concerned over low fertility in Serbia proper and Vojvodina firmly believed that that decision about the number of offspring rests in individuals and families. Moreover, the

⁶⁶ Krause refers to the fact that within the population theory the controlled fertility represents the paragon of rationality and modernity (2000:580)

regime of Slobodan Milošević refrained from restrictive policies and repressive legislation of any kind. In this, Milošević was driven by a desire to present himself and his regime as democratic.⁶⁷

Finally, Serbian economy at the time was more or less bankrupt and non functional (Woodward, 1995). Thus, the state did not have resources to maintain even positive incentives inherited from the socialist times. As a result, some of the new social policy laws significantly limited access to those incentives⁶⁸.

While pronatalist ideas held important symbolic value in the nations' self-identity construction, their influence on actual reproductive behavior was insignificant. Fertility continued a downward trend in Serbia throughout most of the 1990s⁶⁹. Moreover, even though there seemed to be an agreement about the seriousness of the “population problem” in Serbia, no one felt personally obliged to have children for the nation (see Rašević Mirjana 1993, 1997).⁷⁰ As one of my informants put it “If you are interested to learn whether I am bearing children for the nation, I can tell you right away, I am not”.⁷¹

B. THE POPULATION RESOLUTION FOR KOSOVO

During the first half of the 1980s, fertility research and policy in Serbia were focused on the low fertility in Serbia proper, following non-confrontational policies vis-à-vis Albanians in Kosovo that were pursued by the liberally oriented communist government then in power. After Milošević took power in 1986 and promoted the policy of national confrontation within and

⁶⁷ Kosovo was ruled by brutal police force, not by repressive legislation. Only towards the very end, faced by its imminent fall the regime passed several laws that infringed on freedom of the media and on autonomy of the academic institutions (Hayden, 1999).

⁶⁸ For example, until 1990 the child allowance system was a universal tool of social policy aimed at welfare of general population. Since 1991, however, child allowance system targets socially and economically disadvantaged families. As a result, between 1990 and 1992 the number of children receiving the child allowance dropped by one third (see Bjeloglav and Pošarac, 1994:220).

⁶⁹ See table 8. There is anecdotal evidence that the number of families with three children was increasing in the mid 1990s which could not be yet expressed at the aggregate level

⁷⁰ Rivkin-Fish (2003) reports on a very similar attitude of Russian citizens.

⁷¹ She was in her late twenties at the time of the interview, and had recently given birth to her second child. Her response came after I explained the topic of my research and the purpose of the interview.

outside of Serbia, political discourses embraced antinatalist or neo-Malthusian approaches to population issues that up until that point were contained and dormant within the expert discourses.

Four years after the Parliament of Serbia passed the Resolution on Population in Serbia proper, preparations began for the population resolution for Kosovo in 1988. Kosovo's Executive Council, i.e. the provincial government, entrusted the Center for Demographic Research in Belgrade to conduct a study which would describe the population dynamics in Kosovo, define its "problems" and offer guidelines for the Resolution.

The history of the study is interesting and indicative of the political processes in Serbia and in Kosovo at the time. It was based on existing census data and vital statistics data, and was completed in six months and turned in to the Executive Council of Kosovo (Avramov, 1992:11).

In 1992, a hundred copies of the study were published as a book by the Center for Demographic Research. Apparently, antinatalists in Serbia felt equally ignored by policy makers as pronatalists did. Avramov⁷², the book's editor, complained that four years after the study was completed, the proposed resolution on population and family planning in Kosovo was not yet in existence. The authors of the study believed their findings too important to be ignored by politicians and to remain unknown to the public. They therefore decided to make them available to the public. In her introduction, Avramov implied that politicians in Kosovo and the whole country were irresponsibly ignoring what she described as a serious social problem:

This book is the latest in a series of research [reports] on demographic tendencies and the implications of explosive population growth in Kosovo [which is] the last stronghold (*uporište*) of high fertility in Europe. During the last thirty years or so, Yugoslav demographers have conducted their scientific tasks in a professional manner. Numerous studies have been written on Kosovo's population [and on its] demographic, social and economic consequences. Studies and research reports written in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s

⁷² At the time, Avramov was Director of the Center for Demographic Research. She left that position for a post in an international population agency located in Brussels.

and 1980s about demographic and population trends and deviations (*poremećaji*) in Kosovo have been [easily] available to scientists and to social planners. A lack of funds for [turning the studies into] books is the reason these studies have not always been available to the broader public [...]. A lack of an informed population policy [only] increases the burden that the population of Kosovo, Serbia, Yugoslavia and Europe will be facing at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. [This study] stands as a witness to demographers' modest efforts [by which they wish] to give their scientific contribution to overcoming chaotic (*stihijski*) [social] processes (Avramov, 1992:2, stress added).

The substantial political change that took place in the time since the study was requested, curiously, is never mentioned in the book. In 1988 Serbian Parliament passed constitutional amendments to revoke the autonomous status of Vojvodina and Kosovo. Under great pressure, the Kosovo provincial assembly voted itself out of existence in March of 1989 (Kovačević, Putnik-Dajić, 1994; Mertus, 1998; Thomas, 1999) which probably explains why the intended Resolution on population was never discussed or passed.

In her description of fertility levels in Kosovo, Avramov recreates the rhetoric as well as the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of modified transition theory as discussed in the pervious chapter. High fertility is “explosive” and deviant, thus threatening the social order. To say that Kosovo is a “stronghold” of “unruly”, “chaotic” processes implies that it is resistant to progress, thus not only holding back the region, but also threatening the level of achieved development by the whole of Europe. Two other contributors to the study are more explicit about this:

[The high fertility] regions are biologically, economically and psychologically incapable of following the progress of humankind or other parts of our country. Even less [are they capable] of positively contributing to these developments (Berić and Belopavlović, 1992:159).

In other words, “maintaining a moderate but controlled population reproduction is a necessary prerequisite for the socio-economic development and progress of a community” (ibid.:144, stress added).

According to Avramov and other authors, science has answers for all the social alignments caused by “elemental [reproductive] forces”, but the answers fall on the deaf ears of politicians. This type of confidence in “scientific solutions” for scientifically defined “social problems” reflects the dominant position of international population institutions, those working to solve the “population explosion” in the Third World. This confidence that often borders on arrogance is difficult to understand in the light of many failed projects and reflects an ideological commitment rather than solid empirical evidence or sound theoretical justification (see Simon and Zinsmeister, 1995; Sen, 1995; Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985). Still, under the right circumstances this type of confidence can elevate the economic status and social influence of specific disciplines of knowledge.

The book contains a detailed analysis of population trends in Kosovo and compares them with other parts of (former) Yugoslavia⁷³. The research followed the basic principles of demographic transition theory not only in assuming a direct connection between economic and population developments but also in examining all the variables that, according to this theory, influence fertility rates.

Within the assumed framework, the study represents rigorous scholarship but also recreates all the theoretical shortcomings and ideological biases inherent to the demographic transition approach. Consequently, Albanian society in Kosovo emerges as economically undeveloped and “traditional”. Transition theory assumes that traditional cultures are regulated

⁷³ The study was completed while Yugoslavia was still in existence. By the time the study was published, however, the country had disintegrated.

by “older taboos”, which lead people to passively accept high fertility (see Riley, 1997: 161). Some Serbian demographers and other experts, however, added a new twist to this interpretation. They suggested that traditional cultural values were consciously manipulated by the Albanian elites as part of their expansionistic politics. The claim was premised on the assumption that traditional societies are authoritarian by nature and that even the most intimate sphere of social life can be easily controlled and manipulated by local leaders and family patriarchs.

In the first article in the book, Avramov (1992a) summarizes the major findings of the study and compares reproductive trends and behaviors in Kosovo, other parts of Yugoslavia and Europe. Her article defines Kosovo as a “problem region” because of demographic trends that are disruptive to ethnic relations in the province and in Yugoslavia (1992a:4). Her rhetoric depicts Kosovo as a foreign body in Yugoslavia and Europe, i.e. outside of the framework of modern societies:

“Population numbers in Kosovo are four times higher today than in the 1920s. This type of explosive growth is unheard of in other European populations” (ibid:4). She quotes an Italian demographer, Livi Bacci⁷⁴ (1984), in support of the argument that “modernization of a demographic regime [...] opens the way for development” (ibid.:4). She argues that the change in reproductive patterns does not necessarily come about as a consequence of socio-economic modernization. Rather, “taking control over fertility (*ovladavanje fertilitetom*) is a way for society to prepare itself for those changes that lead to modernization” (ibid.:5).

She further argues, again following Livi Bacci, that when modernization of society is not accompanied by the modernization of reproduction, Malthusian positive checks on population growth, like epidemic, wars and famine, set in. According to Avramov, positive checks did not

⁷⁴ According to Krause (2000) Livi-Bacci, participates in production of knowledge which constructs low fertility in Northern Italy as a social problem promoting thus pronatalist policies.

set in Kosovo “primarily because modernization [of the Province] was introduced, maintained and subsidized from the outside” (ibid.:5) i.e. from the other parts of Yugoslavia.

According to local interpretations, Malthusianism, in all its forms, was incompatible with the Marxist taught. While in the 1980s Marxism was losing its ground under the influence of political and ideological changes, social sciences remained predominately anti-Malthusian⁷⁵. Still, I have not encountered either explicit or implicit critique of the above statement anywhere in the literature I have surveyed. What gave credibility to neo-Malthusianism under the new circumstances was its hegemonic status in the West⁷⁶.

The West, exemplified primarily by Western Europe, had become the model of a desirable direction for socio-economic development and political organization for individual nation-states that were emerging out of disintegrating Yugoslav Federation. In the media war launched between the individual Yugoslav republics (see Žarkov, 1999), each nation claimed the status of being a European, and thus developed and somehow inherently democratic nation, while denying those characteristics to the others (see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, 1992; Bakić-Hayden, 1995).

⁷⁵ The official (former) Yugoslav position was consistently anti-Malthusian domestically and internationally: “at all levels of our cooperation with other countries [Yugoslav] representatives have sharply opposed Malthusian and neo-Malthusian conceptions of population problems in the underdeveloped and developing countries because they evince a disparity between the available means of existence and the size of the population. Yugoslav representatives argue that the poverty of the “excess” population cannot be resolved solely by well organized contraception services, family planning, which is the basic tenet of the neo-Malthusian approach, but above all in the context of more just economic order based on equal rights, sovereign equality, common interest and cooperation between all states, regardless of differences amongst them in economic development and political system. Integration of family planning into socio-economic development [...] would [...] lead to a gradual resolution of the problem of so-called over-population which cannot be eliminated by the “pill” as it is commonly phrased, but by accelerated socio-economic development, changing the mode of production and a more just distribution of goods (Petrić, 1980:153).

⁷⁶ The most influential readings on the neo-Malthusian orientation in the West are: P. Ehrlich, 1968; A. Ehrlich, 1990; Hardin, 1993; Davis, 1950) as well as the work of the founding father of demographic transition theory in his later works: Notestein, 1950). The neo-Malthusian approach to population growth has been challenged by many Third World governments and also by groups and individuals of varying theoretical and ideological orientations: from feminist to the Catholic Church; from neo-liberals to ultraconservatives.

The study under consideration confirmed once again that high fertility was the primary factor in Kosovo's population growth (as mortality rates and immigration rates were low). Avramov argued that fertility of Albanian women was in many ways specific and different from those in other regions in Yugoslavia. For example, crude birth rates were decreasing rather slowly and in the ten year period that preceded the research, had been fluctuating around 30 per 1000 inhabitants. Total cumulative fertility in the cohort of women ages 45-49 did not change much between 1950 and 1980: from 6.4 live births per woman it dropped to 5.7. The most dynamic change occurred in total fertility rates (the average number of live births per woman of reproductive age, 15-49, dropping from 7.7 in 1950 to 4.3 in 1980 (Avramov, 1992). It has been established that total fertility at the rate of 2.1 maintains generation replacement, i.e., zero population growth. Thus, the total fertility rate of 4.3 indicates a fast growing population

Albanian women in Kosovo had a very low rate of teenage pregnancy (the rate of births for women younger than 18 had been fluctuating around 1.7). Births to Albanian women in their twenties were the most numerous, with the peak being between the ages of 25-29. Still, the fertility rate of women over 35 years of age was three times higher in Kosovo than in other regions of Yugoslavia. Higher order births (3^d, 4th, 5th...child) were still significant in Kosovo in the 1980s. There was a downward trend in the number of fifth and higher, but the number of fourth order births in Kosovo had not changed at all in two decades. Based on this, Avramov concluded that a significant number of women in Kosovo had not taken control over their own fertility (1992:8). The conclusion is problematic, to say the least. Considering that women can have much more than four children during their reproductive years the steady number of fourth order births can only indicate the opposite – that Albanian women practice some forms of fertility control

Avramov, like virtually all experts, showed a clear bias towards modern contraception.⁷⁷ This bias, however, is not peculiar to Serbian experts. Rather, it represents a hegemonic ideology which privileges scientific and medical knowledge over traditional forms in the European conception of modernity. Thus, the fact that Albanian women delayed their first child after marrying than longer women of other ethno-national groups is not interpreted as a result of conscious family planning. Without much evidence, it is argued that the time gap between getting married and having the first child could be “partly explained by separation between the spouses because men emigrate for work for longer periods of time; it could also be explained by a low number of conceptions before marriage” (Breznik et. al. 1992:35). While I do not dismiss these explanations completely, they both beg some empirical evidence. Furthermore the first claim is at least indirectly disputed by another finding of the study. Albanian women in Kosovo had short intervals between births (Avramov, 1992:35), apparently not affected by the husbands’ absence.

The authors of the study acknowledged some degree of “modernization” of reproduction in Kosovo by noting differences in fertility between women of various socio-economic backgrounds:

The forerunners of family planning in Kosovo are educated, economically active women and the higher strata of society. Economically dependant, insufficiently educated women living in villages, on the other hand, still have a natural uncontrolled fertility and give birth to seven children on average (Avramov, 1992:9, stress added)

The data about differential fertility among women of the same ethno/national and religious background used in the above cite, suggest that stated ethnicity, religion and cultural markers give mixed results when used in explaining fertility decline (see, Kreager, 1997:139).

⁷⁷ Modern medical contraception usually refers to IUDs, spermicidal foam , the pill, and to a certain degree also to condoms.

Avramov, however, uses differential fertility to suggest that dominant cultural and religious values worked to prevent modernization of reproduction that is expected at the level of socio-economic development achieved in Kosovo.

Avramov argued that the level of general socio-economic development in the province had far surpassed the level of reproductive modernization. This, according to her, pointed to the stronger influence of factors other than modernization on reproductive behavior in Kosovo:

Even though Kosovo was no doubt the least developed region of Yugoslavia, the structural transformation of society in Kosovo [...] long ago crossed the threshold which triggered a powerful drop of fertility in other regions of Yugoslavia... Research on the intensity of the relationship between the general [social] development and fertility [shows] that the connection is by far weakest in Kosovo. This suggests greater influence of other kind of factors in Kosovo when compared with other regions (Avramov, 1992:9).

“The other kind of factors” are “traditional” values and institutions that according to the transformed version of demographic transition theory have a negative role and function as lag effects on fertility transition (see (Kreager, 1997:161).

Economic development in Kosovo, according to Avramov, did influence population growth rates but it caused only a mild drop in fertility. In order to explain this Avramov discusses different ways in which economic development and traditional institutions influence reproduction:

[Economic] development [brings about] higher personal aspirations and requirements placed on children which indirectly causes limitation in the number of offspring. The possibility of improving the economic and social status of the family and its members motivates parents [to changing] family planning in most cases. However, the fertility level is influenced also by the institutions of the family’s immediate surroundings: local public opinion; the council of elders; influential individuals in the village; relatives, imams. Numerous elements of traditional consciousness operate through this informal network and contribute to maintaining high fertility by creating cultural barriers to the incursion of new normative standards about family relations, woman’s status, and quality of investments in children. All of these [elements] directly or indirectly influence the size of the family (ibid.:10, stress added).

Other demographers also focused on traditional aspects of Albanian culture and the way they influence reproductive behavior. Rančić (1989), for example, argues that Kosovo is a society in which custom takes precedence over law:

Those that still have many births, use [the constitutional right to freely decide about children] much less [than those with fewer births] or not at all. They rather rely on customary law which does not allow for individual freedom in deciding about children. Within this model of demographic behavior, responsible parenting is subordinated to tradition of tribal social organization. [This model] neglects living conditions and only makes them worse (Rančić, 1989-90:63-4).

‘Traditional reproduction’, i.e. high fertility, thus, reflects ‘traditional norms’ in regulating social relations and individual behavior. In the true spirit of modernization theories, these norms were identified as backward and inferior to modern ones:

It is necessary to [work to] dissolve superstitions, to suppress backward patriarchal customs, to resist pronatalist expansionistic influences and pressures in some communities (Bogoev, 1986:205).

[It is] apparent that in regions with high fertility, traditional pronatalist consciousness and institutions are operating unhampered. The reasons for the persistence of these remnants of the past should be investigated. Why is it that traditional consciousness is not giving way to the new one, when [the latter] is superior (Macura, 1986:189)?

Cultural barriers to the “modernization” of reproduction are present, according to Avramov, “when the modernization process is not generated from within the social structure of a specific community but rather [makes] incursions from the outside” (ibid.:10). When modernization is brought in from somewhere else it “often creates contradictory and sometimes regressive reactions in the population” (ibid.:10). This argument was premised on the assumption that when economic modernization is ‘imported’ from the outside, it cannot be accompanied by ‘cultural modernization’.

Avramov identified some reproductive ‘reactions’ in Kosovo that, according to her, are inconsistent with the attained level of economic development in Kosovo. For example, differences in fertility rates between women of different educational levels had diminished in Kosovo between 1961 and 1981, “but in an unusual way, due to the increase in the fertility rates of women with formal education”(ibid,:10). Avramov did not mention another unusual trend – that employment levels among Albanian women in Kosovo were also decreasing which would suggest deep structural problems in the economic development and would also provide an explanation for the increased fertility rates of Albanian women with formal education but no employment. Between 1950 and the 1980s, the percentage of economically active women in Kosovo dropped from around 25% to 16% (see Gaber and Kuzmanić, 1989:78).

According to Avramov, high fertility in Kosovo created the following ‘social problems’: “exponential population growth” and high population density; changes in ethnic composition of Yugoslavia and Serbia; increasing unemployment rates; an increase in the percentage of economically dependant members of the population; deepening social differences between the families that “took control over their fertility and those that did not”.

Demographic and economic literature, however, offer equally convincing evidence to the contrary – that the consequences Avramov discusses do not necessarily have negative effect in society. For example, Japan is often quoted as one of the most densely populated countries that also has one of the highest GNPs per capita as well as low crime rates and low poverty rates. Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, high unemployment rates and related problems are better addressed by economic restructuring than by population policies aimed either at increasing or decreasing fertility levels (see Simon and Zinsmeister, 1995; Sen, 1995; Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985).

Finally, the most serious demographic consequence/'problem' related to high fertility, according to Avramov, was the changing generational structure of the population, due to its long lasting effects. A young population structure perpetuates the rapid population growth.

In her summary of the volume written in English, Avramov warned that the total population in Albania and in Kosovo was going to double within the following three decades. Thus, Albanians would outnumber not only many nations in Southern Europe but also in the West:

The total population of Albania reached 3 million in 1986 and the number of ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia was assessed at 2 million in 1987. The annual population growth rate in the first half of the 1980s stood at 20.9 per thousand population in Albania and at 25.1 per 1000 in Kosovo. Due to demographic and... cultural inertia both populations may be expected to double in the next three decades or so. This implies that in the second half of the XXI century Albanians in the Balkans will number approximately 10 million people. Thus, Albanians in Yugoslavia and in Albania will probably be similar in number to populations of the neighboring states, Bulgaria or Greece and will outnumber the European countries, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, for example... While population numbers for the next two or three decades may be assessed with a relatively high degree of precision, [their] potential social, economic and political prospects leave more space for speculation about possible scenarios (Avramov, 1992b:178 stress added).

In the above passage, Avramov suggests that in a few decades, Albanians may become the most numerous nation in the Balkans, and may even outnumber some of the Western European nations. Moreover, she warns ominously that this population scenario has the potential of creating yet unknown and apparently threatening social and political consequences. Avramov does not elaborate on these unforeseen consequences. She does not have to. They are implied in the transition theory, which at the global level assumes that a major threat is posed by the excessive reproductive performance of relatively poor and disadvantaged populations (Raily, 1997:160).

In the case of Kosovo Albanians, the perceived threat was magnified by their predominantly Muslim religious affiliation. The fear of Islam stems from the belief, still dominant in the West, that it threatens European and Christian civilization (Duijzings, 2000)⁷⁸. In Serbia, after Milošević's rise to power in 1987, nationalist media started to depict Muslims as fundamentalists embarked on a *jihad* against the Orthodox Serbs (Duijzings, 2000:106; Hayden).

1. "Etiology" of Kosovo's High Fertility

Even though the study recounted above was intended to be the bases for an informed population policy in Kosovo, only one article in the book explicitly discusses the basic principles of a possible population policy and suggests some specific measures (see Berić and Belopavlović, 1992). These two authors claim that a population policy is a "sovereign right of every state". Population policy, according to them, should maintain "rational reproduction", which means a "process of continuous, unhindered and balanced biological growth (*obnavljanje*) of the human species" (ibid.:143).

Discussing specific measures of population policy for Kosovo, Berić and Belopavlović focused primarily on information and education about family planning and population policy that would work towards changing reproductive norms and consciousness (ibid.:162). Thus, proposed measures for "modernizing" reproduction in Kosovo were not different in nature from those intended for the "rehabilitation" of reproduction in Serbia proper – they focused on education and propaganda and relied on the state institutions, educational and medical institutions, church, and the media. Similar concerns that were behind experts' and politicians' reluctance to discuss

⁷⁸ Daniel Pipes, who was recently appointed by president Bush to be a member of the board of directors of the US Institute for Peace, wrote in the National Review in 1990: "Western European societies are unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and maintaining different standards of hygiene...All immigrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most" (quoted in Benin, 2003:1). This is one of the many examples of open xenophobia towards Muslims in the West, and is interesting for me here because of the high profile of its author in the current US politics, but also because of the time overlap.

more specific measures of pronatalist policies were at work here too. Moreover, the state of Serbia not having a real control over the social life of the Albanian community in Kosovo could not hope to implement any kind of social policy there. By the early 1990s, as mentioned in the introduction, ethnic communities in Kosovo lived in separated, parallel worlds.

Thus, Berić and Belopavlović, expressed skepticism regarding the success of population policy in Kosovo. They argued that there was no political will within the relevant institutions and among the citizens of Kosovo to pursue any population policy. They argued, that within the medical and even more so educational institutions in Kosovo one could identify either inertia or a conscious obstruction of any attempt in family planning or population policy. According to them,

this resistance can stem from aggressive political positions of Islamic fundamentalism, retrograde Catholic or Orthodox traditionalism; it can be based on the teachings of various Christian and other sects but also on ethnocentric perspectives” (ibid.:163).

This passage is only seemingly nationally/religiously neutral, suggesting the existence of “retrograde” and “traditional” elements in both Christianity and Islam. However, since it sought to explain the “resistance” and “inertia” to family planning and population policy in Kosovo, there is a little doubt that Islam was the primary target of their criticism. Furthermore, Christianity may, according to the authors, be “retrograde” and “traditional”, particularly some of its sects, but Islam is as a whole “fundamentalist” and “aggressive”. Finally, “Islamic fundamentalism” from the beginning of the description ties in with the “ethnocentrism” at its end, completing the argument according to which high fertility in Kosovo results from conscious politics and manipulations of Albanian political and religious elites.

Berić and Belopavlović implied that political and religious conservatism were

behind the Albanian resistance to population policies. The fact of the matter was that even after Serbian regime eliminated Kosovo's autonomy by the constitutional amendments of 1989, the province continued to be self-governed through an alternative institutional and political structure. The whole social life of the Albanian community was organized through these alternative institutions while policies designed in Belgrade were either ignored or resisted. Under these circumstances, demographic knowledge on Kosovo that was produced in Serbia could only serve to maintain the myth of territorial integrity in Serbian national imagination.

Other Serbian experts went a step further, arguing that political and intellectual elites in Kosovo were promoting pronatalist policies. This position was put forward by members of the Serbian delegation at the meeting that took place in Kosovo's capital Priština in March of 1988. It was organized by the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia and the Provincial Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo. At the meeting Miloš Macura, a leading Serbian demographer critiqued his Albanian colleagues arguing that they had embraced a pronatalist orientation (*NIN*, March 6, 1988:12). Kosta Mihajlović, an economist who, like Macura, had close ties with the regime, argued that the source of pronatalism in Kosovo could be found in religious and nationalist ideologies and that it had been quietly supported by local political institutions and intellectual elites for a long time (*NIN*, *ibid.*).

While it is true that after 1988, when Milošević abolished the political autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, Albanians started boycotting the state institutions and policies designed in Belgrade, there is no evidence to support the existence of pronatalist political camping in the province either before or after 1988.

Penev (1992) provided a more detailed analysis of the possible social consequences of high fertility and rapid population growth in Kosovo. Among other things, Penev examined the

relationship between rapid population growth and economic development. He pointed to the long lasting disagreement about the nature of the relationship between the scientists who believed that rapid population growth is a major cause of slow economic development, and those who reject the idea of a direct causal relationship between the two processes. Still, according to Penev, economic development and rapid population growth are interrelated and the latter has more influence on the former in less developed countries:

Under the conditions of current scientific and technological progress, population trends do not play a crucial role in economic development or in standards of living... It is however, reasonable to expect that...rapid population growth in undeveloped and developing countries may significantly contribute to their slower economic growth or to their lagging behind [in comparison to] the most developed countries (1992:122).

Penev applied this model to Kosovo and concluded that:

The case of Kosovo confirms the interrelatedness of economic and demographic variables. [We] cannot accept the opinion which claims that the explosive demographic growth is the fundamental or exclusive reason for Kosovo's economic underdevelopment and for its lagging behind the Yugoslav average. Also unacceptable are the claims that [a large] population is Kosovo's greatest asset; or that faster [economic] development can be achieved primarily through higher investments which in turn would automatically bring about lower fertility [rates], i.e. slower population growth. This leads to the faulty conclusion that Kosovo does not need population policy, especially the kind that would aim to restrict population reproduction (1992:123).

Penev together with many other Serbian demographers and other experts (Avramov, 1992a, 1994; Macura, 1986, 1997; Rančić, 1989-90; see also NIN 1988) believes that slower socioeconomic development of Kosovo relative to other regions of the former Yugoslavia resulted from high fertility rates and fast population growth.

Albanian experts and politicians, however, put forward the opposite explanation which stems from the classical transition theory. According to them, inadequate development of Kosovo was a cause rather than a consequence of fast population growth in Kosovo. They

opposed more proactive population policies for Kosovo, specifically those designed in Belgrade. They also blamed the federal and republican governments for consciously neglecting Kosovo's economic development (Islami, 1898, 1994). The type of family planning supported by the Albanian demographers is best described by the slogan "development is the best contraception" (see Islami, 1989; *NIN*, March, 6, 1988:10-14)⁷⁹ and can be considered a continuation of the orientation that dominated in Yugoslavia in the previous decades.

Another contentious issue between the Serbian and Albanian demographers was related to the role played by women's status in creating high fertility in Kosovo. Serbian demographers mostly focused on the subordinated position of Albanian women within the patriarchal family structure.

In traditional societies an individual's actions are determined very little by personal choice; rigid normative standards imposed by family and the local community sternly sanction any breach of the established model of living. In the context of a low level of social and cultural emancipation of women and their segregation, the lack of a population policy is the [actual] policy, one which supports high fertility (Avramov, 1990-91:240).

One detail was repeatedly cited in support of this argument. In her numerous surveys on fertility in various regions of Serbia and Yugoslavia, Todorović (1976; 1980; 1984-85; 1990-91) found that the "ideal number" of children for Albanian women was on average lower than the achieved number⁸⁰. While authors like Breznik, who was a consistent advocate of family planning over population policies, interpreted this as an indicator of a continuation of decrease in

⁷⁹ This slogan was created at the Second World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974. Representatives of this school are usually not against any family planning as long as it is voluntary and maintained by indirect social policy measures. Among other Yugoslav demographers, the most consistent supporter of this approach has been Breznik (1980, 1980a.; 1980b; 1986; 1990/91). For the international context see Easterlin, 1981; Caldwell, 1982; Schultz, 1981).

⁸⁰ Todorović actually determined that married women were not satisfied with the achieved number of children regardless of whether they were from low or high fertility regions. The ideal was higher in the former and lower in the latter (Todorović, 1980:177).

number of births in Kosovo (see Breznik, 1986)⁸¹, those who were alarmed by the “population explosion” interpreted this discrepancy as an expression of women’s subordination. Avramov (1992) uses data from Todorović’s 1976 research to argue that, for example,

the lack of knowledge about contraception was unprecedented not only by European standards but also by the standards of undeveloped countries in Asia and Africa. [M]erely every second surveyed woman was informed about modern contraceptives for fertility control and only 9% of them was using [modern] contraception. Only every fifth woman that did not use [modern] contraception wanted [to have] a child, while others were not [using contraception] due to lack of knowledge, because [their] husbands were against it, or due to religious prohibitions. Indirectly, the survey reveals that women in Kosovo were motivated to limit births but that the motivation was not consciously articulated nor expressed through the behavioral model (Avramov, 1992a:8, stress added).

Albanian demographers preferred an economic explanation. For them, high fertility levels were an expression of low employment rates among the Albanian women more than a consequence of patriarchal family relations. They too found support for their argument in Todorović’s fertility research. Islami (1994), for example, quotes her research based on 1981 census data to show differences in fertility between employed and unemployed Albanian women and those of different educational backgrounds:

The average number of children per woman among economically active Albanian women in the cohort 45-49 is 3.07, versus economically dependant women who on average have 5.49 children; the average number of children per a dependant woman [in the same cohort who is] engaged in agricultural activities is 6.74. An economically active woman holding a job outside of agriculture has on average 2.74 children; an illiterate woman and a woman without [formal] education has 7.04 children, a woman with a high school [degree] has 2.24 and woman with a university [degree]e 2.18 children (1994:35).

It may seem paradoxical that the same type of research, done by the same author, offers support for conflicting interpretations of the relationship between the status of women and fertility change. This flexibility of data, however, stems directly from the very concept of

⁸¹ For Breznik, a couple of other indicators suggested a further decrease in fertility and population growth in Kosovo: the ongoing socioeconomic transformation of population; and an increase in educational levels for the younger generations of women (1980a:82)

women's status and its application in demographic research. The focus on a narrow range of women's socioeconomic characteristics that dominates demographic research only scratches the surface of complex gender relations surrounding reproduction (Greenhalgh, 1995a; Raily, 1997). In that sense, according to Greenhalgh, demography remains situated between a prefeminist stage and a "demography of women" (ibid:23). Focus on women's roles and status⁸², among other things, excludes men and broader gender power relations from fertility studies, usually assigning the passive role of victim to women. In addition, demography focuses primarily on how women's status influences reproduction and pay little or no attention to the reverse relationship: how certain patterns of reproduction affect women's lives and statuses. This at least partly explains why another significant finding in Todorović's fertility studies remained unexplored.

Analyzing the census data for a twenty year period, Todorović concluded that women with more children (she does not specify the number) in all parts of Serbia (regardless of the aggregate fertility rates) have higher mortality rates than women with fewer children (1990-91). She warned that this was an interesting observation that deserved special attention in the future research (ibid.:13), but to my knowledge, this issue has not been pursued by anyone.

In summarizing the debate between the Serbian and Albanian demographers about the relationship between women's statuses and fertility it should be stressed that both positions have certain value. Still, even when combined in a unified explanatory model, they remain insufficient because they fail to explain gender relations of reproduction in all their complexity and at various levels of social organization. Used separately, they highlight only specific, very narrow aspects of these complex relationships. What is particularly important for my purposes here is

⁸² Concepts of women's roles and statuses that dominated the prefeminist approach to women in social sciences has successfully been criticized by feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s (see Moor, 1988, Lapmhre et.al, 1977; Mukhopadyay and Higgins, 1988, among the others)

that both interpretations reproduce an image of passive and socially marginalized Albanian women but looking into different sites of their marginalization.

What is socially and politically marginal, however, often becomes symbolically central. Women stand as a prime example. Since colonial times, women and their actual or imagined oppression have been a recognizable symbol of societies that needed to be overpowered and controlled from the outside, by those who believe to know better not only how to treat women but also just about everything else (see Chatterjee, 1989 on India; Ahmed, 1982, 1992 and Abu-Lughod, 2002 on Muslim world). In the same vein, for anti-colonial liberation movements women symbolized the nation's oppression and served to justify the liberation struggle (Chatterjee, 1989; Innes, 1994). Similarly, in the context of the Serbian-Albanian ethno-national conflict, the image of the oppressed Albanian women served to support both nations' claims to the sovereign control of the province. For Serbian nationalism this meant limiting or completely dissolving political autonomy of Kosovo. For Albanian nationalism the solution was seen in even broader autonomy or secession. In either case, Albanian women stood as a symbol of a neglected territory, thus justifying the political claims for its control.

Demographic discourses played an important role in this political struggle over the territory of Kosovo and state borders. They also contributed to the production of national and gender identity narratives in Serbia. I argue, however, that these roles played by demographic knowledge are not peculiar to Serbia. What connects nationalism and demographic knowledge is their shared interest in population while the close relationship between them accounts for the "central place that fertility ...has come to play in the preoccupations of modern [nation]-states" (Kreager, 1997:154). The concept of fertility, on the other hand, implicates women and nation in specific ways.

According to Kreager, the realignment of ideas of nation, state and population came about in the first half of the nineteenth century with the shift in the location of sovereignty from aristocratic elites to a people (1997:155). The polities of the *ancien regime* were polymorphous and polysegmentary. They were composed of people of not only diverse identities - ethnic and religious among others - but of multiple identities as well. With the emergence of the nation state ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity have been replaced by an ideal of national unity and homogeneity.

Demographic transition theory, according to Kreager (1997), displaced the significance of culture in population change from macro to micro level. Still it

“retained a major tenet of demography’s involvement in nineteenth-century ideas of nationalism and state intervention: the idea that fertility measurement and control are essential to national development...Rationalist assumptions about the nature of modern culture, with its progressive individualism [is] substituted for the old discussion of rootedness of national cultures” (Kreager, 1997:161).

Thus national populations if not homogenous are tending more or less inevitably to homogeneity through socio economic progress and modernization (ibid). While studying national sub-populations, demography is searching for universal patterns of fertility transition. Once the patterns have been established, differences or time lags in fertility transition are treated as deviations caused by “retrograde” characteristics of “traditional culture(s)”. Moreover, they are treated as pathological events that stand on the way of the overall social/national development. Therefore, policies are proposed in order to control and direct fertility and population trends and thus to maintain a homogenous social and economic development. The stated goal of homogenization of fertility levels in Serbia (and in the former Yugoslavia) at the replacement level is an example of forging this kind of unity.

Finally, nationalism and demography share the same underlining epistemology in their approach to population as an object of knowledge and management. As argued by Riley, following Fuchs and Ward (1994), demography is among the disciplines that believe in “facts, methods, representation and progress”. The production of facts and objective knowledge is of central importance. Thus, demographers

have little time or reason to undermine the epistemic and social authority of their own practices as merely contingent or culturally relative...[F]actual fields do not view their basic constructions as constructions, but as the way reality is, or at least as approaching Truth [Fuchs and Ward, quoted in Riley, 1997:128].

Due to these properties, demographic discourses participate in establishing “scientifically objective” knowledge, therefore the truth about who “we” are and who is the “other”. In Serbian identity narratives, gender and reproductive norms that emerged from demographic discourses served to separate ethnic “self” from the Albanian ethnic “other”.

Demographic knowledge has a fundamental role in the symptomatology of the national body (Patrica, as cited in Krause, 2000). According to this symptomatology, Serbian national “body” was afflicted by elemental forces of deviant, irrational reproduction. Serbian women by failing to reproduce more, appeared as internal enemies of the nation, its traitors and collaborators in its death (see Iveković, Mostov, 2002). Albanian women, on the other hand, by multiplying excessively represented an external enemy “operating” within the national borders. With their numerous offspring, Albanian women appeared to conspire in order to dilute and destroy the Serbian nation (ibid.:11). Thus, women’s bodies, Albanian as well as Serbian, needed to be controlled and their fertility made suitable to the national goals of (Serbian) nation- state. Demographers proposed to “rehabilitate” and “modernize” Serbian and Albanian women reproductive bodies, respectively. While the stated goal was “rational control of reproduction”,

the metaphor of “rehabilitation” usually suggests restoring something to its “natural function”. In this case Serbian women had to be brought back to their “natural” reproductive roles and by this, restore “natural” gender relations and on them based social hierarchies. At the same time Albanian women had to be emancipated from patriarchal oppression and brought to “civilization” by having them adopt “rational” and “controlled” reproduction.

In a way Serbian and Albanian women stood as metaphors of what appeared to be an internal contradiction of Serbian nationalisms in the 1990s. On the one hand there was a strong sense of belonging to European “civilization” and its (masculine) rationality, contrary to “primitivism” of custom lead Albanian society. At the same time there was a strong sense of uniqueness and purity of traditional (Serbian) culture based on patriarchal hierarchy which seemed to be inconsistent with the European type of modernity, set as the goal of national development. Modernization, moreover, had its traps - it led to consumerism, decadence and loss of traditional, patriarchal values. There is no better symbol of cultural decadence than a non-reproducing woman, one who rejects at the same time “natural” and “sacred” role of mother and nurturer, succumbing to egoism, selfishness and consumerism. Thus, Serbian nation appeared threatened and suffering, squeezed between two internal enemies – decadent, non-reproducing Serbian women on the one hand, and backward, ever more reproducing Albanian women on the other. The Albanian women, however, were denied agency, therefore the real enemy of the Serbian nation were Albanian men who manipulated their women’s reproductive bodies for aggressive political purposes.

I argue that expert discourses on reproduction were among the primary sites of creation of this kind of gendered images of “self” and the “other”. They entered the broader public discourses only after nationalism replaced communism as official ideology which in Serbia

coincided with Milošević's rise to power in 1987. In the following section I analyze the shift that occurred in the media reporting on reproduction in the late 1980s. I also show how these media representations, in turn, contributed to the production of specific kind of expert knowledge which in lack of better term I named popular science. By popular science I refer to non-academic work (often written by academics) on various social and historical issues, that is designed for popular consumption. This form allows the author to avoid complicated theoretical and methodological discussions. Thus, arguments are not grounded in theory. They are, rather, based on common sense which makes argument persuasive and accessible to broader public. The underlining epistemology is based on the principles of positive science, making the presented evidence appear as "historical truths" and "objective facts". This type of literature was very popular in former Yugoslavia at the time of its disintegration and it reached the audiences either in its original form or through newspapers where excerpts would be published in installments.

C. "POPULATION PROBLEM", THE MEDIA AND "POPULAR SCIENCE"

In this section, I analyze the media representations of fertility and population growth in Serbia. I argue that the alarm regarding differential fertility that was created by experts entered media more gradually. The media coverage of the issue was more sporadic during the early 1980s. The media interest in the issue was usually inspired by an academic or political meeting about population trends and policies. In order to analyze the shift in the media reporting on reproduction, on the following pages, I examine writings of two semi-official papers, a weekly *NIN*⁸³, and daily *Politika*. I am particularly interested in the media response to "Warning" a document put together by "nine concerned intellectuals" in order to warn the Serbian nation

⁸³ When in 1994 *NIN* severed all ties with the *Politika* publishing house it became critical of the regime. The magazine, however, never completely eschewed the national agenda (Gordy, *ibid*; Thompson, *ibid*).

about all the seriousness of “population problems”. Finally I examine theoretical and ideological underpinnings of a collection on essays published under the title “The Ominous Crumbling of the Serbian People.” The book serves as an example of the type of popular science that emerged against the backdrop of the intersection of expert and popular discourses on the relationship between the nation and reproduction.

Both *NIN* and *Politika* were controlled by the regime of Slobodan Milošević since the late 1980s. Still, as the ‘respectable’ regime paper *Politika* was usually light on propaganda. It addresses controversial local issues by ignoring them or by reporting vaguely (Gordy, 1999:64). As my analysis shows this strategy was used in reporting on population dynamics – vagueness was partly maintained by lack of a consistent support to either pronatalists or to their opponents. This inconsistency granted a greater flexibility to the regime in formulating specific policies. It also could provide a potential support of diverse groups of population. Last but not least, the regime was more interested in politics than in policies of pronatalism – in other words pronatalist discourses served as a forum for producing identity narratives and not for producing viable social policies. The regime had neither interest in nor means for pursuing the latter.

In June of 1987 *NIN* reported on population issues in Yugoslavia. The language of the article was rather neutral and descriptive. The article reported on various perspectives regarding the origin and solutions of demographic problems in Serbia and Yugoslavia: on the one hand, below replacement fertility in several regions of the country (Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Serbia Proper and Vojvodna province), and fast population growth in Kosovo, on the other. Unlike the journalist who used a more descriptive language, some of the demographers interviewed for the report, used alarmist and politically confrontational language. One of them,

for example, described high fertility in Kosovo as “explosive demographic processes that no one tried to appease” (Macura, *NIN*, June 14, 1987:16). Moreover, according to Macura,

Serious demographic problems like fertility control and migrations have been treated as a taboo [subject] by political officials in Kosovo. By this [they] have supported demographic expansion of Albanian population and legitimized the process of] smothering (*gašenje*) other populations [in the province] (ibid:16).

A close reading of the article reveals that this distinguished demographer and the magazine variously approached the collective “self”. While the title of the article “Are there a lot or just a few of us” [*ima li nas mnogo ili malo*], using personal pronouns “us” and “our” [*“nas” i” naš”*] suggests unity between diverse elements of the collective self (the text makes it clear that Yugoslavia provides a framework for this collective self), Macura, reads separation and confrontation into difference. His frame of reference, however, was Serbia. The journalist described the demographic map of Yugoslavia as very diversified, resembling the global demographic dynamics: “[We] have our ‘developed countries’ and our ‘third world’ (*NIN*, June, 14, 1987:16, stress added). While journalist here reproduces a standard modernization dichotomy between developed and non/under-developed, he incorporates both “developed” and “un-developed” under a common “us”/“self”.

The accompanying illustration, however, reveals deeper meanings of concepts like “developed world” and the “third world”. In the drawing that illustrates the article, we see a row of strollers each carrying a baby. All babies have pacifiers, their heads are covered, they hold on to their blankets, and stare straight ahead. The babies appear static and rather helpless. Presumably, these are Serbian babies.

In front of the row of strollers there is a wheelbarrow, jammed with, again presumably, Albanian babies. With their little bodies hidden in the overcrowded barrow, we see only their

bear heads. They are obviously struggling for space. Those in the front row are grabbing onto the wheelbarrow's edge and there is a sense of motion. Besides, these babies appear more alert than the babies in strollers.

The contrast created by placing a wheelbarrow next to the strollers recreates a dichotomy between the "primitive" and the "civilized" with all its racist implications. Still, the composition suggests common humanity of the two societies, albeit hierarchically organized. The illustration recreates traditional developmental narrative - the wheelbarrow was/is at the beginning, but single baby strollers represent a universal end/destiny of all. Thus while the common "we" is made of various segments of society at different stages of development, all the segments will come together at some point in the future due to the common trajectory. In the dawning, this common trajectory is symbolized by the use of the perspective.

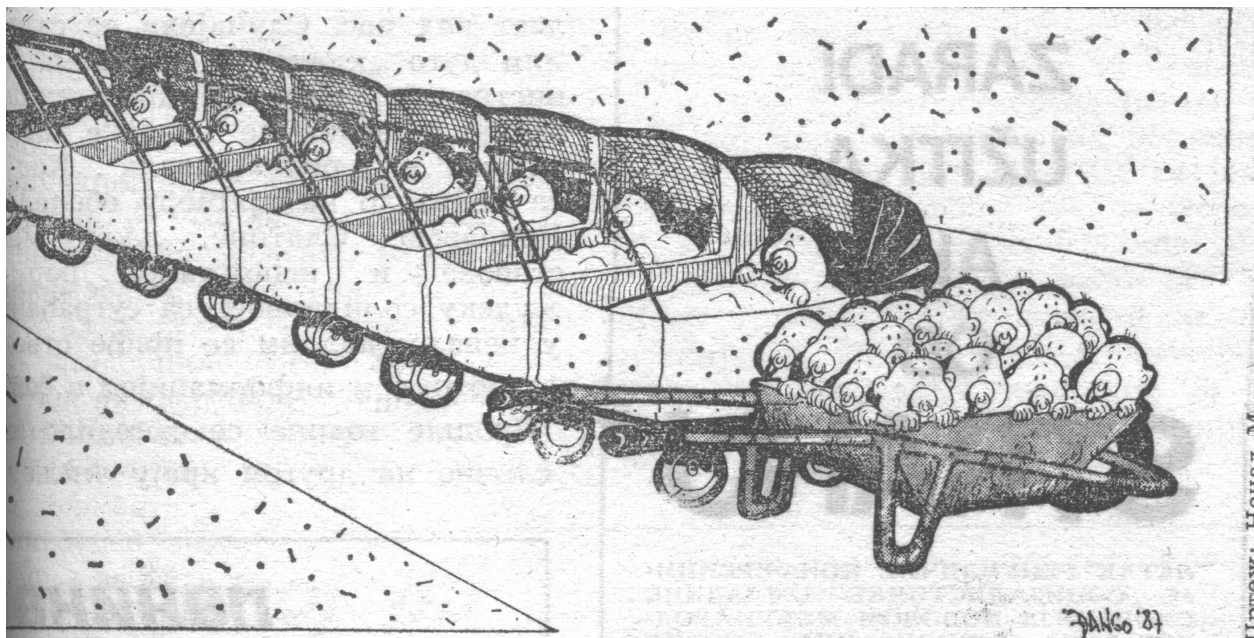


Figure 5: NIN, June 14, 1987

The knowledge and sophistication required to follow this trajectory, no doubt, is in the possession of those who occupy higher levels on the developmental ladder, i.e. nations with fewer births. Biological resilience, on the other hand, belongs to those below. Thus, it is not incidental that Albanian babies have bare heads. According to folk beliefs in Serbia it is extremely important to keep infant's heads covered regardless of the season. It is believed that to do otherwise, represents a serious health hazard. Thus, Albanian parents even though absent from the illustration, come across as ignorant and/or wanting in their parenting role. At the same time, however, again according to folk beliefs, infants that survive this kind of (mis)treatment build up resistance and become resilient. Consequently, they carry a capacity to overpower the Serbian babies not only by sheer numbers, but also by their biological strength – Serbian babies being weakened by overprotection.

Less than a year later, in March of 1988 *NIN* reported again on population dynamics. This time, the report was published in the section called “The Top Story” (*Tema dana*). Unlike the previous article which covered less than two pages, this one took up little over four pages. The report was announced on the front page with the title – Kosovo: Two Natalities, and illustrated by two photographs. The bigger photograph showed an Albanian family of seventeen children, standing in front of their shabby home. On the smaller photograph was a classroom with only one student and a teacher in it. The inside/outside organization of the photographs reads as a standard structuralist opposition between “nature” and “culture”, between the “wild” and “civilized”. Nothing is there that could unify these two communities any more. To the contrary, the size of the photographs and the composition of the front page suggest their separation and expansion of the more numerous Albanians at the expense of Serbs.

The reason for this report was the meeting that the Central Committees of the League of Communists of Serbia and Kosovo organized in Priština, the capital of the Province. Many experts, demographers and other, were invited in order to discuss “Kosovo’s population problems”. *NIN* brought extensive excerpts from several papers presented at the meeting, reporting on various aspects of the problem: population growth and migrations; etiology of population growth; population distribution and migrations; and policy measures.

In a separate box, *NIN* reported on the argument between Serbian and Albanian experts at the meeting.⁸⁴ This section was entitled “Rock me Gently” (*Ljuljaj me nežno*), which was a reference to a popular song, as well as to a practice of rocking babies to help them fall a sleep. The title thus suggested the political fragility of the subject. It also may had been an allusion to the assumed neglect of the problem on the part of local politicians and experts, as well as to their assumed expectations to be constantly pampered and helped by Serbia and other parts of Yugoslavia to the point of falling asleep i.e. oblivion.

The author of the report (the same journalist who signed the previous article) this time adopted the explanation according to which Albanian high fertility had been a result of conscious political design. In the introductory paragraph, the journalist accuses the Albanian elites of planting the “population bomb” and hence of creating a “serious social problem”:

We are now faced with yet another difficult problem in Kosovo (problem being too weak of a designation). Kosovo’s demographic bomb demands enormous patience and enormous knowledge in order to be disengaged (*demontirana*). After all, not all of those [numerous children] were made during long winter nights (without electricity)...(*NIN*, March 6, 1988:8, stress added).

The “long winter nights without electricity” symbolize here not only poverty but

⁸⁴ I explained the basic tenets of this polemic in the previous chapter.

also backwardness of those with numerous children. Both of these characteristics are often associated with indulgence in bodily pleasures. But even that, according to the magazine cannot explain all the numerous births among the Albanians in Kosovo.

Politika, which throughout the 1980s reported extensively on (forced) migrations of Serbs from Kosovo attributing them primarily to harassments whose source was seen in Albanian chauvinism, reported more sporadically on fertility and reproduction. The frequency of reporting on fertility, however, increased gradually during 1990 and 1991 only to be accelerated in 1992. Early that year, nine “concerned intellectuals” issued a document⁸⁵ entitled “Warning” (*Upozorenje*), and subtitled, “You Cannot Have Family without Progeny, or a People without Births” (*Bez poroda nema porodice, bez roda nema naroda*). The document was addressed to all influential state institutions, political parties and to the general public. The aim was to inform the relevant institutions and the whole nation about what the authors believed were serious yet neglected “population problems” in Serbia. The document was presented to the broader public at the press conference in July of 1992. The press conference was organized by the Socialist Party of Serbia which endorsed the document as one of three official documents at the Party Congress few months later.

The integral version of the document was first published on July 10 1992 in daily *Borba*. At the time *Borba* was an independent daily, critical of the regime of Slobodan Milošević and of Serbian nationalism (see Gordy, 1999; Thompson, 1999).). *Politika* reported about the document on several occasions (July, 10, 1992, November, 4, 1992; November 11, 1992; May 1 1993).

⁸⁵ The document was put together and signed by: Miloš Macura, president of the Board for Population Studies within the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences; Bogoljub Stojanovic, president of the Board for Family and Population within the Milošević’s Socialist Party; Miroljub Rančić, interim director of the Demographic Research Center; Miloš Banićević, director, Institute for Mother’s and Child’s Health Protection; Milovan Živković, director, Statistical Bureau of Serbia; Vojin Šulović, president, Serbian Physicians Association; Milomir Bešević, vice-president, Serbian Statisticians Association; Dragomir Mladenović, president, Yugoslav Association for Family Planning; Luka Todorović, director, Institute for Social Policy (See *Borba*, July, 7, 1992:11)..

Following the spirit of vague reporting, however, *Politika* never published the full text of the “Warning”. This was a useful strategy that allowed various, often contradicting interpretations of the document and the policies it promoted.

The subtitle of the Warning, “You Cannot Have Family without Progeny, or a People without Births” (*Bez poroda nema porodice, bez roda nema naroda*), plays on words in order to convey the author’s understanding of the concept of nation. Serbian terms for family (**porodica**), for a people/nation (**narod**) and for offspring (**porod**) are all rooted in the word *rod*. The noun *rod* is etymologically derived from the verb *roditi*, which means to give birth. *Rod* itself stands for (blood) relations, for clan, ethnicity and offspring⁸⁶. For the authors of the “Warning”, therefore, the nation is family writ large and reproduction fundamentally associated with the identity of both of them. In other words, the nation is defined through family like blood relations.

In the opening paragraph of the “Warning” the authors expressed their concern over the “lack of balance” in fertility rates and population growth between various national groups in Serbia: “Three ethnic groups, the Albanians, Moslems and Gypsies, have fertility which deviate from rational and human reproduction, challenging the rights of other nations” (*Borba*, July 10, 1992). According to the authors of the document, the very survival of the Serbian nation was at stake. On the one hand, its biological survival was threatened by the “white plague”, i.e. insufficient births among the Serbs. Its political survival, its statehood and culture were at the same time threatened by “irrational” and “inhumane” reproduction of the “other(s)”. As a result,

⁸⁶ *Rod* also designates yield; grammatical gender and social gender. This last usage, however, is mostly limited to feminist discourses. Outside of feminist discourses, Serbian does not differentiate between biological category of sex and social category of gender both of which are referred to as *pol* (sex). Using the term in the meaning of social gender outside of feminist circles, may cause some confusion. When I gave a talk about my research in a seminar at a small research institute at the University of Belgrade, one of the participants, a distinguished philosopher of international standing, took gender in the meaning of ethnicity.

according to these “concerned intellectuals”, “in fifty years Serbs will be a minority in their own state; and it is well known that mountain belongs to [those] who own the flock” (ibid.).

The issuing of the “Warning” resulted in proliferation of media reports on the subject. Many articles endorsed both nationalism and pronatalism of the “Warning”. Not a small number of the articles however reported also on economic and other hardship of parenting carrying thus anti-pronatalist messages either implicitly or explicitly. The position of a specific article was always clear from the title. Here are few characteristic examples from the first group:

Drastic Decline of Natality in Serbia; White plague wreaks havoc on Serbia; Development is impossible without reproduction- causes and consequences of the white plague in Serbia; Storks are not landing in Vojvodina; Vacant Serbia; In 2020, Serbs a minority in their own state; Are we already a clinically dead nation; In fifty years there will be no more Serbs.

A few examples from the second group of articles included:

Parents of triplets from Belgrade struggle to get enough milk for their babies. Children are growing up in a tiny apartment of their grandparents; Why shoes for children are more expensive?; Mixed blessings of parenthood – a fortune for a baby; A shadow [castes over] motherhood – milk has disappeared from the stores.⁸⁷

Serbian feminists were the most outspoken critics of the “Warning”, its pronatalist and nationalist ideas. The first feminist objection came from their conviction that pronatalism is inherently associated with totalitarian political regimes, like Nazism and fascism⁸⁸. To stress this alleged inherent connection between pronatalism and totalitarianism, Četković (1993a) entitled her commentary of the “Warning that was published in a feminist periodical, as “Achtung, Achtung!” Everyone who grew up in the former Yugoslavia was familiar with this German term for “warning”. It was used in street announcements by Nazi occupation forces during the Second

⁸⁷ The examples from the both groups were taken from several different daily newspapers and magazines

⁸⁸ Historical evidence suggests that this is a false association and that pronatalism is as often part of liberal ideologies and democratic systems. I discuss this point in greater detail elsewhere (see Drezgić, 1997)

World War. A frequent reference to these announcements – usually about new restrictions or arrests – was made in Yugoslav war movies.

Feminists also pointed out not only to irrationality and immorality of calls for more births under the current socio-economic and political circumstances, but also to political manipulation behind them that. They argued that pronatalism, served nationalist and militarist purposes. They criticized nationalist and patriarchal ideologies which informed discourses on population and births, specially their potential consequences for women's roles and statuses (see Četković, 1993a; Papić, 1994; Zajović, 1994).

Several months after the “Warning” was issued, *Politika* (November, 4, 1992:16) published a commentary in which a (female) journalist summarized and took over some of the basic feminist objections to the document. For the title of the article, the journalist borrowed a graffiti which was a sarcastic comment on deteriorating living conditions in Serbia: “Is there life before death” (*ima li života pre smrti*)? The text below suggested a negative answer by arguing that pronatalism promoted by the Warning was an expression of militant nationalism and its need for cannon fodder for the current and future wars.

This journalist concluded that the ideas expressed in the Warning went counter women's interests and women's rights: “the authors of the ‘Warning’ are not offering anything new aside from separating demographic policy from women's reproductive rights. The [separation] may have [some] negative consequences for them” (ibid.). Finally, the journalist criticized the fact that there was not a single woman among the nine authors of the document and quoted Četković, a prominent feminist in support.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude that *Politika* adopted a feminist stand on population politics, particularly the feminist critique of pronatalism and nationalism.⁸⁹

As a matter of fact, *Politika* reported on population politics and on reproduction variously, often depending on the section in which the report appeared. The above article, for example, appeared in the section for women and family. This section generally had a female if not feminist bias. Articles in this section, thus, often reported on economic and other hardships related to infant and child care⁹⁰. Reports on population trends that appeared in the section on society while not lacking in alarmist language (particularly in the titles), exhibited a degree of balance in reported views. This section abounded in experts' opinions.

A majority of experts agreed that low fertility represented a serious social problem. Their interpretations of causes, consequences and proposed solutions, however, varied. The major divide was between the experts who stressed economic reasons and those who insisted that ideational and moral reasons - decline in the value system that included hedonistic life style, egoism and selfishness of parents, particularly women – explained small families and low fertility rates. A careful analysis shows that experts who favored the latter explanation were more frequently invited to comment on a specific issue. Three experts stand out in this group: Miloš Macura, demographer, Dragomir Mladenović, professor of family law and Milan Vojnović, professor of sociology.

Macura and Mladenović had been leading scholars in their respective fields and known to the broader public for a long time. Vojnović, who taught sociology at one of technical schools at

⁸⁹ In the section on the Politics of Abortion I analyze in a more detail the feminist argument against the nationalist reproductive politics.

⁹⁰ Articles that talked about economic hardships of parenting were particularly numerous in *Politika* and other written media during 1993. That was the year of the worst economic crises in Serbia. The high inflation rates were devaluing already low incomes, by hour. In addition many companies were not able to pay their employees – for many in Serbia income was sporadic or received in goods like food or hygiene.

the University of Belgrade, on the other hand, had been previously unknown to the broader public. Moreover, his name was absent from professional periodicals. All three of them promoted pronatalism in the name of the survival of the nation, but with a varying degree of fervor. In addition, while Macura usually referred to parents as being responsible for the survival of the nation, Mladenović and Vojnović turned their criticism primarily to women. Knowing that according to the local conception of reproduction and reproductive gender roles women carry much greater responsibility in this realm the difference in their underlining messages is much smaller than it may appear at the first site.

Macura essentially argued that in addition to their personal needs (that could be met with only one child) parents should take into account the needs of the nation as well. Even if it required a certain degree of sacrifice:

In order to prevent losses that cannot be restored [to happen], it is of utmost importance to sustain the species under the conditions of extreme hardships ...All children born during the second world war are currently fathers or grandfathers; In order to have them, their parents did make [necessary] sacrifices (*Politika*, May 1, 1993:12).

Mladenović and Vojnović argued with a greater zeal than Macura, about the alleged moral decline among the Serbs. According to them, the moral decline brought the nation to the brink of the biological survival. Both of them singled out women as main culprits in the process for allegedly rejecting to play their “proper” gender roles. While Mladenović focused his criticism on feminism, Vojnović blamed emancipation for the current state of gender roles and relations that according to him had detrimental consequences for the survival of the nation. Implicitly, thus Mladenović’s argument contains also an anti-western bias (feminism being associated with the western liberalism). Vojnović, on the other hand, implicitly blamed socialism and its emancipation of women for the current state of the Serbian nation.

Both Mladenović and Vojnović were frequent contributors to the section in *Politika* called “Opinion” (*pogled*). This section of the paper was the most consistent in promoting pronatalist, nationalist ideology. This was another strategy of the paper which served to disassociate the regime from the most radical ideas while giving them room and indirect support. Since the contributors to this column were either experts from various fields or concerned citizens, the resulting identity narratives appeared to be a product of (scientific) knowledge and to be embraced by the popular will – both of which represent important pillars of nationalist ideologies. Needless to say the contributors to the column did not have to comply with the standards of rigorous science when presented their arguments and empirical evidence. Thus, the column represented a venue through which what I call the popular science reached the biggest audience.

The content of these opinion pieces was rather redundant. For that reason, in order to present the knowledge production and underlining ideology of the popular science, instead of analyzing a number of individual articles from the media, on the following pages I examine a book which is illustrative of both the ideology that informed the popular science on nation and population and discourses that shaped it. The book was published in 1995 by Milan Vojnović, who as already mentioned, was a frequent contributor to the Opinion section in *Politika*.

The very title of the book, “Ominous Crumbling of the Serbian People” [*Kobno osipanje srpskog naroda*] had to convey the whole seriousness and urgency of the issue at hand. The book is dedicated to “Serbian heroes who gave their lives defending Serbian territories” [*Srpskim herojima koji su dali živote braneći srpske zemlje*]. The dedication apparently refers to recent wars in Croatia and at the time still ongoing war in Bosnia. Therefore, there is little doubt that the author supported the political “project” of “greater Serbia” i.e. an argument that all the

territories in Croatia and Bosnia where Serbs made up a majority should be incorporated into the Serbian state. The project was promoted by the slogan “all Serbs in one state” (*svi Srbi u jednoj državi*). While “greater Serbia” project was an integral element of nationalist discourses I do not believe that it ever represented a real “project” or goal pursued by the regime. Like pronatalism, the concept of “greater Serbia” primarily served to mobilize nationalist sentiments and feelings.

The book has five sections: On Degenerative Phenomena among the Serbian People [*O degenreativnim pojavama u srpskom narodu*]; The Biggest Problem of Serbian People: A Catastrophic Fall of Births [*Najveći problem srpskog naroda: katastrofalni pad radjanja*]; Culture, Moral and Upbringing as Important Elements in a People’s Life [*Kultura, moral i vaspitanje kao značajni činioci u životu naroda*]; About the Minimal [Denominators of] the Serbian national Program [*O minimalnom srpskom nacionalnom programu*].

While the author never defined what exactly he meant by “degenerative phenomena” [*degenerativne pojave*], he discussed their causes and began with the infamous legacy of the Ottoman rule, one of the favorite explanations put forward in nationalist, and not only nationalist discourses to explain any ailments that have ever befallen the Serbian nation. Discussing the “consequences of centuries’ long enslavement under the Turks”, among other things, Vojnović asserted that “living for centuries under that fatalistic, lower race, Serbs have acquired many negative features...” (1995:39, stress mine). While racist undertones in reference to Muslims or anyone living east and south of Serbia had been far from rare before, in the mid 1990s racism become more open und unrestrained. The mirror image of this orientalist dichotomy between the rational and irrational, between civilized and backward is the occidental dichotomy between the materialist oriented west and spiritual east. According to Vojnović, Serbia occupies the better end of this dichotomy as well:

In the West material culture (civilization) dominates [while] in the East spiritual culture has a predominant influence. I believe that Serbian people belong more to eastern than to western culture, even though we are not far from the western civilization either (ibid.:149).

This is an example how within Serbian identity narratives two types of nationalism – modernist/rationalist, and neo-traditionalist (see Thomas,1999), are often intertwined. I further elaborate this point in the following chapter.

The other causes of “degenerative phenomena among the Serbs”, according to Vojnović, are modernization and the ‘white plague’ [*bela kuga*]. He argued that transition from a patriarchal to modern society is a complex process and that Serbs had experienced difficulties in adjusting to this change [*“Srbi se nisu najbolje snašli u teškom socijalnom preobražaju, u prelsaku iz patrijarhalnog u moderni život”*]. According to him, the process of modernization was particularly difficult for women. Without providing the full reference he quotes a prominent early twentieth century Serbian philosopher, Branislav Petronijević, as saying that “It will be difficult for our woman to adjust to this change from patriarchal to modern society and we will pay dearly for it.” Vojnović then elaborates:

We know that woman does not give life only to a single being, but also to the whole nation. Our woman was traditionally modest, placid, honorable and dignified (*dostojanstvena*). She loved [her] family and children. History of our nation provides many glorious examples of our women’s generosity, hard-work, self-sacrifice and courage...These are well established facts...But I want to bring to your attention [the fact that] not such a small number of our girls and women have rejected these traditional features of Serbian woman. ..They all aspire to emulate [personalities like] Elisabeth Taylor and yearn to live high of the hog, to travel internationally, to go to exclusive restaurants, to drink foreign beverages and smoke foreign cigarettes. Most often [thy desire] to live beyond their means (*žive izvan materijalnih mogućnosti*). They lack modesty in the way they dress and behave; they also have tendency to be lazy. In a word, they imitate the standard and way of life which is incompatible with our situation. For these women, hedonistic life [style] has a primacy over giving birth. They neglect motherhood and simply do not want to bear children [*prosto neće da radjaju*]; by this [they cause] the awful advent of the “white plague” among the Serbian people (1995:50-51).

Several characteristics of the popular science emerge from the above. First, there is a strong tendency to rely on the argument of the authority, rather than the vice versa. In this specific example, an undisputed authority in his field (metaphysics) was quoted, out of the context, and without the reference in support of Vojnović's conservative views on women and gender.

Second, disclaimers like “we know”, or “it is a well established fact” were frequently used in this kind of literature. They represent a recognizable strategy of public speech for their potential psychological effect on the listeners/readers⁹¹.

Finally the above citation is illustrative of discourses of woman's sacrifice⁹². According to this discourse, femininity and womanhood are defined by reproduction and nurturing which “naturally” go hand in hand with sacrifice for family and for nation. While this type of femininity used to adorn “traditional” Serbian women, “modern” women corrupted by emancipation and consumerism became selfish and indulgent, all at the expense of the well being of the nation.

Even the “white plague” (*bela kuga*), a disease that befell the Serbian people, has a feminine face, so to speak. As a rhetorical trope, it draws on the folk perceptions of the plague, a disease to which children are believed to be particularly vulnerable. This disease is not perceived as a neutral, natural force, but is rather personified as a vicious, greedy female⁹³ who takes away children with special pleasure. Since, Vojnović, attributed the “white plague” to “almost completely liberal abortion law”, women metaphorically emerged as selfish, irrational, killers of the innocent.

⁹¹ Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the militant and conservative Serbian Radical Party, was infamous for using such disclaimers while badmouthing his political opponents.

⁹² The discourse of female sacrifice was with greatest enthusiasm promoted by the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Here are the words of a bishop: “[T]he foundations of our homes dwell in mother's suffering and mothers efforts” (*Na mukama [majki] i [njihovim] trudovima počivju temelji naših domova*) (Blic, June, 29, 1995;12). The Serbian word *trud* translates both as effort and as birth pain. Thus, woman's suffering and sacrifice stem from her reproductive role.

⁹³ All nouns in Serbian/Croatian are gendered and the plague (*kuga*) is a feminine noun.

Another reason behind the low fertility, Vojnović saw in destruction of rural life accompanied by excessive growth of the cities and concomitant pauperization of the city population (ibid. 101). Following the tradition of the nineteenth century social science (see Horn, 1994), Vojnović claimed that

the countryside is the source of strength and vitality in every nation...It was our reproductive base which used to fill in [the void made by] war losses and to revitalize the cities. [It], however, has almost exhausted its reproductive potential. The youth has left to the cities...A few young men who stayed are not able to find a marital partner because majority of girls have left to the cities (1995:93).

Because the socialist government following the program of industrialization stimulated rural-urban migrations,

our countryside had been emptied in a very short time and was not able to maintain its traditional functions any more: material reproduction and human reproduction. (Vojnović, 1995:112).

This rural exodus emptied our villages which used to be a pool for rejuvenating the city population, whose [some] segments were undergoing [the processes of] degeneration and moral deformation (Ibid.:116).

Vojnović recreated here the image of a “sterile, decadent city” (see Hogan, 1994), and pure, fertile and morally superior countryside, so characteristic for the late nineteenth and early twentieth century European social science and literature. His peasant, while physically strong and morally superior is simpleminded and deficient in intellectual capacities as compared to his urban compatriots. But all these characteristics make him a vital, rejuvenating force of the nation.

Farm work affords the farmer with his exceptional physical characteristics, his robust, muscular body. But farm work is also responsible for his lack of skills that require a finer adjustment of the muscles. Because his physical work dominates his life, farmer does not use his full intellectual potential and for that reason he represents more of a muscular than of a brain type...The countryside has primarily material-reproductive function

because it produces food for the national community...It also regenerates society culturally and morally...The morality of the villagers is based on healthy and practical common sense. The often confused rational morality [of the city] can find its corrective in this instinctive morality (Vojnović, 1995:114).

The population exodus and a systematic neglect of agriculture by the communist regime, according to Vojnović, destroyed the countryside and thus deprived the Serbian nation of its most important reproductive “force”. Moreover, a few fertile women that have stayed in the countryside have as low fertility rates as urban women (ibid.:94). He argued that mandatory elementary education had contributed to the process of rural exodus, particularly of women, causing further decrease in the overall fertility rates. Moreover, once in the city, women become corrupted by emancipation:

A false understanding of women’s emancipation has created the abrupt decrease in births...A significant number of our women simply do not want to give birth. They claim that having children is a matter of individual choice and pejoratively refer to the attempt to make women primarily housemakers and baby producers arguing that these things are inappropriate for modern times. That is why we are going to disappear as a nation. I do not support the opinion of tsar Wilhelm that women are only for children, kitchen and church, but I strongly believe that woman’s duty is primarily in reproducing the human race. Even though the above message of tsar Wilhelm is superseded (*prevaziđjena*) nowadays, we could still adopt it, at least for a while, in order to overcome the current situation of biological collapse and revive the nation demographically (1995:99-100).

While Vojnović’s book is far from representative for Serbian demography or sociology it is illustrative of popular (social) science which I treat as another form of knowledge production which shaped identity narratives in Serbia. I argue that due to its accessibility this type of knowledge reached broader audiences and had even greater impact on identity narratives. In the following chapter, I show how this type of knowledge informed one unusual, locale level based project, which aimed to increase Serbian fertility rates.

IV. SEOSKI PRAG: A CASE STUDY

There were a few grass-roots and local initiatives designed to stimulate births and improve child care in Serbia, from the Professional Association for Population Studies to the Society for Breast-Feeding, to the Third Child Fund. The last one was founded by Željko Ražnatović Arkan, who until his assassination in early 2000 was one of organized-crime bosses in Belgrade and an indicted war criminal for crimes he and his paramilitaries committed during the war in Bosnia. Arkan himself had nine children by three or four different wives. His last wife, a popular folk singer, was the president of the Third Child Fund.

Because of the founder's background I did not feel comfortable and/or safe in exploring the Fund and its activities more directly. From what I understood from the media (which did not cover it extensively either), the Fund was giving short-term financial support to families with three or more children. Unfortunately I could not learn anything about the process of application, and selection, or how many families received this help. My only encounter with this organization came one day on the bus stop in front of a big market in Belgrade. While I was waiting for my bus a van with the sign "Third Child Fund" (written in English, with 'fund', misspelled as 'found')⁹⁴ parked in the street and out came a man, a recognizable street money dealer who engaged in a conversation with another man, a dealer working at this bus stop.

The episode only confirmed my suspicion that the Fund was but another channel for money laundering - it was common knowledge that Arkan, among other things, organized and controlled money laundering – and confirmed my decision not to explore its work. It is however important to mention the Fund here as an example of pervasiveness of population discourses, or

⁹⁴ It is interesting that a militant Serbian nationalist would use a foreign language specifically in association with a project which was presented as vital for the survival of the Serbian nation.

more precisely of discourses of insufficient births among the Serbs. This discourse entered almost all spheres of public life and became a currency for various political and business gains, alike. In Arkan's case the gain was potentially twofold – he founded a political party, *Stranka srpskog jedinstva* (Serbian Unity Party) and for a brief period of time in the early 1990s was an elected member of the Serbian Parliament.

Grass-roots participants and local level initiatives, from concerned individuals to NGOs, and local governments, professed a desire to contribute, one way or the other, to increasing births among the Serbs. They created discourses and, to a lesser degree, practices targeting primarily Serbian women. The end result was supposed to be twofold – to decrease the number of abortions and to increase the number of births. More often than not it was believed that the former would automatically lead to the second. One organization, however, sticks out precisely because it changed the target population in more than one way and consequently received a lot of public attention.

At one level, this organization, *Seoski prag* (The Village Threshold), turned its attention away from Serbian women, to Serbian men. Not just any men, though – *Seoski prag* was primarily concerned with rural men. Ignored by (rural) women as potential marital partners, these men, it was argued, were deprived of the possibility to reproduce: “[In rural areas] there are many men aged between 20 and 40 who have no perspective of marrying and forming a family home because there are almost no girls around them. The girls leave for the city in search of a nicer and easier life.”⁹⁵

Even though the focus of attention is on men, Serbian (rural) women are implicated as a reason for the dire straits of these men. Women are thus present as active agents and mobile subjects, both traditional attributes of masculinity and men are represented as victims of

⁹⁵ *Seoski prag*, Program , pp. 1. I analyze the Program in more detail later.

women's actions, their (masculine) identity as challenged. This representation is no different from the one created through demographic discourses analyzed earlier, which represent women as the enemy of the nation. However, here the nation is more directly defined through men. More specifically the nation is defined as a patrilineage, a point to which I return later. The real novelty introduced by *Sesoki prag*, though, is the idea of replacing Serbian women. A *Seoski prag* activist stated: "since many of our girls do not want to hook up with village lads, even when they are well off, we opted [to look] for Russian and Ukrainian women, who are very interested [in marrying them] to fill this void" (*Politika*, May 8, 1997:14)

This idea provoked a lot of public attention with a whole spectrum of responses and opened up an at times stormy debate in the media. The project itself and the debate that surrounded it generated various ideas about the nation, gender and reproduction. While demographic discourses had often cast ethnic Albanians as the enemy who overpowers the Serbs by excessive births, the saga of bringing foreign women to marry Serbian men is, among other things, a story of a search for friends and allies for the Serbian state and nation. The continuum between these two discourses is provided by the fact that Serbian women remain the internal enemy, not only those women who decide not to reproduce more, but also those who leave the villages, thus depriving many village men of the possibility to reproduce at all. Moreover, in many minds an intergenerational female conspiracy was blamed for lack of women in the villages: "Mothers instruct their daughters, from very early on, that they should be good students [*da uče školu*] and run away from the villages."⁹⁶

I learned about *Seoski prag* and its unusual proposal from the media and started to follow the story. After I learned that *Seoski prag* was actually bringing a group of women from Ukraine

⁹⁶ From my interview with Pedja. I have heard the exactly same sentence on many other occasions from both men and women.

to visit a village in Western Serbia, I decided to pay a visit to the organization and to attend the event. As it happened, a friend from Belgrade who grew up in Užice, a regional center in Western Serbia where the organization was founded, knew both presidents of *Seoski prag* - the president of the Organization (Pedja⁹⁷) and the president of the Executive Committee (Majić).⁹⁸ My friend's recommendation allowed me to cross the organization's threshold – I was able to make an interview with one of the presidents and became their guest during the week I spent in the village together with a small group of Ukrainians (nine including the translator and two male drivers).

In this section I analyze the program and activities of *Seoski prag*, as well as the response to its actions at various levels of the social structure – from the local community to the national press. Through the many different representations of *Seoski prag* I discuss competing ideas about the nation, state and gender that they reveal. In addition, I show how reactions of individual women and men often created a topsy-turvy situation on the ground, at least when measured by the standards and aims established by *Seoski prag* and its leadership. The analysis is based on participant observation, semi-structured interviews with the actors immediately involved in the project and on textual analysis of articles that reported on the *Seoski prag* activities and on the visit of women from Ukraine. I have collected and analyzed all the articles which appeared in two dailies - *Politika* and *Večernje novosti* and in two weeklies – *NIN* and *Vreme* for the period of 1996-1998.

⁹⁷ While all other names are pseudonyms, I use the actual names of the two officials of *Seoski prag* whose identities due to their public roles is impossible to conceal. I further refer to the president of the organization by his first name, Pedja, and to the president of the Executive committee by his last name, Majić, they way everyone else addressed them.

⁹⁸ Even though the Organization seems to have an elaborate structure (the general assembly, the executive committee with a president, delegates (*poverenici*) and offices in 39 counties, and the president of the organization) my impression was in agreement with the popular opinion that the two presidents, Pedja and Majić, ran the Organization single-handedly.

A. MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS – ACT ONE

Seoski prag was founded in the Fall of 1996, and the first article about it appeared in the main Serbian daily *Politika* in December of the same year. *Politika*, at the time, was controlled by the regime of Slobodan Milošević. Both the text and the accompanying caricature use irony to express an ambivalent attitude that would continue to frame not only media coverage, but also reactions of institutions and individuals regarding the central project of *Seoski prag* – finding potential wives abroad for unmarried village men. The irony can be detected by the choice of words. The title, *Ruskinje za neženjene brdjane*, (Russian Women for Unmarried Hillbillies), uses a pejorative term (*brdjani*) for village men. If *seljak* (peasant) is a common insult among the urban dwellers, *brdjanin* (which means a peasant from the mountainous regions) is a somewhat stronger version of that insult. In either case the implication is that a person is crude, uneducated and uncultured but the hint of backwardness is much stronger in *brdjanin* (hillbilly) as an insult than in *seljak*.

The subtitle: “Newly Founded Organization from Užice Launches a Fight Against the ‘White Plague’. – A Hundred Dinars for a Girl” [*Novoosnovana užička organizacija krenula u borbu protiv “bele kuge” - sto dinara za devojku*], suggests two things. The expression ‘to launch a fight’ [*krenuti u borbu*] in this context implies the pretentious character of the project and its inappropriate means and methods. The phrase draws on the socialist political rhetoric of “revolutionary struggle”, which created the often used expression “to launch a fight against [a specific] social evil”. Used here the phrase evokes the socialist past and its methods of approaching complex social problems by ‘attacking’ them with simplified, short-term solutions. Thus, the message goes, the whole project as well as the organization and its leadership carry the

baggage of the socialist past in both ideology and methods. Reference to money, taken out of context, implies a business transaction, and a dubious one, rather than social activism and patriotism, which the organization's leaders preferred to stress.

The overhead reads "The Organization 'The Village Threshold'", Seeks Prospective Brides for Village Lads [*Udruženje 'Seoski prag' traži udavače za seoske momke*]. The Serbian term *udavača* (for a prospective bride) traditionally simply designated a woman of marital age or a girl eligible for marriage. In current Serbian, however, the term has mostly a pejorative connotation, designating a woman chasing a husband. The pejorative meaning of the term has at least two sources. One is in woman's active pursuit of a husband instead of, according to dominant gender mores, the more appropriate and becoming course of passively waiting for one. It is believed that if a woman is good enough she will have many suitors and will not have to demean herself by searching for one.

In addition, a woman's pursuit of a husband is often interpreted as a quest for a breadwinner, which enables her to assume an economically passive role. This, however, ran against the socialist work ethic according to which both men and women were supposed to take an active part in the labor force and to equally contribute to socialist development and to family income. The pejorative character of the term is, thus, underpinned by a blend of traditional and socialist values and ideas. The irony in the title and in the subtitle is further maintained by suggesting passivity of the Serbian village men: they are not active agents in the pursuit, but rather passive recipients – someone else (i.e. *Seoski prag*) is going to find and bring them wives. While, again, this was a common practice in times when families would arrange most marriages, the socialist reorganization of marriage as a matter of individual choice made wife-finding skills an element of masculine dominance.

The article itself is rather short and more descriptive/informative than ironic, giving excerpts from interviews with the two presidents of *Seoski prag* who explain how they see the background of the problem (“low birth rates in rural areas”) and the aims of the organization. We also learn that the hundred dinars the subtitle refers to (\$ 2) is a kind of membership fee for men who want to be considered for marrying foreign women.

The accompanying caricature is even more ironic than the title, and also plays upon urban-rural tensions and miscommunications. The caricature shows two men. One is standing behind a desk (he could be either a politician or an academic), leaning forward and tapping the desk in impatience. Above his head is a diagram with a declining line (an allusion to the declining fertility rates). In despair, he is watching another man, middle-aged, in a traditional peasant costume, who is closely examining pictures of young women in revealing swimming suits, hanging on the wall.



Figure 6: Politika, December 2, 1996

Apparently the peasant is not able to make up his mind and is sweating both in torment and in anticipation of sexual pleasures. Together with the allusion to the money payment from

the subtitle, this allusion on sexual pleasure may suggest that the whole project is a cover up for a more dubious business. Or it may suggest that whatever the intentions of the organizers, village men will see in it an opportunity for easy access to unattached sex. After all, foreign (in this case Russian) women in the pictures are not represented as nurturing mothers, but rather as sexualized females.⁹⁹ The apparent tension between the title and the caricature (which is inserted in the text), on one hand, and the text itself on the other, serves probably to test the waters and leaves enough room to either fully embrace or fully reject the foreign brides in the future. “As the ‘respectable’ regime paper [*Politika*’s] content is usually light on propaganda. It generally addresses controversial local issues by ignoring them [and] by reporting vaguely...” (Gordy, 1999:64, stress added).¹⁰⁰

Only eight months later, the same author wrote another article on the same topic for the same paper (*Politika*, 5 August 1997), but in a rather different manner. The irony has disappeared, and terms like *brdjani* and *udavače* which appear in this article are linguistically framed in ways which erase the pejorative connotation. The overhead, “How to Halt the Declining Population Rates in Serbian Villages”, [*Kako zaustaviti pad nataliteta u srpskim selima*], using the term *natalitet* [natality] for population growth, gives a scientific credibility to the project, unlike the first article where the diagram which appears in the accompanying caricature together with the pictures of half-naked women, actually implies a flawed if not quasi science behind it.

While the first article states that *Seoski prag* intends to look in other parts of Serbia, in Republika Srpska and in Russia, for prospective brides, the second article mentions only Russian

⁹⁹ On the difference between the maternal body and the female (sexualized) body as represented in Serbian media see Žarkov, 1999, n.d.

¹⁰⁰ *Politika* had a more propagandistic character in the early 1990s during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia (Gordy, 1999; Thompson, M. 1999)

and Ukrainian women. Moreover, according to the article, when the first group of 150 Serbian villagers would go to Ukraine and Russia, as was planned at the time, they would each have an opportunity to choose from among at least five women. The figure allegedly reflected the gender imbalance in Ukraine as well as interest among their women in marrying Serbian men. This article thus restores agency to the peasant men that had been denied to them in the previous one. But to regain the agency they would have to travel to Ukraine, because there are women there waiting and willing to be chosen. Ukrainian women are rendered passive, hence more appropriate marital partners.

The second article mentions the alleged support that *Seoski prag* received for the project from the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and from the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. The article also states that many unmarried men from all over Serbia have expressed their interest to join the project and “are eagerly waiting for their turn [to go to Ukraine]”. The article ends on an optimistic if romantic note: “This could re-ignite the flame [which had been] extinguished from the hearths of our barren village homes.”

The significant change in tone of reporting about the *Seoski prag* initiative, in the same paper and by the same journalist, only confirms the ambiguity that would continue to underlie responses and attitudes not only of various outside commentators but also of those who were directly involved in the project. I analyze possible reasons of this ambiguity below.

B. SELF-REPRESENTATION - THE PROGRAM

The name of the organization, *Seoski prag* (Village Threshold), is a reference to ‘*kućni prag*’ (house threshold) which as a trope in folk narratives primarily evokes belonging. A saying “The house threshold is a tall mountain” [*Kućni prag je golema planina*] bespeaks the difficulty of

leaving the family home. Many rituals mark a bride's crossing the threshold of her new home. Thus the very name of the organization indicates its main goal, marrying off Serbian rural men, and at the same time designates rural Serbia as the hearth of the nation.

In January 1998, *Seoski prag* contacted various individuals and institutions in order to solicit cooperation and support. The cover letter stated that “[we] can halt the dying of Serbia only if we build young families, tie people to villages and create conditions for those who have a difficult life in the cities to return to the threshold of their ancestors.” This statement simultaneously defines the organization's aims and creates a romantic image of the true Serbianhood as rural and family life. “The overall prosperity of Serbia - states the letter - depend[s] on the survival and progress of the rural family.” The letter is accompanied by their program, reports from past activities and a list of future plans. The introductory part of the program describes the grim situation in rural Serbia, particularly in the mountainous regions of western Serbia: agricultural production is in decline due to persistent external pressures and migrations to the cities; rural infrastructure is underdeveloped and backward; the most capable and most vital segments of the [rural] population have been leaving for years; the rural family is dying out. Most importantly, the family is dying out because women are leaving villages for easier life in the city.

Among the specific goals that the Program sets up are: to bring life back to the villages and to halt further migration of young people from rural areas; to bring back an economically active population to the village; to promote scientific knowledge in rural areas; to build up the infrastructure, revive agricultural production, and build medical and veterinarian facilities; to revive elementary schools; and to preserve the cultural tradition and adjust its development to

modern living standards. In order to give an example and to present to the outside world how their ideas work in practice, *Seoski prag* proposes to build an experimental village. It would

serve as an example of how to organize life and work in mountainous regions. At the same time we could bring domestic and international delegations to this village, where they would have an opportunity to learn on the spot about the ideas of the social organization *Seoski prag*.¹⁰¹

The tension between the desire to join (Western) European social developments, on one hand and to preserve national identity and individuality on the other was common in post 1989 (Eastern) Europe. Rural identities became particularly problematic in this context. In nationalist discourses rural culture is usually perceived as representative of nation's tradition, its essence and authenticity. Pastoral images of rural life are an integral part of this picture. Much less becoming images of rural life, however, emerge on the opposite side of the same coin. Here, peasant cultures appear backward, even primitive, holding back whole nations in their attempts to build a 'true' European identity. Seemingly, *Seoski prag* wants to bridge this gap and bring the urban, modern, and rural, traditional cultures closer together. Along the way, as the analysis that follows will show, rural dwellers are denied almost all subjectivity and the story of marrying off middle-aged bachelors is paradigmatic in that respect. It is also paradigmatic for the complex relationship between the "masculine rural" and the "rural masculine"¹⁰² which is inherent in most nationalist projects and which was recreated by discourses related to *Seoski prag* and its unusual project.

¹⁰¹ *Seoski prag*, Program, pp. 3

¹⁰² According to Campbell and Bell, "masculine rural" refers to masculine identities of rural men, while "rural masculine" signifies rural aspects of the dominant (hegemonic) concept of masculine identity in a specific society (2000:532). They argue that rural images are often used in images of "real men": a logger cutting a tree, the Marlboro cowboy cantering over the plains, the hairy warrior, the soldier defending the fields of the motherland....Especially important in all these images is how the "association with the rurality bring an air of the natural to masculinity legitimizing it as allegedly in touch with truths that are deeper than the merely social" (Ibid. pp. 540)

After detailing its ideology based on market competition, and specific measures that government should undertake in order to stimulate agricultural production, the program concludes that the project has

national, economic, cultural and defense significance. [The proposed program] is designed to strengthen the defense system because it will contribute to the revival of the mountainous rural regions and [will help them] gain economic strength and redefine their role within the defense system. We should be aware that in Serbia as a whole there are over 160,000 lads of marital age and the goal of the organization is to help [each of] them start a family and revive the village hearth.

It remains unclear in the Program what the relationship is between marrying off middle-aged bachelors and the defense system. We can only assume that it has something to do with demographics. As it turns out the defense system here involves more than demographics. The point was clarified by the organization's officials on several occasions in the media, as well as in my interview: "If 30.000 Ukrainian women marry our men, than we can expect 300.000 volunteers (their fathers and brothers) to come and help Serbia's defense if needed."¹⁰³

Another explanation was never mentioned publicly but was brought up in my interview with Pedja. The region in Western Serbia where the whole project started borders with Bosnia and Sandžak, a region in south-western Serbia with a majority Slavic Muslim population, an ethnic group which was at the time struggling for more adequate representation in the Serbian legislative and government. Villages in the borderlands (between Sandžak and Western Serbia) are ethnically mixed. Due to different population trends and migration patterns, Muslim households tend to be significantly bigger than Serbian ones. Adopting the mathematics developed by demographers for projections of population growth in Serbia, based on the general fertility rates, the officials from *Seoski prag* calculated that in approximately thirty years those villages would be emptied of Serbs. Pedja told me that

¹⁰³ This exact quote was repeated in many interviews that Pedja gave for the media.

extremely low birth rates in the region [constitute] a real danger. In no time Serbs may be outnumbered and overpowered by Muslims. In a village which, for example, nowadays has only three Muslim households, but with ten members [each], it is easy to calculate that in only thirty years Muslims will make a majority in that village.¹⁰⁴

The implication is that the Muslim population will consequently develop secessionist appetites and further threaten the territorial integrity of Serbia. In order to avoid this, Serbian falling fertility needed not only to be stopped but also reversed. Thus the concern for the demographics of the rural families is inseparable from concerns for the territorial integrity of the Serbian state in a context in which the Kosovo Albanians claimed political independence based on demographic superiority in the Province.

Under the heading “Future Tasks” the document explained how Serbian men and Ukrainian women would be brought together into marriage. *Seoski prag* would organize groups of Serbian bachelors to travel to Ukraine, and would also bring groups of Ukrainian women to Serbia. These trips, however, would not be quite the same. Ukrainian women (and their parents) would come to Serbia for vacations but also as seasonal agricultural workers and/or employees for small enterprises in the region. *Sesoki prag* would then organize gatherings [*kulturno-zabavni život*] in order for “young people to meet and get to know each other, all with the aim of starting the family” (Ibid: 7) Serbian men, on the other hand, would go to Ukraine exclusively to look for potential brides and no other pretext was necessary (tourism or seasonal work).

After preparations, [Serbian] lads would go to Ukraine where they would [meet and] spend some time with the girls [in the organization of *Seoski prag*] and would meet their parents. If and when mutual feelings developed [they] would go [back] to Serbia together and one of the girl’s parents would accompany them. After they arrived in Belgrade one of the garment companies would dress the girls nicely for the collective wedding (ibid., stress added).

¹⁰⁴ The quote is from the interview with me.

It is not clear right away what ‘preparations’ (of men) entail. The following paragraph, however, explains them as health (including psychological) examinations and/or education conducted by teams of experts (made up of sociologists, pedagogues and physicians). This was never reiterated for the media, nor mentioned in my interview with Pedja. What was repeatedly stated for the media and also maintained in my interview, was that women coming to Serbia are undergoing complex health exams, including the test for HIV. Even though, to my knowledge, none of this happened in reality the leadership of *Seoski prag* persistently recreated this narrative in order to dispel the rumors about the compromised health of the Ukrainian women.¹⁰⁵

I argue, however, that the narrative has a different origin. It belongs to national discourses in which the Serbian nation is framed by the state, science and religion. Thus the *Seoski prag* leadership felt urged to give scientific credibility to its program. This also explains the idea of “preparations” for men by experts and the building of an experimental village. While during the socialist era science and church were unlikely bedfellows in Serbia, today they are two of the three pillars that together frame the nation. While religion connects the nation with its history, culture and tradition, the state and science define it as modern. Hence, *Sesoki prag* reproduces and links together two competing images of the Serbian nation which dominated political struggles through the 1990s: modernist/rationalist and neo-traditionalist (Thomas, 1999).

Seski prag’s projection of modernization of the Serbian nation has its subjects – urban elites, and its objects – rural dwellers. Its leadership counted themselves among the former and rarely failed to mention the alleged support of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Academy of Arts and Sciences and the state. More often than not they would be mentioned together. ”Patriarch Pavle gave us his blessing, seventeen members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and

¹⁰⁵ I return to this point later when I analyze the representations of Ukrainian women in the media.

Sciences, (including Miloš Macura)¹⁰⁶ are members of our organization and we also have support of the Ministry for Internal Affairs and of the Army.”¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that the alleged support was never officially confirmed or denied by these three institutions. Their individual members, however, dispensed conflicting comments about the Serbian-Ukrainian marriage connection, confirming yet again “a lack of unifying national values” (Thomas, *ibid.*:5) in Serbia in the 1990s.

If these three institutions (the state, science and church) frame the Serbian nation, its content is made up of territory and blood. But not any blood. Serbian blood is primarily male blood and only Serbian men can sire Serbian children. If the nation here is represented by metaphors of family (see McClintok, 1993; Verdery, 1998) that family is a patrilineage. And as in a true patrilineage, women are brought in from outside. Even though belonging to the family is determined exclusively through birth, the role of the mother in this matter is rendered insignificant by the dominant kinship ideology. It, however, is far from insignificant where from the wife is brought.

First, she has to be of the same faith, and even more importantly from a family with whom an alliance is sought. The seemingly ‘natural’ choice for *Seoski prag* would have been (Serbian) refugees from Bosnia and Croatia many of whom were young and widowed women with no resources. As refugees, however, these women did not ‘belong’ to any state-cum-family any more and were not able to provide the alliance sought. Besides, the alliance is usually sought with somebody bigger and/or more powerful, which excluded neighboring Bulgaria (both Slavic and Orthodox) as a potential candidate. The leadership of *Seoski prag* was going to establish kin ties between Serbia and a Slavic, Orthodox, military superpower that was often, without much

¹⁰⁶ Miloš Macura is the most prominent Serbian demographer and at the time was president of the Council for Population and Family established by the Serbian government.

¹⁰⁷ From my interview with Pedja. The same statement was repeated on many other occasions in public.

historical grounding, regarded “the traditional friend of Serbia”. Their first choice, hence, was Russia, but they could not find an institution or organization there that would support and participate in making marriage arrangements between Russian women and Serbian men. So Ukraine served as the second best choice, and the Society for Ukrainian-Serbian Friendship agreed to provide assistance.¹⁰⁸

The fact that all of women there (especially those from the western parts) would not necessary be Orthodox, was obliterated by the fact that Ukraine was a nuclear power. This, however, never surfaced in *Seoski prag*'s communications with the broader public. What did surface was a story about 18th century emigrations from Serbia to Ukraine. “History tells us about a big emigration of Serbs to Ukraine in the 18th century. They adjusted there nicely. Now, it is time we get some of our blood back from these areas.”¹⁰⁹ Blood here is different from the male blood previously mentioned. Here, it is a metaphor for feminine reproductive potential.

Ukraine turned out to be a convenient choice for more than one reason which is apparent in the reports from the two visits that the president of *Seoski prag* and president of its Executive Committee made first to Russia and Ukraine in June of 1997, and then to Ukraine in October of the same year. There is a striking difference in how the Serbian village is represented here and in the Program. While the Program paints Serbian villages in grim colors, they appear bright in the reports.

The aim of the visit[s] was to advertise the attractiveness of Serbia and of the Serbian village; [to advertise] the loveliness of rural life through the popularization of the rural family...A documentary [that was shown on Ukrainian television] depicts the economic prosperity of the Serbian village and the life of the lads – candidates for marriage, so that the girls and their parents can see that [the girls] are not going into uncertainty but rather

¹⁰⁸ The leadership of *Seoski prag*, often stressed the alleged support and cooperation with *Dia*, a Ukrainian women's organization. I could not gather any evidence about either the organization itself, or the alleged cooperation and its forms. The Society for Ukrainian-Serbian Friendship, however, did organize the first group of Ukrainian women to Serbia, and the group's guide/translator was a member of the Society.

¹⁰⁹ The president of the Executive Committee, Majić, in the welcoming speech from the Ukrainians.

[into] healthy Serbian families, meadows, forests and hollows, where they will be able to fulfill their dreams (ibid.:4 stress added).

Indirectly, the city here appears as an unsafe place, at least for (foreign) women.

The apparent tension in the presentations of Serbian rural life reveals the intersection of two hierarchical oppositions in the rhetoric created by *Seoski prag*: urban-rural and west-east, which in this case translates to less poor vs. more poor. Thus the grim image of rural Serbia in the program of *Seoski prag*, is relative to the privileged status of the urban. This image serves as an implicit critique of socialism for destroying the “essence” of the Serbian nation, the “purity” of rural life. At the same time socialism created a privileged position for Yugoslavia, and consequently for Serbia too, within socialist Eastern Europe, due primarily to higher living standards which included enough and greater variety of food; and due to individual freedoms that citizens of Yugoslavia enjoyed.

From this perspective, the image of rural Serbia where collectivization had never been completed, and where individual farms were kept as the dominant unit of agricultural production, emerges brighter. More importantly it emerges as a potentially attractive destination for those (preferably women) from the former Soviet republics, precisely because it appears more modern, offering a better standard and a more comfortable life. After all, Serbia is west of Ukraine, a fact which from the perspective of the orientalist symbolic geography that dominates public spaces in Serbia receives an ontological status of being modern, progressive and democratic (see Said, 1979; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992).

“In terms of cultural representations [...] one might envision a system of nesting orientalisms, in which there exists a tendency for each region to view cultures and religions to the south and east of it as more conservative or primitive” (Bakić-Hyaden and Hayden,

1992:4).¹¹⁰ The orientalizing of the east (Russia, Ukraine) in our case is primarily based on economic disparities, or more precisely on relatively higher living standards in Serbia. As a young man married to a Russian woman stated: “Our people feel superior to Russians because they consider them very poor.”¹¹¹ As Bringa noted in her study of a Bosnian village, being poor often “has the connotation of being ignorant, uneducated, and miserable” (Bringa, 1995:59).

All of this could render Ukrainian women polluting and undesirable within the designated national borders. The question is why the *Seoski prag* leadership (considering its project of rejuvenating the Serbian nation) does not perceive them as such. The answer to this question lies in *Seoski prag*'s perception of the Serbian nation as the patriarchal, *zadruga* type family. This type of family produces gender images according to which women are inherently polluting and represent a constant threat for the group's cohesion (Denich, 1974, Erlich, 1966, Greamux, 1994).

Within such a gender system it is irrelevant where the women come from – their behavior has to be controlled and movement restricted, all of which is easier maintained when they are from far away (Denich, *ibid.*, Erlich, *ibid.*). Ukrainian women in this context have an additional advantage. While inherently dangerous and polluting, unlike Serbian women they are not corrupted by “too much modernization”. Finally, as nationally devalued¹¹² they would bring superior status to Serbian men and restore the patriarchal order. So in the eyes of the *Seoski prag*

¹¹⁰ See also Bakić-Hayden, 1995 on how this system of nesting orientalisms operated within the former Yugoslavia at the time of its disintegration.

¹¹¹ This couple met while the husband worked in Russia for a Serbian company. Many local construction enterprises had projects in Russia and more than a few marriages like this one exist in the region as a consequence. I visited the couple together with Pedja on our way to Gornja Dobrinja. He wanted to show me an example of a successful international marriage as a justification for the project proposed by his organization.

¹¹² In order to illustrate and reinforce the image of national superiority based on a relative economic advantage the *Seoski prag* leadership often cited how even women with university education were interested in coming to live in Serbian villages. This claim was based on a few examples. One that was particularly often mentioned was a former flight attendant for Aeroflot (Russian airliner) who settled down in a village in Western Serbia after marrying a local man who had worked in Russia.

leadership Serbian and Ukrainian women are equally polluting, but the latter may present a lesser threat for the patriarchal order. Better yet, they are able to restore the patriarchal order through their perceived inferior and hence submissive status.

The work of *Seoski prag* can be related to the work of international matchmaking agencies and the institution of 'mail-order brides (see Constable, 2003).

Mail-order brides' firms have been flourishing because of the construction of oriental women as the 'perfect wives' – beautiful, docile, hard working and dependent – for isolated and timid western men. Such marriages can be seen to be the only opportunity for those women (and often their families) to escape from lives of incredible hardship in the society of origin" (Yuval-Davis, 1997:52).

For some Western men, usually those unwilling and/or incapable of accepting change in gender roles, relations and conceptions, images of Asian women as described above, make them preferable marital partners. On the other hand of this equation are Asian women for whom this type of marrying-out represents a channel for upward social mobility. In the context of unequal power relations between the East and the West, moving westward means moving upward. Not a small role in these women's expectations is played by their perception of the West and Western men as less patriarchal.¹¹³ Agencies involved in international matchmaking are, in a way, responding to a market demand, catering to the (differential) needs of individual women in the East and Men in the West. They are for-profit organizations and they charge for their services generous amounts of money.

The first attempt at the international matchmaking in Serbia while reproducing images of the East and West as described above in which Serbia emerges as "Western", differs from the foregoing pattern in the last two points. It was organized by *Seoski prag*, a non-profit, social

¹¹³ How are these opposite and opposing expectations negotiated within the marriages would make an interesting research topic.

organization¹¹⁴; and even though its presumed “clients” were individual Serbian men and Ukrainian/Russian women, the organization was catering to what its leadership perceived to be the needs of the nation. Since the concept of the nation is always gendered the discourses created by *Seoski prag* and its matchmaking-project, as well as by public responses to the project, necessarily espoused images about men and women and about their different roles in the nation.

C. MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS – ACT TWO

Most media coverage of *Seoski prag* and its program(s) appeared during the visit of a small group of Ukrainian women to the village of Gornja Dobrinja in western Serbia. The visit was organized by *Seoski prag* and took place during the second week of February 1998. The choice of the place could not have been more symbolic. The village is the birthplace of Miloš Obrenović who, in the second half of the 19th century, established the foundations for the development of the modern Serbian state. He was also the founder of the first Serbian modern royal dynasty, which was eliminated and replaced, by the Karadjordjević dynasty in the early twentieth century. Starting a Serbian-Ukrainian marriage connection there meant reaching back to the roots of the nation and state; it meant starting all over again while erasing not only the 40 years of socialist history but also the 60 years of history of the common Yugoslav state. Finally, Miloš Obrenović symbolizes the peasant roots of the Serbian nation.¹¹⁵

While Politka, after the second article referred to earlier, continued to report on *Seoski prag* and their initiative vaguely and ambiguously, two news weeklies, NIN and Vreme, were

¹¹⁴ While Serbian legislation at the time was already using new classifications according to which activities of *Seoski prag* would go under the heading “non governmental”/“non profit” sector, the Program and its leadership insisted on using the old, socialist era bound, concept of “social organization.

¹¹⁵ Miloš Obrenović led the Second and successful Serbian uprising against the Ottomans in the early nineteenth century. Combining military actions and diplomacy he managed to gain first, significant amount of political autonomy and eventually full independence from the Empire.

extremely critical in their reporting. *Vreme* is the oldest independent magazine in Serbia and the sharpest and most consistent critic of the regime of Slobodan Milošević, and of Serbian nationalism in general. It was founded in 1990 and most of its original staff were journalists who left *NIN* and *Politika* after the regime took control of them (Gordy, 1999; Thompson, 1999).

[I]t does not hold to an ideology of ‘objective’ reporting, [r]ather, its highly opinionated and widely researched articles are often characterized by irony, sarcasm and bitterness and are generally consistent in anti-nationalist and pro-European orientation (Gordy, *ibid.*:69).

NIN on the other hand, while for the most part critical of the regime after 1994 when it severed all ties with the *Politika* publishing house, never completely eschewed the national agenda (Gordy, *ibid.*; Thompson, *ibid.*). When *Politika* signaled a possibility of the regime’s at least tacit support for *Seoski prag*, these two magazines became critical out of reflex – nothing initiated and/or supported by the regime could have gained their support. Their critiques, however, were somewhat different.

Vreme, in its only article (February 21 1998), presented the whole story of Serbian-Ukrainian marriages as a travesty, mocking everything *Seoski prag* might stand for. The marriage project appeared in *Vreme* as yet another example of nationalist megalomania. The article was titled: “Karlobag¹¹⁶ is ours” [*Karlobag je naš*], and subtitled, “Five prospective brides from Ukraine have arrived in Serbia and if everything goes according to the plan and program – we will become in-laws with the all of Ukraine.” *NIN*, on the other hand, pointed to the anti-national character of the project. Some of the subtitles that appeared in *NIN*’s two articles are illustrative: “Who are those that Insist on Radioactive Demographic Politics?”; “The Survival of Serbhood”.

¹¹⁶ Karlobag is a town in Croatia which in the rhetoric of Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of an extreme nationalist, right wing party, marked (together with Virovitica, also in Croatia) the western border of the Serbian nation-cum-state.

Both magazines presented the Serbian-Ukrainian marriage initiative as a lucrative business deal concocted by the two presidents of *Seoski prag*. Marrying middle-age rural bachelors was, according to these two magazines, just a cover up for bringing in Ukrainian women for prostitution.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the borders of the eastern lager countries ‘fell down’ as well and the people from over here seized the opportunity and took off to see the West. For many, Serbia and its roadside ‘establishments’ where the last and only West. Young and eager for work and money, Russian and Ukrainian women brought a real freshness there [to the ‘establishments’]. Realizing that an average Serbian household head [*domaćin*] showed a certain kind of interest for the ‘exterior and interior’ of these women [...] some fervent ‘businessmen’ sensed an opportunity for a good venture. [They] have founded agencies for the revival of the neglected Serbian village... (*Vreme*, Ibid. pp. 24).

NIN published two articles during the visit of Ukrainian women to Gornja Dobrinja. Both articles, textually and visually, construct Ukrainian women as both morally compromised and genetically challenged and thus polluting. Both articles (each two pages long) start with an illustration, placed above the title and occupying approximately one third of the page

The opening illustration in the first article (*NIN*, February, 12 1998) shows a drawing of a hilly landscape and a voluptuous, naked woman stretched out in front of it. Her smile and her look are seductive. Her curves match the landscape. The whole landscape is, in fact, made of voluptuous female body parts, which, somewhat like in a Rorschach test, the viewer does not realize right away. The sun is shining from the horizon, but the landscape remains dark, symbolizing the darkness of feminine sexual desire. The illustration thus creates an image of woman as a sexualized female. Since it is accompanied by overhead which reads “The Serbian-Ukrainian Connection”, and the title, “Brides from Kirovgorad,”¹¹⁷ there is a little doubt about the nationality of the woman stretched out in front of what is presumably a Serbian landscape.

¹¹⁷ Kirovgrad is a town in western Ukraine

The illustration also suggests that this sexuality of ‘other’ women may saturate Serbian soil and its moral landscape.

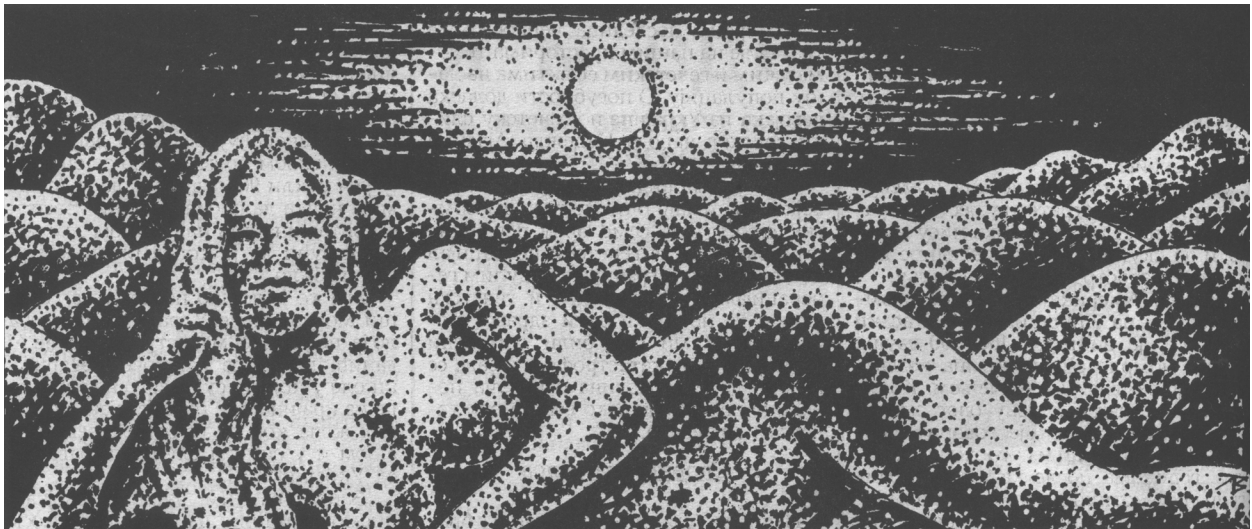


Figure 7: NIN, February 12, 1998

The text below the illustration, however, “admits” that Ukrainian women are not only whores (as implied by the illustration) – there are women in Ukraine who could fulfill the dreams of Serbian rural men who “dream about a woman devoted to the home and family and more than anything else about a woman who wants and is able to bear children” (NIN, February 12 1998,:24) But, according to the author, these women are not to come.

“[It] is unlikely that a timid Ukrainian girl [one that would fulfill the dreams of Serbian men] will leave her village and parents and just like that marry a stranger, thousand kilometers away from her home. For, what if it goes phut [*šta ako pukne tikva*] and there is no money to return back home” (ibid.: 24)?”

”Decent rural lads”, claims the author, are thus “set up for treachery and an immense disappointment”. For women likely to come over from Ukraine are those traveling westwards in

order to find employment in strip bars. “This type of girl hardly fits in Serbo-Ukrainian version of ‘pastoral love¹¹⁸” (stress added.). The author does not mention that, more often than not, “this type of girls” is brought to Serbia and other ‘Western’ destinations on false pledges. Promised legitimate jobs in exchange for substantial fees, they find themselves forced into prostitution and at the mercy of criminals who organize and control international chains of women and drug trafficking (Kobelyanska, 1999; La Strada Program: 1998).

The article, however, represents these women as adventurers, who actively pursue the ‘easy life’ of waitresses or strippers, unlike timid, nurturing girls who know better. This opposition is informed by ambiguous notions of femininity – woman, be she Serbian, Ukrainian or any other, always has the potential of being either a mother or a whore. Žarkov (1997), argues persuasively that both notions of femininity and its very ambiguity are instrumental in the construction of ethnicity.

The main thrust of *NIN*’s first article, however, is the narrative of Ukrainian women’s alleged compromised health: they are either sterile or genetically defective as a consequence of radiation released by the Chernobyl nuclear incident. Through this narrative the article constructs Ukrainian women as biologically polluting but also implicates the Serbian regime into an international conspiracy aimed against the Serbian nation.

The author states that Ukrainian women, if brought to Serbia, would damage the genetic makeup of the Serbs and quotes a woman, a nuclear physicist¹¹⁹ in support:

This is a genocidal act. To bring girls with damaged chromosomes is a perfidious plan cooked up not only to degrade the genetic potential of Serbian people in the future, but also to change [their] genetic makeup so that it can not [produce] healthy offspring. We have also been harmed by the Chernobyl catastrophe and now we are to bring the other half which is far more genetically damaged in the foundation of a family ... This type of

¹¹⁸ “Pastoral love” here is an ironic reference to a TV series from the 70s with the same title.

¹¹⁹ Nadežda Ajdačić is a nuclear physicist, a retired fellow from Vinča Institute for Nuclear research. She was first to voice criticism against the Serbian-Ukrainian marriages based on an alleged genetic threat.

breeding [*ukrštanje*] certainly cannot develop a super-race. I cannot but see in it a very perfidious act” (*NIN*, February 12 1998:25)

Breeding [*ukrštanje*] here indicates unnatural, artificial intervention into ‘natural’ processes of reproduction. And in case the point escapes the reader, the journalist clarifies it further: “Even the notorious Dr. Mengele, Hitler’s associate, could not create a super-race artificially. A cross of the best Junkers with the healthiest and prettiest Nordic women would beget monsters too (*Ibid.*:25, stress added).

In a way the article suggest that the state’s intervention in reproduction is somehow unnatural, and when the state is personified by the by characters like Hitler or Slobodan Milošević, the intervention can only be monstrous both in intent and in effects.¹²⁰

The article, thus, makes a direct connection between *Seoski prag*, and the regime of Slobodan Milošević, without ever mentioning his name, and implicates both in a shady lucrative business. Worse yet, they are implicated in an alleged international conspiracy against the Serbian people. To stress this point and to differentiate between those really concerned about the well being of the Serbian nation and those undermining it i.e. the regime and its associates, the article frames parts of the text into two boxes which occupy about a third of the page. One box contains a long direct quote from the interview with the above mentioned nuclear physicist together with her photograph. Among other things, she states here:

Like all other decent people in this country [I] believe...that ‘matchmaking’ business is probably unique, at least in these areas [and is] just a well designed cover for entirely different, lucrative deals [made] on our soil” (*Ibid.*:25 inverted comas in original).

¹²⁰ The article also reproduces the image of Slobodan Milošević as a totalitarian Hitler -like ruler. Slobodan Milošević, no doubt, was an authoritarian ruler, and his rule was increasingly totalitarian towards the end. Despite all his faults and alleged crimes, however, the image of him, created by western media and to a lesser degree academia, which portrays him as a Hitler like totalitarian ruler is far fetched. Still it was often reinforced and used against him in Serbia by his political opponents.

The lucrative business here does not refer to prostitution but to the ‘directing migrations’ of population which was exposed to radiation after the Chernobyl incident.

The other box contains the statements of two members of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. Unlike the previous box, this one does not give direct quotes from the interviews, but the journalist’s interpretation of their statements. One of them, a professor of economy and member of Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, often named by the leadership of *Seoski prag* as someone who supports the Ukrainian-Serbian marriage connection, denies this support and declares incompetence regarding health issues and concerns. Another academic, whose photograph is in the box, described as a radiologist, geneticist and a physicist, is quoted only as saying that

he ‘has no idea’ whether these girls may have damaged chromosomes. The arrival of Ukrainian women he sees more as a social phenomenon. Since he did not follow the situation in Chernobyl (!) And [he] was one who...in written form, [but] hidden from public eye, warned the prime minister at the time,¹²¹ about the Chernobyl tragedy [when the accident occurred] (Ibid.:26 stress added).

The journalist here made very open allegations against the regime and its associates, their clandestine methods and dealings that were against the interests of the Serbian nation. The Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences was generally associated with the production of Serbian nationalist discourses at the time of Milošević’s rule. But this journalist points more to the fact that some of its sections and individual members were considered very close to the regime (Hayden, 2000; Dragović-Soso, 2002) and that together with the regime were working against the interests of the nation while espousing nationalist ideology. The member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences mentioned above, who was also its president during one term in the 1990s is among them. Because he did not express more professional interest in the

¹²¹ Branko Mikulić was the Prime Minister of SFRY in the mid eighties.

allegations about Ukrainian women being radioactive, hence dangerous, (being radiologist, geneticist and physicist), the journalist, inferred that he was a participant in the conspiracy concocted by the regime of Slobodan Milošević against the Serbian nation. It was also implied that *Seoski prag* was probably created by the regime as a cover up.

To further stress the difference between false and genuine nationalists the photographs of the nuclear physicist, who vehemently criticized *Seoski prag*, and the academic who did not have an opinion about it, were placed next to each other, but these two scientists look in opposite directions.

The second article (*NIN* February 19, 1998, pp. 24-25) is a textual and visual inversion of the previous one. Here the illustration focuses on the biological, and the text on the moral threat that Ukrainian women pose for the Serbian nation, i.e. for Serbian men.

The drawing (by the same cartoonist) shows a bride and a groom. He carries her as in the ritual crossing of the house threshold but the shadow that they form on the ground is shaped like a nuclear mushroom cloud. The text openly suggests that women have been brought for reasons far removed from marriage. The same author supports her argument by quoting a villager: “Most of the time [the girls] are not in the village. They [officials from *Seoski prag*] pick them up in the morning and drive them back late at night...They are always taking them somewhere. It’s all in haste” (*NIN*, February 19 1998:24). The wording here like “to pick them up”, “to drive [them away and bring them] back”, may suggest the women’s object position of the type usually associated with prostitution.

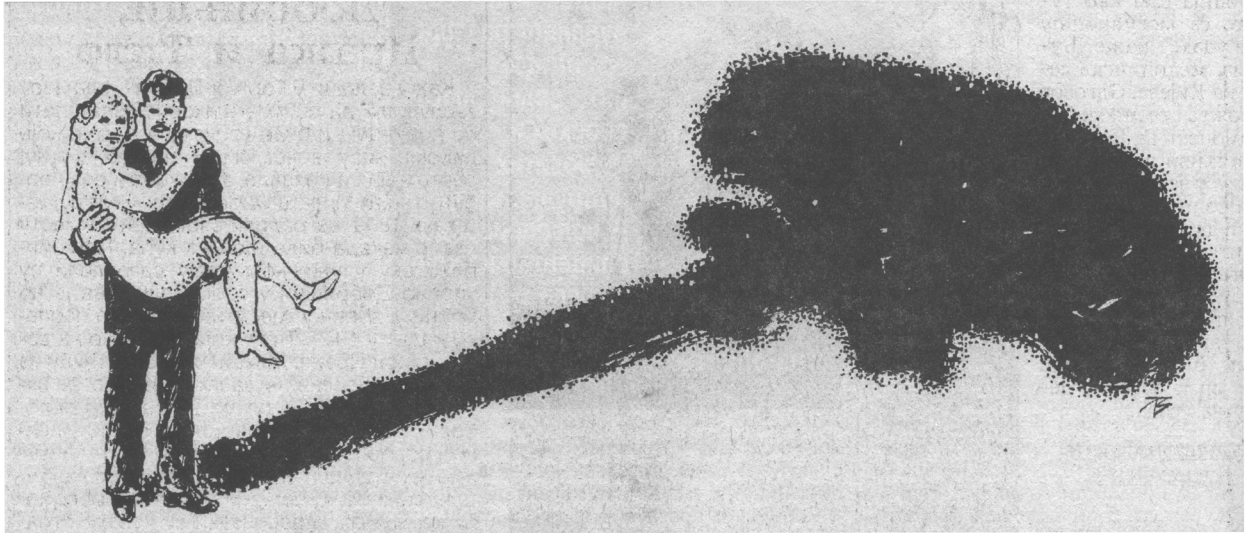


Figure 8: *NIN*, February 19, 1998

So again, the text and the accompanying illustration together create the image of Ukrainian women as doubly polluting, and the whole project as not only dangerous but also detrimental for the Serbian nation. *Seoski prag* as the initiator and organizer is, consequently, represented as an enemy within, together with the regime of Slobodan Milošević. This time, Serbian women are not among the enemies, but they serve to reinforce the victim image of the nation:

Whoever has come up with the idea that our lads should marry Ukrainian women should have...visited the camps...with refugees [from Bosnia and Croatia]. There are young women and girls there who used to work in agriculture and are anyhow healthier than Ukrainian women (*NIN*, February 12, 1998).

Both articles in *NIN* interpret the initiative within the framework of a conspiracy theory – as a Ukrainian underground, or the ‘Chernobyl lobby’. This lobby is allegedly “directing population migrations from the regions affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe. The Ukrainian mafia takes part in this through numerous marital agencies abroad” (Ibid. pp. 19). While the conspiracy theory created by the regime of Slobodan Milošević and its associates saw the

conspirators primarily in the West, here the regime itself is implicated in a conspiracy allegedly contrived in the East. Either way, the resultant image of Serbian nation is one of suffering.¹²²

Representations of Ukrainian women as morally and genetically threatening for the Serbian nation that were created by the opponents of the Serbian-Ukrainian marriages define that nation as a moral and biological unit. Within such an image, Serbian women are not as easily replaceable. They are responsible for the upbringing of Serbian children according to Serbian traditions and moral values: “what mother tongue is a child going to learn if his mother is Ukrainian?” asked a head priest of the Church in Gornja Dobrinja when approached by journalists for a comment¹²³. “We are of the same blood and faith but their girls can not fit in here... They have different laws¹²⁴ [over there],” commented a middle-aged bachelor.

The above analysis shows how various discourses that were created in relation to the project of bringing Ukrainian wives for unmarried rural men in Serbia espoused two opposing images of nation: neo-traditionalist, on the one hand, and modernist-rationalist on the other (see Thomas, 1999). These two images often overlapped (as for example in the program of the *Seoski Prag*). These two types of nationalism, however, as well as the most fervent anti-nationalism (see the above analysis related to *Vreme* magazine), operated within a single gender ideology.

Moreover it seems that neo-traditional nationalism was more open to accepting and incorporating the “other” into the national body, granted that other bodies were women’s bodies. Since the nation is constructed as a patrilineage, nationhood is inherited by blood, but only male blood counts. Women can really come from just about anywhere. They are assigned the primary role in biological reproduction of the nation but ultimately only paternity determines belonging.

¹²²For more on the images of the suffering nation created by the media in Serbia see Žarkov, 1999

¹²³ His lower ranking colleague from the same church, on the other hand supported the idea of Ukrainian wives for the local bachelors. He opened the village church for the visitors from Ukraine and later on told me how he was very impressed by their knowledge of the ritual practice.

¹²⁴ The Serbian term *zakon* (law), used in this context signifies cultural norms and vales.

Individual women do not even have to be of Slavic background or Orthodox faith if the state-cum-family they belong to is perceived as such and is considered an advantageous ally of one's own state.

The rationalist/modernist construction of the nation, on the other hand, seems less inclusive and more suspicious vis-à-vis "other" women. While nationhood here is acquired and learned, rather than inherited through blood, it has to be learned in the mother tongue. This makes women responsible not only for the biological but also the cultural reproduction of the nation. They can successfully fulfill the latter role only if they belong to the same cultural tradition. Even then, however, "women are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic and retain object rather than subject position" (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Serbian nationalisms in the 1980s and 1990s were in agreement on this matter – by not reproducing enough, women not only failed in their most important role but they threatened the very survival of the nation. The consensus was also prominent in the conception of low fertility rates as a result of too much modernization of Serbian women. Most of the social actors involved in the demographic debates were suggesting policies aimed at increasing fertility among Serbian women. Many of the proposed policies (as for example, banning or restricting abortion) challenged the emancipation of women achieved under socialism. Their roles had to be recreated (in a way de-modernized) if women were to be reincorporated into the national body.

Seoski prag was unique with its proposal that Serbian women could simply be replaced. Its neo-traditionalist conception of the nation was inclusive (of "other" women), however, due to narrowly defined women's roles. Modernist/rationalist nationalism, on the other hand, while expanding women's roles to include education of children and cultural reproduction, excludes all foreign bodies from the "body of the nation", regardless of their sex. Nevertheless, *Seoski prag* is

not anti-modern. It actually links together modernist/rationalist and neo-traditionalist images of the Serbian nation. While rural Serbia symbolizes the essence of the nation it needs to be modernized and life there organized scientifically. More importantly, men should guide modernization, not women. Modernity along with the nation is constructed primarily as masculine.

“Rural masculinity”, as defined by Campbell and Bell, has a complex status within the hegemonic concept of masculinity as well as in the nationalist constructions of the nation as masculine. While rural images are an important element of the images of ‘real (Serbian) men’ (see note 9 above), the “masculine” rural is often devalued as traditional, hence backward, even primitive. Moreover, in discourses created by *Seoski prag*, rural men are presented as overpowered by women who do not hold ‘proper’ dreams any more – they “study and leave for an easier life in the city”, and they have been corrupted by too much of modernization. Serbian women are thus responsible for feminization of (rural) men and of the nation.

As a result, rural men are often presented in a patronizing manner as decent, honest but gullible, even timid.¹²⁵ This is not the most becoming image of manly virtues. It is also in sharp contrast to the stereotypical “rural masculine”. Yet, rural men are never emasculated. Their masculinity is maintained through their non-reproductive sexuality. According to one journalistic account, “these lads [*momci*]¹²⁶ say that they ‘have taken care as far as those things go’¹²⁷ [*da su obezbedjeni što se tiče onih stvari*]¹²⁸, and [they] always add “‘but that’s not the thing’ – they need someone to prepare a cup of coffee, to attend to guests, to bear children” (*NIN*, 1 August

¹²⁵ This image was rather prevalent in the newspaper reports after unmarried villagers failed to attend a small welcoming party for a group of Ukrainian women who came to the village of Gornja Dobrinja . The titles of almost all newspaper reports suggested that unmarried villagers were hiding from the prospective brides.

¹²⁶ Serbian term *momak* (pl. *momci*) designates both a young man and unmarried man.

¹²⁷ “those things” is an often used euphemism for sex.

¹²⁸ The logical question of who are the women they have ‘those things’ with remains un-addressed, because culturally it is not logical at all. The dominant gender ideology of double moral/sexual standards renders women appropriate for ‘those things’ inappropriate for marriage and even more importantly for mothering.

1997:25). The organization *Seoski prag* took it upon itself to find such women in Ukraine for Serbian middle aged bachelors living in rural areas. Along the way the organization reproduced the ambiguous relationship and tension that exists between rural, pastoral images of the nation and its urban origin. Within the nationalist projects rural always has a complex and ambiguous position. The same is true of rural masculinity which at the same time stands for the masculine essence of the nation but also for its unbecoming pre-modern past.

D. BRIDES OR TOURISTS?

Majić, the president of the Executive Committee of *Seoski prag* concluded his welcoming speech to the small group of Ukrainian women who came to Gornja Dobrinja saying: “I wish for you [...] not to return to Ukraine after the eight days [expire] but to stay here with your companions [*sa vašim izabranicima*].” *Politika* quoted Pedja at the end of the visit saying:

The aim [...] is that these girls get the true picture about life in our villages and pass it on to others in Ukraine because we are making preparations for a group of standard tourists from Ukraine [to come over]. The girls have come to this region primarily as tourists, but if an opportunity emerges why not realize their other aspirations [...*zašto da ne ostvare i druge želje*] (*Politika*, February, 16 1998, stress added).

Considering the timing of these two statements (the beginning and the end of the visit) it could be inferred that the marriage component was downplayed in the latter statement in order to mask the apparent failure of the visit because no marriages had been arranged. Even though this may have played a role it was not the whole story. Indeed, from the very beginning the organizers were sending conflicting messages, shifting back and forth between the goals of marrying Serbian rural men and developing tourism in rural areas. The program of the organization, which was circulated to many individuals and institutions is explicit about tourist

visits serving as a method of bringing Serbian men and Ukrainian women together “all with the aim of starting a family”.¹²⁹

Most of their time, energy and resources were invested in the project of Serbian-Ukrainian marriages. Still the organizers rarely failed to depict it as anything but a segment in a much broader and complex plan, for revitalization of rural Serbia. In this context tourism would become simply one segment in overall economic development of the rural Serbia. Consequently Ukrainian women who came to Gornja Dobrinja were sometimes presented as potential brides and sometimes merely as a promotional tourist group. Why only women were brought in for the promotional tourist visit would, however, always remain unaddressed. This shifting interpretation of the nature of the visit was adopted by everyone involved, from the *Seoski prag* officials to people boarding the guests. As the analysis that follows will show the interpretation depended on the specific situation and/or audience addressed.

Whatever their true motives, the organizers of the visit were de facto engaged in (failed) international matchmaking and were initially quite enthusiastic about, what they believed to be imminent weddings between Serbian men and Ukrainian women. In the following pages I describe events just before and during the visit of Ukrainian women to Gornja Dobrinja, including the ever-changing opinions and attitudes of those directly involved in the organization of the visit regarding the marriage project.

I arrived in Gornja Dobrinja two days ahead of the Ukraine group. I came to the village from the nearby town of Požega together with Pedja, with whom I had done an interview¹³⁰ earlier that day, and Dara, a woman who at the time was the president of the Tourist Association of Požega. Her primary role was to organize accommodation for the guests and to create and

¹²⁹ *Seoski Prag*, Program, pp. 3

¹³⁰ I should point out that his interview with me was as pre-scripted as those he gave for the media, so in the text I quote him from my notes and from the media interchangeably.

coordinate the program of visits to cultural and historical sites in the region. Several households in Gornja Dobrinja had previously taken in tourists. Most of the experience the villagers had with tourism came from biannual Summer Art Workshops. Artists stayed for a couple of weeks in the local houses for a small fee. In addition they often gave some of the artwork they created during the workshop to their hosts. This time *Seoski prag* was going to pay room and board for the guests from Ukraine. The payments were not made directly to the households but through the Tourist Association of Požega.

During our short ride to the village, Dara and Pedja, my two hosts and the organizers of the event, were discussing some technical details of the upcoming visit. Having no doubt in its success, they were planning future visits, by much bigger groups of women. (This time they were expecting 20 women to arrive, but only 6 came). The grand finale of those visits, according to Dara, was going to be a collective wedding of 150-200 couples, dressed in Serbian national costumes. As she went on describing the imagined event, I was reminded of collective weddings that had taken place in former Yugoslavia in the 1970s. These weddings were organized annually by a woman's magazine from Belgrade and they always took place in Bled, a scenic, lake town in Slovenia and a popular vacation destination. Couples from all the Yugoslav republics would enter a competition and, if I remember correctly, a hundred would be selected to be married at the collective ceremony. Even though couples were mostly from urban areas, during this collective ceremony they had to wear traditional folk costumes of their respective ethno-national groups and in that way to symbolize not only national equality but also the multicultural character of the Yugoslav Federation.

While the iconography of the imagined collective wedding as a desired outcome of the visit of Ukrainian women to Gornja Dobrinja appeared similar to those weddings from the

socialist past, they were going to be different in one important detail. Both the Serbian grooms and the Ukrainian brides would be dressed in Serbian traditional folk costumes. In addition, the places she suggested as potential sites for the collective wedding carried strong symbolism related to Serbian nationhood. While Pedja seemed somewhat reluctant¹³¹ to take part in creating this fairtaleish narrative, he did express his agreement that Studenica, the oldest Serbian monastery and the symbol of the height of the Serbian medieval state and culture, would be an appropriate site for the weddings. This suggests another important difference between the collective weddings of the past and those planned for the future.

In Yugoslav days it was a civil ceremony, while the future ones apparently were envisioned as a religious service. This is an interesting detail in and of itself, not only because it is illustrative of the changing institutional status of the Church and its increasing popularity and influence in the society. More importantly, the church ceremony assumes that the Ukrainian brides were going to be of Orthodox background and even if they were not they would have to convert. The Serbian Orthodox Church usually does not perform weddings for couples of different confessional backgrounds and if such a couple wants an Orthodox wedding, whoever is not of Orthodox background first has to be baptized Orthodox.

Ukrainian brides thus, while foreigners, were not going to contribute to the Serbian ethnic patchwork; rather they had to be culturally assimilated from the very beginning. This constitutes a major difference between how I remember the collective weddings of the past and what was envisioned for the future. While collective weddings from the socialist past served to forge multi-ethnicity of the federal states, the post-socialist ones were imagined as fostering Serbian national identity which many at the time constructed through Orthodox religious background.

¹³¹ His reluctance can partly be explained by the different iconography he had in mind when envisioning the collective weddings. He wanted to have the Ukrainian brides dressed in outfits created by one of the national garment manufacturers (see pp. 6) which all followed urban/western fashion designs.

We arrived at the house of the local representative of *Seoski prag*, a nurse who ran the village health care center¹³². Pedja arranged for me to stay in the nurse's house together with one of the Ukrainian women, who would turn out to be Lidija, the representative of the Society for Ukrainian – Serbian Friendship. She was also the group's guide and translator, otherwise a professor of Serbian language and culture at the University of Kiev. Our landlady, Nada the nurse, was *Seoski prag*'s appointed representative in the village. She had been recruited to join the organization and subsequently appointed its representative, primarily in order to dissolve the rumors about the compromised health of the Ukrainian women. As Pedja said to me:

There were some stories in the press asserting that [we are] bringing in sick women (with AIDS, or exposed to radiation) which scared people [in the village]. However, the fact that the nurse agreed to take in one visitor [from Ukraine] to her house has encouraged other households [to do the same].¹³³

After we arrived in the village, the three of them (Pedja, the president of *Seski prag*, Dara, the president of the Tourist Association and Nada, the local representative of *Seoski prag* and my hostess), continued to discuss the organizational issues related to the upcoming event, as well as the reactions the event stirred in the community. The two women described how they had been contacted by many elderly men, widowed or divorced, who expressed interest in marrying Ukrainian women. Dara's comment speaks about her commitment to the marriage project, at the time: "It is not our intention to import grannies [*babe*], but women able to give birth. We have enough [people] for the cemeteries, but we don't have [enough] for the maternity wards."¹³⁴

¹³² The health care center had a visiting physician, once a week. In the meantime villagers could see the nurse for minor health problems or to undergo a treatment prescribed by the physician. The nurse also made house visits so she was rather knowledgeable about the village and village events.

¹³³ From my interview with Pedja.

¹³⁴ Her comment is also instructive for her understanding of appropriate marital matches age wise: she could not conceive that a younger Ukrainian woman in her 30s would want to marry an elderly man in his 60s.

Towards the end of the visit of the Ukrainians, however, Dara changed her narrative, completely denying any involvement in the matchmaking, point I turn to later in the text.

I spent the morning ahead of the arrival of the Ukrainian group in a local variety store, a hangout for the local women. While nowadays it is not unusual for young village girls to hang out in coffee shops, old-fashioned pubs (*kafane*) are still out of reach for women (see Cowen, 1991 on Greece). Men also often hang out and drink in front of the store in the village center, especially in villages which like Gornja Dobrinja do not have a *kafana*. Women on the other hand occupy the space inside the store where they chat and exchange gossip.

For me this was an opportunity to learn more about the community's reactions and opinions about the visit of the Ukrainian women and the possibility that some of them may marry local men. The Ukrainian group was expected early next morning, and since the parents of the store owner were going to take two of the guests in their house and her father was also involved in the preparations for welcoming the group, it was only natural that the shoppers would ask about or comment on the upcoming visit. So I decided to listen and observe rather than engage in direct conversation with them. Since I had come to the village with the organizers and was staying in with *Seoski prag's* local representative I felt that more often than not while talking to me my informants were actually addressing the organization. Listening to spontaneous conversations was a rare occasion to mitigate this positioning somewhat. For that reason I just listened and later on recorded any spontaneous conversation about the approaching visit.

Many shoppers thought that bringing women in an attempt to marry middle-aged village bachelors was a good idea but at the same time felt that majority of the 48 middle-aged bachelors in the village were not suitable marital partners for anyone any more, being long past their prime and deeply engrained in their bachelor habits. Drinking was often mentioned among those. "I

would not give my sister in marriage to any of them”, said a young man in his mid twenties and added: “This arrival of potential brides opens up a conflict between the older, unmarried lads and young men of my generation. The old lads are afraid that we, young guys, will pick up [*pokupiti*] all the girls.” This turned out to be true at the party that was organized in the village on the second day after the arrival of the Ukrainians. While none was “picked up” in any sense of the word, younger men in their twenties proved to be more outgoing and successful in initiating contacts and communicating with the Ukrainian women.

While Marija, the storeowner, reported to me that the villagers were sharply divided regarding the visit, no one who came to the store that day had a problem with the fact that the women were foreigners. It is quite possible that the majority of shoppers who came to the store that day were those (positively) curious, who probably even came primarily because they wanted to learn more about the awaited event than because they had a pressing purchase to make.

As for the rumors that Ukrainian women might be sick, more than one of the elderly shoppers expressed disbelief. They did not think it possible sick women would be let across the border. An elderly woman said: “I have heard on the radio that these women are not healthy. I don’t know, that’s what they say on the radio in Užice¹³⁵. But I am thinking [since] they are crossing the border that [their health] must be checked.” Even though people in Serbia are on average well traveled, including foreign travel, some people of this women’s generation and particularly from rural areas had rarely if ever crossed an international border. Still it is very unusual that she imagines the state border as some kind of sanitary border and could be a result of increasing (self)isolation of Serbia vis-à-vis the rest of the world throughout the 1990s. At the same time her comment is an expression of a deeply embedded belief that state is responsible to protect public health.

¹³⁵ Užice is a nearby town and regional center.

When later that day I accompanied Nada for one of her regular house visits to a patient, I had an opportunity to hear a dissonant voice. After I mentioned the upcoming event Dragan, the household head, a married man in his late forties showed that he was troubled by it. With irritation in his voice he responded by first asking “[Do we know] who these women are? What do we know about their health?” He continued stating that

it is not true that our lads can’t find girls for marriage here. They simply don’t want to get married. And even if it [lack of women] were true, why bring Russians and Ukrainians when there are girls [available for marriage] in Montenegro and Bosnia. I as a Serbian should marry a Serbian woman.

Slavko, A young unmarried man in his twenties, a family relative, was of the same opinion. He himself had a girlfriend in a neighboring village.

Faced with direct criticism, Nada intervened by insisting that the upcoming visit was about tourism, not about marriages:

I personally have no intention of marrying off anyone. My only intention is to board and provide hospitality for guests. I am not even boarding any of the prospective brides this time, anyway.” She added, however that “my telephone rings non-stop and lads keep asking about girls who will come [as prospective brides].

Later on, she explained to me that she did not want to get into an argument with these two men and simply wanted to change the topic of the conversation.

Unlike these two men who seemed to oppose international marriages for patriotic and nationalist reasons, women appeared to have somewhat different concerns for opposing the proposed marriage arrangements. As an example of the opposition, even hostility towards the idea promoted by *Seoski prag*, Marija, the above mentioned storeowner shared with me the reaction of her sister in law (her husband’s brother’s wife):

My sister-in-law, works as a nurse in Užice, her husband has recently left for Russia [through his work] for six months, does not allow her mother-in-law to take in guests

[from Ukraine]¹³⁶. She says [that] neither she nor her children will use the bathroom or get into a bed after a Russian woman uses them. She also asked me how I could be sure they would want to return back [to Ukraine] after the end of the [contracted] time. She asked if they were Catholic and I told her even if they were there is a solution¹³⁷ for it.

The racist comments expressed by the sister in law reproduced the image of Russian/Ukrainian women coming over as prostitutes. In her case the image did not sink in well with her personal situation at the time, her husband being on a business trip to Russia, and as she probably saw it, vulnerable to the seductive powers of ‘their’ women. Similar concerns definitely played a role and contributed to Dara’s change of mind. When I came to her office in Požega to pay for my accommodation at the end of the visit I found her very upset. The reason was her involvement in the Serbian-Ukrainian marriage arrangements, which she now denied.

I am engaged in this as [with] a tourist group, solely! I don’t know anything about any marriages. I don’t want to know anything about it! I only know this is the last time I have anything to do with *Seoksi prag!* There are all kinds of rumors in town regarding that business of theirs. Only last night my neighbor [a woman] asked whether I had grown bored of my own husband and hence decided to bring over these women.

Apparently the town gossip which represented Ukrainian women as prostitutes and consequently a potential threat for her own and other women’s private lives, made Dara change her mind about the marriage project and her own involvement in it and with the organization that according to the town rumor was bringing women for prostitution and making a lot of money from it.

¹³⁶ This episode, among other things, shows the changing character of power relations in the family. While, traditionally, as parents shared household with sons and their wives, mothers in law had a substantial degree of power over their daughters- in-law,(see V. Erlich, and B. Denich). With changing household patterns this power relation also changed. Consequently this daughter in law was able to tell her mother in law what she could or could not do in her own house because otherwise the daughter in law may prevent the mother in law from seeing the grandchildren and justify it by health concerns.

¹³⁷ The implied solution is conversion. Conversion was also mentioned by some Orthodox clergy who supported the Serbian-Ukrainian marriages when they had to address the issue of religious background of the Ukrainian women including the possibility that some of them were Catholic.

This episode took place only a couple of days after she had come to Nada's house to talk to Lidija, the representative of the Society for Ukrainian-Serbian Friendship who was also the Ukrainian group's guide at the trip. Quite agitated Dara complained: "The villagers are very angry to learn that one of the visitors is married. It is unacceptable to bring women like that and present them as potential brides. The villagers feel cheated." As it turned out the woman was divorced but when she told to her hosts that she had two children from her previous marriage they misunderstood her due to the language barrier and promptly alerted the community.¹³⁸

Dara also stated that villagers did not appreciate that the girls spent so much time with the two [Ukrainian] drivers at the party which was organized so that local men could meet the Ukrainian women: "It is not appropriate for the girls to spend so much time with the drivers. After all they have come here for our men." Since professional drivers are usually considered sexually promiscuous, the expression "to spend time with drivers", in local vernacular implies sexual encounters which, if they happened, would have made the women "easy" and consequently inappropriate marital partners for the local men. More than that, however, her reaction denies any agency to the Ukrainian women. They had come as potential brides for local men and were not supposed to change their mind or explore other possibilities.

What really happened at the party was that the local men came in rather late and for the longest time were hesitant to make contact with the guests. So the Ukrainians stayed together, listened to the music from the tapes that they had brought and danced with the drivers. After the ice had been broken and the girls joined the local men in dancing the *kolo* (the traditional Serbian circle dance) the situation changed completely. Younger men who came to the party even later than the middle-aged bachelors also contributed to the changed atmosphere being more outgoing

¹³⁸ Out of six women who came, two (a mother, a divorcee and her daughter who studied Serbian at the University of Kiev) were explicit about not being interested in marriage from the very beginning. The remaining four who never denied the possibility of marriage were accordingly perceived as potential brides for the local men.

and communicative. One of the Ukrainians, however, spent most of the evening and left the party with one of the drivers. That was enough to start a rumor about alleged “inappropriate behavior” of the whole group.

The party was attended by the Ukrainians, young and middle-aged single men, elderly men and women, mostly those who hosted the Ukrainians, a few elderly relatives of the middle-aged bachelors who were too shy and/or uninterested to attend, and the organizers.

The evening started off in a rather uncomfortable atmosphere with little or no communication between the locals and the guests. It was obvious that matchmaking skills were lost on everyone involved. Moreover, the organizers had worked hard from the very beginning to dispel the image of traditional matchmakers and insisted that marriages between Serbian men and Ukrainian women should take place “when mutual feelings develop”. The socialist redefinition of marriage as a matter of individual choice has relegated matchmaking to the backward past and the institution has largely died out throughout former Yugoslavia, including the rural areas (Lockwood, 1975). The *Seoski prag* leadership certainly did not want to be associated with ‘backward traditions’ and even less with a traditionally female ‘occupation’.¹³⁹

It was apparent, however, that the local woman, even the elderly did not feel comfortable in this role either, partly because the institution of matchmaking was outdated, and partly because they did not possess information on women and their families that are necessary for successful matchmaking.

¹³⁹ Traditionally matchmaking was a female profession. A successful matchmaker had to be knowledgeable about families, family businesses and relations. She had to be familiar with the domestic (woman’s) realm. This type of knowledge is not accessible to men and more importantly it is demeaning for them. Even for women there is always a thin line between being well informed and gossipy and nosy. Consequently while a successful matchmaker used to be valued for her skill she was not necessarily highly respected as a woman. It was often believed that a woman so well informed spends too much of her time in idle conversation outside of her home and at the expense of her own household chores

At the same time, for the middle-aged bachelors the *kafana*¹⁴⁰ is a space where they primarily communicate with and in various ways assert their masculinity vis-à-vis one another. This includes heavy drinking and bragging about (hetero)sexual advances (Simić, 1969). Romantic encounters, for this generation of men, are relegated to a couple's privacy and run against public display of masculinity in a *kafana*. Thus, at the party, the middle-aged bachelors stuck together. When someone put on the tape with Serbian folk music, they got up to dance and formed an all-male *kolo*.

This is when the Ukrainian women broke the homosocial circle by joining them. And it was only the beginning of the appropriation of space by the Ukrainian women. When the *kolo* ended they scattered throughout the *kafana*, starting conversation and initiating contacts. Thus in more than one way the Ukrainian women breached local rules of etiquette and gender norms. Taking initiative was certainly one of them. After all they were brought in order to salvage rural men's masculinity which was perceived as threatened by the actions of Serbian women.

This role reversal, however, was not the only unintended outcome of their visit. Many things turned upside down from what had been intended by *Seoski prag*. For example, most of the men who contacted the organization looking for a wife from Ukraine appeared to have been older, divorced or widowed men – not interested in having more children. Similarly, the majority of about 200 women who contacted the Society for Ukrainian-Serbian friendship had been married and had at least one child (again probably not interested in having more). The local middle-aged bachelors proved to be rather passive and lacked the initiative in establishing contacts with the visiting women.

¹⁴⁰ The party was organized in the space of former only *kafana* in the village, which at the time was not operating any more.

The younger men, who were neither the primary target of the project nor were they interested in marrying, on the other hand, proved more active and outgoing at the social functions organized by *Seoski prag*.¹⁴¹ The middle-aged men whose masculinity was already at stake were overpowered by the actions of elderly men, younger men, and the Ukrainian women. It was no wonder then, that the all-male leadership of *Seoski prag* wanted to distance itself from the marriage project at the end of the visit. They did not want to be a party to effeminizing Serbian men whose masculinity, measured by sexual and reproductive virility (Žarkov, 1999), they had set out to restore.

In addition, the regime's ambiguous stance on the subject was equally confusing for everybody, including *Seoski prag's* leadership. As mentioned earlier, the Serbian society at the time was much politicized and politically polarized. Citizens were sharply divided according to their political affiliations and sympathies. The first line of division was between the supporters of the regime and supporters of the opposition. Opinions about specific issues were accordingly formed primarily based on these affiliations. The leaders of the opposition steered this attitude by automatically rejecting anything that was initiated by the regime. The regime, on the other hand, often kept everyone in suspense, being vague about important issues.

In this particular case no one was sure where the regime really did stand and opinions were formed based on what was assumed to be the regime's attitude and/or role. If somebody could not determine this fact, s/he would assume an equally ambiguous attitude. A good example was the head of the municipal council of the nearby town of Požega. Požega was one of the towns governed by the coalition of opposition parties, *Zajedno*, since the elections of 1995

¹⁴¹ The lack of a common language, was an additional problem. The organizers kept insisting that Ukrainian and Serbian are very close and mutually intelligible. Ukrainians, however, spoke only Russian and communication, even though not impossible, was far from smooth, which again for the younger men was less of a problem, due to their greater experience in communicating with the outside world and also on average their better education.

(Thomas, 1999). This man found it opportune enough to attend a small welcoming ceremony for the Ukrainian group. But when asked to give a speech he literally ran away even before the group actually arrived. While opposition leaders could and often did cooperate with the representatives of the state establishment, at the local level, such behavior would be highly undesirable at the national level. The presence of correspondents for major Serbian dailies and weeklies at the arrival ceremony prevented the president of the Požega's municipal council from taking a more active part in welcoming the guests.

Missing on this occasion were also the bachelors, even though the organizers had contemplated otherwise. They had considered having the bachelors, dressed in national folk costumes, welcome the guests together with a brass band [*trubači*] playing traditional folk music. Since the band asked for more money than the organizers would pay, the whole plan fell through. No one invited the bachelors to welcome the Ukrainians and they did not show up on their own either. This prompted some unbecoming titles in the Serbian press implying their skittishness as a reason: ” “Ukrainian [Women] Have Arrived, Bachelors not to be Seen” (*Blic*, front page); “Brides have arrived, Bachelors not to be Seen” (*Blic*, February 11, pp. 9); “The Prospective Brides from Ukraine Have Arrived, Serbian Lads Not to be Seen” (*Dnevni Telegraf*, February 11, 1998, pp. 10). Unlike these two dailies, *Politika* simply stated in a subtitle that “Bachelors did not attend the welcoming [of Ukrainians]” (February 11, 1998, pp. 13).

Nada, however, commented that the middle aged bachelors did not show up because “they believe they should be making the choices of [women], not being chosen [by them]”. The implication was that after the bachelors had learned how small the group from Ukraine was they simply decided not to show up because they could not to accept the latter role. After all they had been promised by *Seoski prag* a ratio of 5:1 (five potential brides per one middle aged bachelor)

to choose from, and it turned out to be 1:8 (eight middle aged bachelors per one visitor from Ukraine), making them potentially the object rather than subject of selection process.

Seoski prag's leadership desperately wanted to secure unambiguous support from the 'parent state' but it never came to fruition. Nevertheless, many perceived them as the exponents of the regime. For some this perception signaled that it was safe and/or opportune to support the event. Others, on the other hand, often based the opposition and criticism solely on this perception. Individual interests and/or fears also shaped reactions regarding the presence of Ukrainian women and the whole Serbian-Ukrainian marriage project. Those who had unmarried middle-aged relatives were more likely to welcome this new opportunity even when aware of problems like the lack of a common language. "I don't know, child, this seems good but how are we going to talk to them?"¹⁴² Another problem was seen in the apparent mismatch between the unkempt bachelors and well kept Ukrainian women: "I don't know, child, but these girls are too nice [*fine*] for these lads of ours."¹⁴³

Others, like Marija's father Milan, the owner of the biggest house in the village, who also used to run the village pub [*kafana*], approached the whole event pragmatically, as a potentially lucrative business. Nada described him as a "heavy opposition", a very opinionated person, always "bugging people with politics". Even though he had made some hostile remarks about the *Seoski prag* leadership, this man played a prominent role during the time the Ukrainians were in the village. Milan hosted three guests and opened the door of his former pub for the collective welcome and for the party.

Commenting in a conversation with me on the resistance among some villagers he said: "People here traditionally object to anything new in the beginning. In the beginning, only the

¹⁴² From my conversation conducted at the party with an elderly woman who boarded two Ukrainians.

¹⁴³ The same conversation.

most progressive [people] embraced the cultivation of raspberries and artificial insemination [of domestic animals]. They will skim the milk this time too.” While prizing the project as progressive, he also had made derogatory if cryptic comments about the bachelors by comparing marrying them off to Ukrainians with the artificial insemination.

Needless to say Milan saw himself among the progressive ones who do not shy away from novelties. This is exactly how he perceived *Seoski prag*'s project of marital tourism, as something new and progressive primarily because it involved financial gain for those boarding the guests. The marital component of the project was not foreign to him either - he eagerly answered telephone calls and hosted a few men and their relatives who came from other parts of Serbia hoping to find a potential bride among the Ukrainians. At the party, Milan was encouraging the middle-aged bachelors to be more outgoing and enthusiastic about this new opportunity to find a marital partner that was given to them.

Still, when approached by a journalist from the opposition magazine *Vreme* he did not spare harsh words about the leadership of the *Seoski prag* criticizing the marriage component of the visit and distanced himself from it completely. “I have always insisted that this [should] only be a tourist visit, but he [Pedja] would not give up on marrying off the girls [for the middle aged bachelors in Dbrinja]. Otherwise, he [Pedja] was afraid Albanians would take over. Where this is going to plunge is in Gods hands now” (*Vreme*, February, 21 1998).

While fully embracing the project at the local level, then criticizing it in the national press, this prominent villager was more than strategizing and negotiating his subject position variously in various contexts. His actions were calculating and opportunistic and his narratives consciously adjusted to specific audiences. He participated in activities motivated by material gain and prestige – having the biggest and best equipped house in the village he hosted three

Ukrainians, and like everyone else, was paid for their board and food by *Seoski prag*. The organization also rented from him his old pub space for the welcoming ceremony and for other parties during the visit. He would have certainly expected some form of material gain had he been successful in matching one of his guests with some of the men from afar who contacted him for information.

Finally his reputation was differently vested at the local and at the national level. At the local level he could not afford not to participate in something that was potentially lucrative, controversial and associated with the nearby urban center. Much of his outstanding reputation (even though not necessarily positive) in the village was based on his economic wealth and on promoting a ‘modern’ urban style of living. For the very same reason the leadership of *Seoski prag*, while being aware of antagonisms, gave him a prominent role in the organization of the event and was more than happy to put up even three Ukrainians in his representative, three storey house with all the modern amenities including central heating, the last being far from common in rural Serbia.

Tensions between Milan and the *Seoski prag* officials were of a political nature. Milan saw them not only as proponents of the ruling regime but also as representatives of the socialist past. At the same time he represented himself as a member of the old entrepreneurial class which had been disowned by the communist regime. He could, however, forego their political/class differences at the local level, because, among other reasons, the community leadership in the village, dominated by the representatives of the ruling (Milošević’s) Socialist Party, according to the village rumor, opposed the whole project.¹⁴⁴ In addition, as already mentioned, cooperation between political position and opposition outside of the nation’s capital was far more common

¹⁴⁴ The community meeting was scheduled for the second day after the arrival of the Ukrainians. The rumor was that one of the issues that were going to be discussed at the meeting was the visit from Ukraine. It turned out, again according to the gossip, not to be true.

than in the capital. Thus, when approached by a journalist from the most influential opposition magazine with a national circulation he could preserve his class and political image only by criticizing *Seoski prag*, its officials, and of course the marriage project.

Even though Milan would on occasion express strong national feelings, his involvement in the events related to the visit from Ukraine was not motivated by either patriotism or nationalism. Overall, the meaning of the event for those involved in it at the local level was far removed from those promoted by the *Seoski prag* leadership - rescuing the Serbian nation by improving its birth rates and security. Individuals took part in the event and/or disengaged from it following their particular, individual interests which were defined through social relations at the local level. Communal relations and gossip appeared to play a greater role in shaping individual attitudes and actions than the national press, at least for those who initially agreed to take part in the event.

Those members of the community who distanced themselves from the project from the very beginning had a tendency to treat it as a national issue and to frame their criticism in terms of national interests as they saw them. It could be argued that since the whole event was in a way abstract to them, they approached it from an equally abstract position by claiming loyalty to and defending interest of the “imagined community” of the nation. In a way their attitude is paradigmatic of popular nationalism. It comes to the fore and becomes an important element of individual identities in times when other, more concrete forms of identities that emerge against a specific social structure are not available any more, are disappearing, or appear to be threatened. An existing social structure may disappear due to its disintegration or may come as a consequence of relocation (which partly explains the phenomenon of Diaspora nationalism).

The former was certainly the case of Serbia in the 1990s. The broader political framework of which Serbia used to be a part disintegrated and consequently political, economic, and social structures and systems were undergoing a radical change. Its citizens were in the process of changing and adjusting their political, professional and other individual and collective affiliations and identities. If one did not change his/or her political loyalty, or was lucky enough to keep a job, the meanings of these types of identities were changing. More importantly, new structures were slow to appear and were not all-inclusive. For those who were left at the margins of the newly emerging structures, the nation was often the only point of reference left, the only category which offered feelings of belonging to and embeddedness in a collective. But those at the margins certainly were not the moving force of the process of national integration. The urban elites were at the head of this process and were also engaged in designing social reforms while redefining their own social roles under the changed circumstances. *Seosoki prag* leadership offers a good example for this.

The above analysis has another important theoretical implication. It shows how responses to the initiative put forward by *Seoski prag*, were not fixed: they changed either over time or in different contexts, or both, reflecting multiple subject positions of various social actors at all levels of social organization – from the village to the national body. If it is true that all societies are in constant flux, Serbian society in the 1990s was more than that, it was in unrest. The difference between a society in flux and one in unrest I see in the fact that in the former, the flux is framed and shaped by relatively stable social structures. In the latter, the old structures are disappearing while new ones have not yet been established. Speaking metaphorically, if in a relatively stable society the flux is made by a current of a more or less steady flow and shaped

by more or less defined yet flexible banks, instable societies are shaped by many different meandering currents and ever changing, malleable banks.

The saga that was created by an attempt in international matchmaking, as a way of “increasing birth rates, improving the defense system and ultimately preserving the nation and its survival” (the president of *Seoski prag*), showed this all too well. Both the organization of the event and the response to it – at the local and the national level alike - recreated many divisions that existed in Serbian society at the time: between political position and opposition; within the opposition; between new and old elites. The most prominent was probably that between rural and urban Serbia, which at the same time represented continuity with the previous system in which farmers and rural dwellers in general were assigned an object rather than subject position in social and political life and state politics.

The project was actually founded against a backdrop of urban-rural hierarchy. Its creators, while prizing the “purity” of rural life and its potential for rejuvenating the nation and its essence were at the same time, denying agency to the rural population. For them only the city had the potential for creating and leading progress. Consequently, they assigned primary roles to urban elites in developing rural areas. While stressing the importance of traditional values and morality allegedly preserved in the village social and family life which included ‘natural’ gender relations, they denied any credibility to “traditional”, experience based knowledge in areas like production and the economy.

One anecdote from my stay in Gornja Dobrinja is illustrative of this. One evening we all gathered in a house which hosted Ukrainians, for a small party. As we were sitting around the dining table, traditional offerings were served (coffee, fruit preserves, water and homemade fruit brandy) and we engaged in small talk on various topics. When the hostess, an elderly woman

with a life long experience of running a well-off household together with her husband, brought up the issue of difficulties related to agricultural production and started expressing her opinion on how they might be dealt with on the part of the state and broader society, Pedja interrupted her in a rather rude manner.

To the very least, his intervention breached the social norms of age related etiquette and of host-guest relationships. Annoyed by this but not wanting to create more tension I discretely asked him why he had not let our hostess talk. His response was: “We already know all their complaints”. And in his opinion “their complaints” were not the crux of the matter. The crux of the matter does not come out of daily practice it comes about as a result of systematic studies by “impartial” science. For him all solutions were going to come from science. For that reason, the program of the organization proposes building of a “scientifically designed experimental village, which has to show to outsiders and to the villagers alike how successful agricultural production should be organized in the mountainous regions.”¹⁴⁵ More importantly, scientific design takes into account interests of the nation, not only of the immediate community.

¹⁴⁵ From the program of *Seoski prag*.

V. ABORTION POLITICS IN SERBIA: SOCIALIST LEGACIES AND POST-SOCIALIST DEBATES

Abortion as a way of terminating an unplanned and/or unwanted pregnancy has a long history in Europe. Its medicalization and legalization, however, are much more recent (David, 1974, Potts et. al., 1977). While the project of modernization implied, among other things, improving public health it took a long time before abortion was institutionalized medically and legally. For many years even after more reliable and safer abortion procedures were medically possible abortion could not be institutionalized primarily because of the resistance of religious institutions and of the dominant Christian morality. This fact speaks of the lingering influence of religious institutions in the West long after the official separation between the church and the state. It took the emergence of the socialist state and its radical separation from religion for abortion to be legalized. The Soviet Union was the first country in the world to legalize abortion on request during the first trimester of pregnancy. After WW II the newly established socialist regimes in East and Central Europe implemented liberal abortion legislation in the 1950s and 1960s (David, *ibid.*).

Liberal abortion policies were variously justified by socialist regimes - from public health concerns, to women's emancipation, to Marxist theory according to which improving living standard in socialism was going to maintain relatively high fertility levels (Besemeres, 1980, David, 1974, Macura 1974, Potts et.al., 1997). But real life proved Marxists wrong and following a steep decline in fertility, almost all socialist regimes introduced some restrictions in abortion

legislation while at the same time promoting pronatalist policies in the 1960s and 1970s¹⁴⁶. Save for Romania, however, abortion restrictions at the time were rather mild and/or temporary (David, 1999), and abortion remained a symbol of women's emancipation throughout the socialist world until its collapse in 1989.

After 1989, "socialist' abortion laws were almost universally under attack in campaigns by the previously silenced Catholic Church which asserts spiritual and moral values centered on the family and the traditional role of women" (David, 1999). The attempt of the Orthodox Church to regain influence in the public and private spaces in post-socialist Serbia has been similar to that of the Catholic Church elsewhere. Even though restrictive measures have been proposed throughout the post-socialist world, only Poland and Hungary passed new laws that limited access to abortion for non-medical reasons during the first trimester (Gal, 1994; Fuszara, 1993; Zielinska 1993; Titkow 1999). This, however, turned out to be damaging to the Catholic Church's popularity in these two countries.

Throughout Eastern Europe, initiatives to criminalize or restrict the availability of abortion had provoked broader public debates in which family planning organizations, pro-choice and feminist groups argued for the necessity of safe, legal abortions for women. Abortion debates, however, became a forum for political competition in which much broader issues were at stake, like anticommunist morality, nationhood, and demographic trends (David, 1999). Being associated with socialism and its project of women's emancipation, abortion became "an argument in absentia against socialism" (Gal, 1994), and against what was perceived as an

¹⁴⁶ It is important to note that the effects of pronatalist policies were limited and short lived. A slight increase in the fertility rates would usually occur right after restrictions were introduced in the abortion legislation (cf. Czechoslovakia and Romania). Many authors in the West viewed the provisions that were given to working women with children as part of socialist governments' pronatalist policies. Local authors, and the citizens of the socialist states, however, perceived them as social policies aimed at improving the family standard and at helping women to combine work and motherhood. Consequently the so called positive incentives did not cause an increase in the fertility rates.

unnatural order of things in which women were masculinized and men emasculated by the massive participation of women in the labor force which obliterated the male role of the breadwinner. No wonder then that "one of the first pieces of state legislation to come under attack [in the first post-socialist parliaments], second only to the private property rights legislation, has been the right to abortion" (Einhorn 1993:9).

A. SOCIALIST ABORTION LEGISLATION

Unlike other East European countries, Yugoslavia had uninterrupted liberal abortion legislation ever since the 1950s¹⁴⁷. In 1952 a Regulation was passed allowing abortion for unspecified sociomedical reasons. The abortions had to be approved by special commissions composed of a gynecologist, internist and a social worker. Due to poorly defined criteria, commissions were often inconsistent in their decisions and many women whose requests were rejected sought the help elsewhere which resulted in an increase of both legal and illegal abortions. In 1960, another regulation was passed which determined more specifically both social and medical reasons for legal abortion. Abortions still had to be approved by special commissions, which now were required to inform women about health risks associated with abortion and about methods for preventing pregnancy. This regulation marks the beginning of a widespread use of abortion for family planning. Social reasons become dominant among the approved abortions (see Rašević, 1993:49).

Due to the fact that since its legalization in 1960 abortion had become the major method of birth control, the Resolution of Family Planning that was passed in the Federal Assembly in 1969, stressed that abortion is the worst way of birth control and that it should be used only as

¹⁴⁷ On the history of abortion legislation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia see Rašević, 1993:48-50

the last resort. A “General Law on Pregnancy Termination” was passed together with the resolution, keeping all provisions from the 1960 Regulation (see Rašević, 1993:50).

Finally, Yugoslavia was among the first countries to include reproductive rights in its Constitution, which stated that “it is a human right to decide freely on child birth” (SFRY Constitution, Section III, article 191). Abortion legislation was relegated to the constitutive republics and autonomous provinces. Even though there were some differences in detail, all abortion laws had to be designed respecting the above mentioned constitutional right. Between 1974 and 1979 existing abortion regulations were replaced by new laws at the level of individual republics and in Serbia at the level of the autonomous provinces as well. All constitutive units granted abortion on request up until the end of the tenth week of pregnancy.

Only in Macedonia was this right somewhat limited, so that abortion during the first trimester could not be obtained on request if a woman had already had one less than a year before (Rašević, 1993: 52). After the tenth week¹⁴⁸ of pregnancy a special committee at a clinic had to approve the request if the specific situation matched one of those defined by law. The reasons could be medical (if the health and/or life of a woman were endangered by the pregnancy or the child would be born with some kind of deformity); and legal/ethical (if pregnancy resulted from rape). Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia in addition recognized socio-economic reasons (personal or family hardships that would be created by the birth of a child) for terminating a pregnancy after the tenth week (Rašević, 1993:53).

¹⁴⁸ In practice, however, abortions were obtained on request up to the end of the 12 weeks of pregnancy.

The large majority of requests for abortions after the 10th week were approved. Almost 95% of the approved requests were based on social-economic reasons (Simoneti et.al. 1976).¹⁴⁹ The great majority of all abortions, however, were performed during the first trimester, over 98% (Rašević, 1993:82). The age breakdown of women who had abortions after the 12th week points to women who did not expect to get pregnant. According to data for Serbia in 1988 teenagers and menopausal women composed the greatest number of those who had late gestation abortions, which later on made these cohorts most vulnerable to restrictions imposed by the new law in 1995.

Abortion in the former Yugoslavia was defined as primarily a social issue dominated by two expert discourses, that of medicine and demography.¹⁵⁰ Liberal abortion legislation was justified primarily by its role in cutting down the number of illegal abortions and associated health complications. High abortion rates, however, were defined as a health and possibly as demographic problem. Even though the evidence is sketchy and circumstantial at best, abortion was often associated with the following reproductive problems that may have demographic consequences: secondary infertility, miscarriages and premature births in subsequent pregnancies.

The 1984-85 issue of *Stanovništvo*, the journal of the Yugoslav Demographic Association, published back to back two articles on abortion. Štampar, in her article on patterns

¹⁴⁹ A similar kind of leniency was noted by Luker (1975) in California in the early 70s. California was the first state in the USA to legalize abortion for therapeutic reasons in 1967, a few years before the Supreme Court decision in *Roe vs. Wade* case was handed down. According to the California law abortion could be approved by an accredited clinic if the pregnancy had resulted from rape and incest, or if it posed a threat to women's physical or mental health. The vast majority of requests were based on threats to mental health. Women were required to undergo a psychiatric interview but it was "largely a formality because virtually all patients were approved" (Luker, 175:9). See also Outshoorn 1997, on Western Europe during the so called reform period in the 1970s when most national laws had one or the other kind of limitation for the first trimester abortions, but in practice the large majority of the requests would be approved.

¹⁵⁰ Abortion and unwanted pregnancies were defined as "major health and social problems" by the World Health Organization at the conference "From abortion to Contraception" which took place in Tbilisi, in 1990 (see Rašević, 1989/90)

of family planning in Croatia, explicitly denies any connection between abortion and fertility levels. According to her, liberal abortion legislation “has only contributed to the continuation of the already existing [demographic] trends under somewhat different [better] circumstances. Various economic and social factors have had much stronger effects on population trends” (1984-85:60). This author also points out the significance of liberal legislation for “cutting down the number of illegal terminations of pregnancy, in reducing frequency of medical complications as a result of pregnancy termination as well as in contributing to zero mortality rates due to pregnancy termination” (1984-5:60).

Lalović, who in the same issue of *Stanivništvo* discusses fertility of Yugoslav population and abortion rates, acknowledges the significance of liberal abortion legislation for the same reasons discussed by Štampar. Unlike her, however, he sees a possible connection between abortion rates, and fertility rates. He argues that

abortion has become [one of] direct causes of declining population fertility, and has already produced negative effects in population reproduction, which in near future, may lead to decrease not only in relative but also in absolute numbers of population particularly in Serbia Proper, Vojvodina [Autonomous Province], Croatia and partly in Slovenia (Lalović, 1984-85:73).

Only four years earlier but under a different political climate in the country Lalović drew a rather different conclusion about the relationship between the birth and abortion rates: “the rise in the number of abortions after 1971, or after 1975 when liberalization became more complete – did not diminish population fertility. Possibly the rise was partly due to a drop in the number of illegal abortions and partly to changes in the use of contraception in some regions” (Lalević, 1980:217). The significant differences that existed in abortion rates¹⁵¹ between republics and

¹⁵¹ See Figure 3

provinces, Lalević, here, attributed to differences in use of contraception and its efficiency (ibid.:217)¹⁵².

In his later article, however, Lalević forgets all about inefficient contraception and bases his argument about a direct link between abortion and fertility rates on the ratio between the number of live births and number of abortions. While we can not speculate about the reasons that made this author change his mind, it did coincide with changes in dominant social and political ideology. As discussed earlier, this broader ideological change brought about a shift in dominant ideological orientation in demography. The family planning orientation was gradually replaced with an orientation towards population policy. Lalević argues that such a policy could curb the number of abortions:

It would be of utmost importance to cut back on this excessive number of abortions through [measures of] demographic policy[...] I do not necessarily have in mind an pronatalist policy. I argue for social measures that would bring about a desired [level of] reproduction...(Lalević, 1984-85:73, stress added).

Nationalism was ascending and penetrating all pores of social life in the mid 1980s in Serbia and other parts of Yugoslavia. Old categories changed their meaning and, as always, empirical evidence was called in support.

True enough, ever since the mid 1960s the number of births had been decreasing and number of abortions increasing so that in 1978 there were 704 abortions per thousand live births in Yugoslavia (Ibid. 70). In Serbia proper, however, there were 187 abortions per 100 live births in 1978 (Breznik, 1990-91:26). Serbia proper was far ahead of other regions in Yugoslavia in

¹⁵² In this article Lalević notes another important aspect of birth rate differentials, i.e. “regional variation in the average number of induced abortion for a given nationality”. For example while the total average number of abortions for married Serbian women in 1976 was 1.34, married Serbian women who lived in Kosovo had on average 0.45 abortions. Married Serbian women from Vojvodina, region with the highest abortion rates, had on average 1,78 abortions. Lalević documents similar trends for other ethno-national groups (1980:224). The data are based on a survey done by the Federal Institute for Statistics in 1976 on a Yugoslav sample of married women aged 15-49. This kind of information was virtually absent from the public discourses on abortion in the 1990s and more or less disappeared from expert discourses as well.

number of abortions.¹⁵³ The abortion rates measured against the number of live birth continued to grow until 1986 in Serbia proper. There were 218 abortions per 100 births in 1986 and 200,5 in 1988 (Rašević, 1993:60)¹⁵⁴. Nevertheless only after abortion was turned into a national issue it became ‘responsible’ for the low fertility. Earlier, its meaning was defined against the background of ideology of women’s emancipation, ‘free and responsible parenting’ and policies related to public/women’s health. Table 7 and figure 7 shows abortion rates and ratios in former Yugoslavia and in Serbia (including the provinces) between the 1960s and 1990s.

¹⁵³ Bosnia and Herzegovina had 66 abortions per 100 live births in the 1980s, Montenegro 55, Croatia 83, Macedonia 67, Kosovo, 16 and Vojvodina 151 abortions per 100 live births (see Breznik, 1990-91:26 n. 16).

¹⁵⁴ Official statistics show a slow decrease in number of abortions in the early 1990s (see Rašević, 1993; Kapor-Stanulović, 1999). The statistics, however, are not very reliable for this period due to the fact that an increasing number of women was at the time having abortions in private clinics which were not yet certified for this procedure, and consequently were not reporting them.

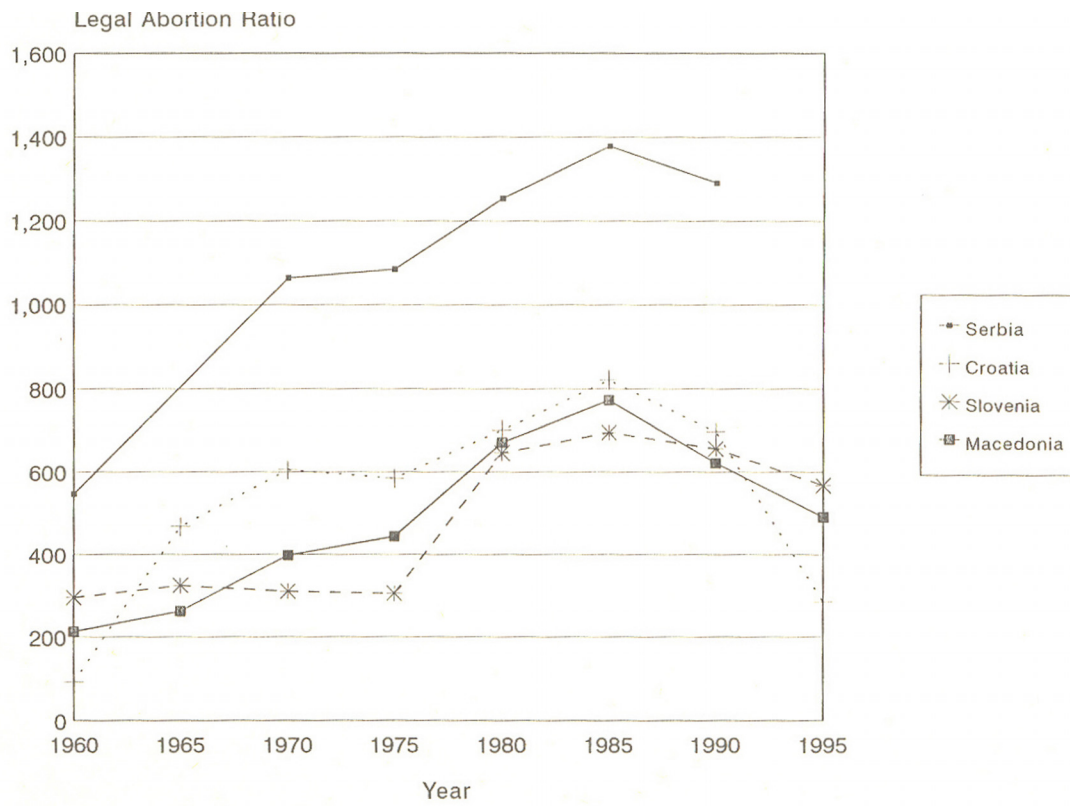


Figure 9: Abortion Rates and Ratios - Republics of Former Yugoslavia 1960-1990¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Kapor-Stanulovic and David, 1999:288

Table 7: Birth, Abortion, and Fertility Rates and Ratios in Serbia, 1950-1996¹⁵⁶

	Live births	Abortions	Birth rate	abortion rate (per 1000 women)	Abortion ratio (per 1000 live births)	Total fertility rate
1950	198,500	-	29.5	-	-	3.54
1960	160,900	88,000	21.2	-	547	2.56
1965	150,300	-	18.9	-	-	2.51
1966	146,200	122,900	18.6	-	841	2.41
1967	146,200	122,900	18.2	-	-	2.41
1968	148,200	154,700	18.0	-	1,044	2.39
1969	152,000	-	18.3	-	-	2.40
1970	146,900	156,100	17,5	-	1063	2.27
1971	151,100	-	17.9	-	-	2.30
1972	154,800	161,800	18.1	-	1045	2.32
1973	156,10	-	18.1	-	-	2.30
1974	160,300	-	18.4	-	-	2.33
1975	162,300	-	18.5	-	1,084	2.32
1976	165,400	-	18.7	-	-	2.45
1977	161,400	-	18.0	-	-	2.30
1978	156,600	-	17.7	-	1,265	2.27
1979	158,100	-	17.4	-	-	2.24
1980	162,700	204,100	17.6	-	1,254	2.28
1981	151,500	-	16.2	-	-	2.14
1982	159,400	-	17.0	-	-	2.26
1983	157,600	207,900	16.7	-	1,319	2.24
1984	162,300	214,400	17.0	-	1,321	2.31
1985	155,900	214,800	16.2	-	1,378	2.23
1986	153,900	212,400	15.9	-	1,380	2.21
1987	154,500	205,300	15.9	-	1,329	2.22
1988	153,800	193,600	15.7	-	1,259	2.21
1989	144,900	193,800	14.7	-	1,338	2.09
1990	145,600	188,000	14.7	-	1,291	2.10
1991	139,600	150,500	14.6	72.1	1,078	2.08
1992	131,300	136,000	13.5	63.7	1,036	1.91
1993	132,100	-	13.5	-	-	1.91
1994	128,700	-	13.0	-	-	1.85
1995	131,000	-	13.1	-	-	1.89
1996	128,600	-	12.9	-	-	1.83

¹⁵⁶ Source: Kapor-Stanulovic and David, 1999:290-91

1. Contraceptive Practices and Gender Relations

As in other socialist countries, abortion appeared to be a main method of family planning - women and couples throughout the former Yugoslavia relied on it in order to achieve the desired number of children¹⁵⁷. It is usually believed that women during socialism relied on abortion because modern contraceptives simply were not available. The Yugoslav case disputes this assumption. Unlike in other East European countries, most other methods of birth control were available and affordable in Yugoslavia since the late 1960s¹⁵⁸. Pharmacies in bigger urban centers were better supplied in general which made contraceptives more readily available in urban than in rural areas. Most of contraceptives, including the pill, were fully covered by the health insurance. For abortion, however, there was a fee and the amount depended on the type of anesthesia used during the procedure. Not a small number of abortions were performed, by the choice of women, under a partial anesthesia in order to diminish the expense.¹⁵⁹

Results of a survey (Ristić, 1994) conducted among health care professionals (physicians and nurses) in Belgrade defies another common belief according to which a lack of information and medical education are to blame for the widespread reliance on abortion. Out of 437 respondents in the survey (all health workers), 41% of them had a personal experience with abortion (either respondents themselves or their partners). Among gynecologists in the sample,

¹⁵⁷ In 1987 there were 365.700 legally induced abortions in Yugoslavia. With the number of live births at 359.300, abortion ratio (number of abortions per 1000 live births) was 1,018, while abortion rates (number of abortions per 1000 women age 15-44) was 71.6 ((N.Kapor-Stanulović, H. Davida, (1999:298). Figures in Serbia for the same Year were: 205.300 abortions, 154,000 live births, and abortion ration of 1,329 (ibid.: 290-91)

¹⁵⁸ Hungary was another socialist country where modern contraceptives were widely available due to the organized government effort. Unlike Yugoslav couples, Hungarian were practicing contraception mostly by means of modern, effective methods. According to a research done in 1974 , 98% among the newly married couples in Hungary was using one of modern, medical methods of birth control (see McInture, 1985:279)

¹⁵⁹ The contraceptive pill was made available in Yugoslavia in 1964, and IUD in 1967. The former Yugoslavia, however, is not the only place where women relied primarily on abortion as a method of family planning despite the availability of modern prophylactics (see Paxon, 2000 on Greece; Outshoorn, 1977 on Western Europe, Luker, 1975 on California).

as high as 63,5% had a personal experience with abortion. The average number of abortions per person among the gynecologists in the sample was 1.30, but ranged from 1.00 to 1.81.

The findings of this research indirectly support suggestions proposed by Morokvašić (1984),¹⁶⁰ who argues that widespread use of abortion as a method for birth control is just a surface expression of deep cultural patterns related to asymmetric gender relations within the private domain throughout the former Yugoslavia. According to this and much other research, unplanned pregnancy and subsequent abortion are most often results of failing traditional methods for birth control, like *coitus interruptus*. This traditional method, according to Morokvašić, symbolizes man's virility and gives him a sense of control over the relationship. At the same time abortion for a woman is a "symbolic procreation". While unplanned pregnancy confirms her fertility, a very important element of female identity throughout the former Yugoslavia, abortion renders it symbolic (Morokvašić 1984)¹⁶¹.

While abortion in socialist Yugoslavia and Serbia was widely practiced and accepted as a method of family planning, it was also constructed as a social/medical problem due to its high rates and multiple uses. High abortion rates were connected with low fertility and below replacement population growth, while repeated abortions were considered a threat for woman's overall health. In addition, multiple abortions are believed to undermine woman's future 'reproductive success'. These two themes were prominent in expert discourses on abortion during the socialist times and were incorporated in the abortion debates in the 1990s.

¹⁶⁰ Morokvašić did a survey among immigrant female workers from Yugoslavia in several Western European countries in the late 1970s. An interesting detail from her study is that a significant number of her respondents would at the time travel to Yugoslavia just to have an abortion, because the administrative procedure to get one there was much simpler than in the Western European countries where these women were living.

¹⁶¹ Paxon, who challenges the idea of abortion as a 'symbolic procreation' also sees the high abortion rates among urban Greek women as an expression of unequal distribution of power within more narrowly defined sexual relations. According to her, both men and women have an interest invested in recreating gender proficiency through female passivity and male proactive role. Thus, according to Paxon, from woman's perspective an unwanted pregnancy and the subsequent abortion represent in-calculated risk, rather than assertion of femininity through 'symbolic procreation'.

By the 1990s, the high abortion rates were widely perceived as a result of liberal legislation and almost unanimously linked directly to the low fertility. Despite the ample historical evidence to the contrary, not a single expert or a feminist questioned this relationship. Demographic transition in the Western Europe and in some parts of Eastern Serbia and Bulgaria, for example, began in the nineteenth century, the time when abortion was criminalized; the below replacement fertility levels in Western Europe were reached for the first time in the 1960s, a decade before abortion was legalized in this part of the world. Still, experts in Serbia often attributed below replacement fertility in Vojvodina and some regions of the Serbia proper to a set of intertwined socio-economic reasons among which abortion played a prominent role (cf. Lalović, 1984-5; Rašević, 1993). This perspective is in lieu with the World Health Organization's official proclamation according to which abortion (i.e. its high rates) was designated a social/health problem.¹⁶²

“[T]he number of terminated pregnancies in Serbia is so high nowadays that the proportions are epidemiological. Ever since 1969, the year of full liberalization [of the law] the number of abortions has been increasing. The only developed country which in the late 1980s had [significantly] higher abortion rates was the USSR. In 1984 the number of abortions, for the first time, outnumbered [the number] of live births [in the former Yugoslavia]. Reproductive behavior in Serbia, obviously, is not different from [that] in the developed world, which is not the case when it comes to the birth control methods. Abortion [a method many rely on] runs counter the civilization's achievements [and] it is the least acceptable method for moral reasons and even more so for its potentially harmful effects at the individual and social levels. At the micro level, [abortion] can be harmful for physical end emotional health and for social relations. At the macro level, consequences [of abortion] are demographic and economic” (Mirjana Rašević, 1993:1 and 1989-90:117)¹⁶³.

¹⁶² Of special concern were the repeated abortions. In 1988, for example, 80% of women who had abortion had previous experiences with it. Among them, as much as 22% have had 4 and more abortions (Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije, 1991). Some women have more than 10 abortions during their reproductive lives (Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999:301). In a survey with women who were about to have an abortion in a Belgrade clinic, one of the respondents, a 43 year old women, have already had 22 abortions (Rašević, 1993:145). One of my informants who was 40 at the time of the interview had had 18 abortions.

¹⁶³ Rašević is a gynecologist who left medical career to become a demographer. In the second half of the 1990s she was Director of the Center for Demographic Research.

“According to experts’ opinion there is a growing population of women in Yugoslavia who suffer from long-term effects of abortion. Most often quoted is sterility”(NIN, February 3 1995).

“[Medical] complications follow in one of five cases of terminated pregnancies. These complications are often grave, endangering the woman’s life. This is what experts say” (Politika, June 3, 1987 stress added).

Expert discourses offered various solutions for thus defined social problem. While criminalizing abortion did not seem as an option for most experts, some did suggest that the old socialist law may have been too liberal from the stand point of public health and population growth. Often, the solution was seen in providing better (health) education for women – instructing them at the same time about advantages of “modern” [*savremeni*] contraceptives and about abortion health risks.

The focus of all proposed policies was on women. Men were only rarely mentioned in relation to abortion, and even then they would be assigned a passive role or that of a victim of women’s power “to decide on their own”. Women having abortions were presented either as selfish egoists, or as victims of their own ignorance while holding on to traditional values and behavior.

Economic reasons make people limit their family size (the basic stuff, like baby food and diapers are too expensive). Women are unwilling to use modern contraception because they are ‘not prepared to make love under controlled conditions, plus our folks do not like to have their lives planned, and because of that they resist [using] protection. There is a lack of knowledge about possible effects of abortion for women’s health and an overall lack of health consciousness, (argued an expert quoted in NIN February 3 1995).

In my opinion, our people absolutely lack health consciousness [or in other words] are ignorant about health [issues]. Even though abortion [happens to be] most widespread it, under any circumstances, can not be a method of birth control (a women gynecologist, quoted in *Politika*, November, 10, 1994).

Feminist discourses would also depict women as victims, but for different reasons. Women were portrayed as victims of the overall social poverty in addition to patriarchal social relations which prevented women from assuming an autonomous role in sexual/reproductive social relations. For feminists too, women were held back by traditional values and social relations. Feminist activists would see women as passive victims of male dominance, while some feminist scholars, following the dominant trend in the Western academic feminism in the 1980, interpreted women's reproductive behavior as a 'quiet resistance' to the hegemony of the asymmetric gender relations (cf. Blagojević, 1995)

Popular and experts discourses often presented abortion as women's method of choice. Nationalist oriented discourses in addition argued that women use abortion and limit the family size for selfish, egoistic reasons with a little or no concern for the interests of the father or society.

A child in a woman's womb is most often the result of a project in which a woman and a man participate together [*zajednički projekat žene i muškarca*], but its fate is arbitrarily decided only by her (Ponjavić, 1996:69, stress added).

While it is true that pregnancy is *always* a result of a "project in which a man and a woman participate together",¹⁶⁴ it is also true that abortions within the marriage, are most often a result of the common decision between the spouses or to the very least of an unspoken agreement after a desired number of children has been achieved. Findings of my research¹⁶⁵ are in agreement about this with other research (cf. Antonovski, 1984-85: 87; Rašević, 1993:146). Moreover, it is my impression, based on anecdotal evidence and on life histories that I collected during my fieldwork that after a desired number of children is reached, women are more inclined to contemplate having another child particularly if they get pregnant.

¹⁶⁴ Artificial insemination by an unknown sperm donor is still a rather rare practice.

¹⁶⁵ Findings are based on my interviews and on participant observation in a gynecological office.

For most women abortion does not represent a moral dilemma or psychological trauma (see Rašević 1993, and Antonovski 1984-84). Some are even surprised when such issues are brought up to their attention (see Antonovski, *ibid.*). There are women, however, who would rather keep an unplanned pregnancy than terminate it even after the desired number of children is achieved but are met by resistance of other family members (most often the husband and sometimes the children too)¹⁶⁶. One of my respondents gave a particularly moving account of her experience of two unplanned pregnancies and unwanted abortions. She was forty at the time, had two children and two abortions.

I was surprised by my next pregnancy, after I had had my two children. But it appeared normal to me to terminate that pregnancy. ‘Well, we are done with [having] children, we have agreed so’ – my husband was definite. When it was over I was exhausted, empty – I can’t say I was distressed, that came after. A few years later, even though we were careful¹⁶⁷, I’ve got pregnant again. As I was watching my children play I would catch myself rubbing my belly and smiling. It would be really great to have this child, I was thinking. But my husband was of a different opinion: ‘It’s easy to give birth to a child but how we are going to provide everything it needs. You can’t decide alone on something like that, it’s reckless.’ My whole being was resisting to the idea of abortion but I could not find support anywhere. My children were as definite as my husband, they did not want to [have to] share with another child. Once again, I was overpowered. The second abortion was even more emotionally devastating for me than the first one but no one else seemed to care. Everyone around me acted as if it was the most normal thing to do.¹⁶⁸

Some health professionals reproduced this image of “abortion as a normal thing”.

Moreover, they regard it superior to most forms of modern contraceptives, primarily the pill. A female general practitioner with whom I talked about my research told that she personally did

¹⁶⁶ One woman whom I interviewed, who was in the mid thirties and had three children told me that neither her nor her husband’s family was supportive of their decision to have a third child, which by the way, was primarily motivated by a prospect of getting an apartment. Her husband’s company whose management had close relationship with the Milošević’s regime at the time was stimulating the employees to have three children, by awarding them with an apartment if they had three or more children.

¹⁶⁷ She and her husband were combining the rhythm method and *coitus interruptus*.

¹⁶⁸ This was the only one of my respondents who gave such a detailed and moving account about her feelings and doubts related to abortions. Most of the others seemed to be emotionally detached vis-à-vis the experience even though some claimed that from the current perspective they might have reconsidered the decision.

not see any problem with abortions: “after all it is a minor and safe surgical procedure with almost no side effects unlike the pill which can affect the body in unknown ways”.

While quite a few women who are determined to prevent unplanned pregnancies using medical contraception take the pill or have an IUD unbeknownst to their husbands, with abortions it is rarely the case. Even though in Serbia as in Greece, abortions are “performed quickly and quietly” (Paxon, 2002:319) and even though men have no part in abortion practices, abortions most often are not hidden from husbands. If they appear to be hushed it is vis-à-vis a broader network of family and friends, not husbands.

Abortion, together with menstruation and labor, is a taboo topic outside of exclusively female contexts, among other reason because it makes public woman’s non-procreative sexuality. Even within the exclusively female contexts conversation about these topics is highly ritualized and pre-scripted (see Spasić, 1994). According to my observations in all-women situations men may be blamed for an unwanted pregnancy and the subsequent abortion in two distinctly different ways.

Which narrative is used depends either on the character of the husband-wife relationship, and/or of the audience addressed. If the relationship with the husband is tense and conflict-ridden, an unwanted pregnancy is presented as a result of his carelessness (“Why would he care – it’s me who has to endure an abortion, not him”)¹⁶⁹. If her relationship with the husband is more harmonious, or for a more competitive female audience, frequent unwanted pregnancies are explained by women’s sexual appeal i.e. by husband’s uncontrollable desire (“He simply can’t help himself with me”). In other words, in women’s narratives about abortions, husband may

¹⁶⁹ In Rašević’s survey almost half of her respondents (46,1%) attributed an unwanted pregnancy and the subsequent abortion to husband’s carelessness. (Rašević, 1993:141)

lack feelings for his wife, or he may have excessive passion for her, but his skill is never questioned.

I argue that the initial reason of the high abortion rates in Serbia is related, on one hand, to the strong preference for small families and to patriarchal gender relations of sexuality, on the other. All research suggests preference, even a norm of two child family throughout the socialist period in Yugoslavia.¹⁷⁰ However, women rarely if ever decide on their own what contraceptive method to use in order to achieve the desired number of children and to space them.

Decision about contraception seems to be primarily the men's realm (see Morokvašić, 1984; see also Paxon for Greece). This is particularly true within marriage. Finally, and most importantly, rather than being a method of choice, abortion is a back up method¹⁷¹ and its high rates in Serbia seem to be, to the most part, a consequence of the contraceptive mistake, or failed *coitus interruptus*, which happens to be the preferred method of birth control (see Morokvašić, 1984; Rašević, 1993).

Majority of women that I interviewed who had abortions become pregnant while they relied on this method, sometimes in a combination with the calendar method. Most of them also argued that their husbands would not agree to switch to some other, more reliable method. Moreover, they themselves expressed discomfort with majority of available medical contraceptives. The reasons ranged from inconvenience (local contraceptives), to side effects and safety (the pill and IUD).

¹⁷⁰ Many surveys, mostly done with women, determine that the ideal number of children (under the best of economic circumstances) is between 2-3. In 1970 it was 2,27, in 1976, 2,21, in 1993, 2.70 (Rašević, 1993:131, see also Blagojević, 1995, Petrović, 1992-93)

¹⁷¹ In the above mentioned Rašević's survey (see note 14) the two thirds of women who were about to have an abortion, had tried to prevent the pregnancy. Most of them (50,4%) relied on *coitus interruptus*, 32,5% used the calendar method, and 3,2% believed to be protected because they were nursing. 33.7% of women in the sample, did not use any contraception even though they did not want to get pregnant at the time, but only 4,7% of the whole sample declared that they opted for abortion as a method of birth control. (Rašević, 1993:156. In another survey on a sample of 3.000 women in Serbia, only 22,4 were using medical contraception - pill, chemical contraceptives and IUD. Politika June 3, 1987).

Despite its relatively high failure rates *coitus interruptus* seems to be preferred method of birth control both by men and by women, irrespective of their socio-economic background. Reasons for this are varied and multiple but the most important ones emerge when we look into the structure of gender relations in general and those related to sexuality and reproduction in particular.

Asked what do they do in order to prevent pregnancy, women in Serbia often reply “[I do] nothing, my husband looks after me” [*ništa, muž me čuva*] – it was the answer I have gotten most often when interviewing women about their reproductive practices if they relied on the *coitus interruptus* and majority did. This short but often given answer, may serve as a vignette for heuristic examination of gender relations of sexuality and reproduction. The sentence recreates a whole set of ideas about woman’s femininity achieved through [sexual/contraceptive] passivity, and man’s masculinity through his active role in sexual relations and his control not only of the sexual act itself but also of woman’s sexuality and their (common) fertility. Along the way he does not protect *them*, he protects *her* from an unwanted pregnancy.

Because modern [...] heterosexual relations have been defined by male initiative and orgasm, creating women’s pregnancy risk as a side effect, heterosexuality has been organized around a perception of female vulnerability” (Paxon, 2000:322; see also Cowan, 1990).

If this is the case, seemingly logical question becomes why only a small number of women in Serbia take advantage of available contraceptives in order to mitigate their vulnerability which is inherent to sexual relations. In a survey on a sample of 3.060 women in Serbia, only 22,4 were, at the time, using medical contraceptives - pill, chemical contraceptives and IUD (*Politika* June 3, 1987). Majority of medical contraceptives are not only more reliable compared to *coitus interruptus*, but also afford women with more autonomy and control of their own bodies and sexuality. This very property of medical contraception makes the above question culturally illogical. By giving women an active role in the contraceptive practices and by affording them with more autonomy medical contraceptives place at risk not only women's own gender identity

[i]nnocent women do not need to use contraception (Lurker, 1975: 79),

but also that of her partner:

[f]ertility, contraception and abortion cannot be isolated from other aspects of women's lives...The use of contraception is deeply embedded in our notions of gender, sexuality, and courtship" (Lurker, 1975:75; see also, Morokvašić, 1984, Paxon 2002).

In other words, women's initiative and autonomy in matters of sexuality and contraception goes counter to the dominant gender ideology. Most preferred method of birth control by Serbian men, for that very reason, is *coitus interruptus*. This method gives them a sense of control over the relationship¹⁷². Moreover it serves to affirm men's virility and prowess. And in order to make an even stronger point men have to provide protection [da čuvaju] for

¹⁷² Explaining their husbands' resistance to using medical contraceptives, a significant number of women I talked with stated that "this way he is sure I am being faithful to him" (see also Rašević, 1993, and Morokvašić).

women relying solely on their skill. In other words the protection is provided in a ‘natural’ technologically unmediated manner.¹⁷³

I once witnessed a conversation between male co-workers in a small publishing company¹⁷⁴. One of them was expecting his third child and the others were teasingly commenting on this unusual number of children (two being the norm) and along the way questioning his sexual skills for not being able to ‘hold it back’ and ‘protect’ the wife. “Oh, whenever we are running a major marital crisis I just drop in one [child]”, was his reply.

This image of man as a depository of ‘ready-made’ children is congruent with traditional ideas about reproduction, according to which, child is made of father’s substance (mother’s womb serving only as a vessel for nurturing an already formed entity). Traditionally, women were responsible for preventing unwanted children either by avoiding sex or by self-induced abortions. Modern men however, can prevent inopportune pregnancies by deciding whether his child-making-substance drops-in, or out. If it drops-in accidentally at an inopportune time woman takes over the responsibility of quietly, without much ado, cleaning up the mess. In rural vernacular as well as among urban men in Serbia, *čišćenje* [cleansing] is a common designation for abortion. Being a result of non-reproductive sexuality, unwanted pregnancy makes a woman unclean, thus she has to undergo a ritual cleansing by having an abortion.

Silence that surrounds abortion, thus, serves not only to conceal woman’s non-reproductive sexuality but also man’s contraceptive mistake which if brought to public may put

¹⁷³ Women often refer to rhythm method and to *coitus interruptus* as “natural methods” [*čuvam se prirodno*] Many women I talked to about contraception during my fieldwork would refer to mechanical and chemical methods as ‘unnatural’ and disruptive, “killing the spontaneity of sex”. Apparently there is a discrepancy between the medical and popular definitions of uninterrupted, spontaneous sex. What medicine defines as *coitus interruptus*, for my informants is exactly the opposite: a model of spontaneous, uninterrupted sex

¹⁷⁴ This episode occurred in a line in the copy room. While I did not actively participate in the conversation, my presence must have somewhat influenced what was said. I knew them all and was known by them as a feminist. They did not know anything about my research – I was just visiting a friend who was their coworker.

at risk his masculine identity. Indeed, abortion in Serbia is an utterly female matter¹⁷⁵ leaving masculinity unchallenged. After all masculinity in patriarchal societies is both asserted and challenged primarily vis-à-vis the other men (see Simić 1969, 1979, Herzfeld 1993).

Even though *coitus interruptus* serves to affirm men's virility and prowess I do not want to argue that it makes women passive victims of men's power as some feminist activists would have it. Women have an interest invested in recreating both their own and their partner's gender identity. By participating in a relationship in which they are assigned a subordinate role they demonstrate their own and their partner's gender proficiency (see Paxon, 2002). Very little, however, in their behavior is traditional, as some experts would have it.

Modern (male) subjects take on themselves to conquer and control nature (Jordanova, 1989; Fox-Keller, 1985; Plumwood, 1994). To assert their modern subjectivities both men and women ought to control their instincts i.e. to control the nature in themselves for which sexuality is emblematic. This is maintained through an elaborate dialectic of gendered sexual practices. Men's proactive, aggressive sexuality is checked by women's resistance to sexual act. Once a woman succumbs to man's sexual desire, however, she is captured by instincts and passions which she is incapable either of resisting or controlling any more.

[I]t is easier and more 'normal' for men to be lustful and assertive, for women to merely surrender, to be carried away by a greater force" (L. Gorodn, quoted in Paxon, 2002:320).

Serbian men while being "lustful and assertive", do not get 'carried away by a greater force' of instincts, or emotions. Unlike women, they should be capable of restraint and in general should have better control of their own instincts for which *coitus interruptus* is exemplary. When it works, a man is successfully performing his role of, among other things, protecting his wife.

¹⁷⁵ Heitlinger argues that "in Eastern Europe, abortion, pregnancy and childbirth are events which hardly touch men at all, though this admittedly applies to men as sexual partners and not to men as doctors" (1987:10)

When it does not work she comes to his rescue by quietly taking care of an unwanted pregnancy, having abortion. Cultural practices related to abortion that make men's role in an unwanted pregnancy absolutely invisible, make their absence form public discourses on abortion and contraception unproblematic. It appears almost as if unwanted pregnancies occur outside of (heterosexual) social relations, unlike the wanted ones. Along the way women appear as if caught by tradition, ignorant about their own health and that of society.

If abortion were approached as a consequence of the contraceptive mistake (i.e. failing *coitus interruptus*), rather than as women's premeditated choice, its high rates could seriously challenge masculinity of Serbian men. More over, their masculinity would appear inferior to that of the Albanian men. Even though fertility levels of Kosovo Albanians are comparatively high, they have been declining for the last several decades (see section III, chpt.4). At the same time Albanian women have a very low abortion rates as well as medical contraceptive usage.

Like Serbian, Albanian couples also rely primarily on *coitus interruptus* to maintain and space the desired number of children and apparently with a higher success rate. There is evidence which suggests that under certain circumstances *coitus interruptus* can be rather reliable method of birth control.¹⁷⁶ Male centered world view that dominates not only popular but also expert discourses, obscures this otherwise conspicuous aspect of the reproductive/contraceptive practices. As a consequence the critical eye is cast on women and their femininity or their modernity is questioned, or both when *coitus intreruptus* does not work.

While men tend to be in control of sexual/contraceptive practices reproductive accountability ultimately rests with women (see Paxon, 2002:322). This female centered procreative accountability is reinforced by a confluence of expert, popular and religious

¹⁷⁶ Some research suggest that it is only a little less reliable than condoms, and more reliable than diaphragm (Sintow, and Paxon, 2002)

discourses in Serbia. All family planning policies have been focused on women and most of the contraceptive counseling services are associated with gynecological clinics and offices, places from which men are excluded¹⁷⁷. There is little doubt about women reproductive bodies being subjected to disciplining more than men's.

While experts agree that *coitus interruptus* is an unreliable method of birth control, no one questions how and where men learn about it and do they know how to properly practice it in order to increase the efficiency. Explaining some advantages of *coitus interruptus* over medical contraception from a women's perspective Rašević states that "a visit to physician is not a precondition for its usage" (1993:158). Rašević does not see a paradox in the fact that when *coitus interruptus* fails woman has to visit a physician under much more unpleasant and often humiliating circumstances. It also did not occur to her, or anyone else, that men may lack sufficient knowledge neither about medical contraceptives nor about how to make *coitus interruptus* more efficient and that consequently contraceptive education should target men too.

The structure of gender relations within marriage and family determined that women in this part of the world did not have a real choice when it came to deciding on methods of family planning, and abortion had become their ultimate resort. The fact that out of all women from the territory of Serbia proper who had an abortion in 1988, 93,4% were married (see Rašević,

¹⁷⁷ Men rarely if ever accompany their partners for gynecological visit, whatever the reason of a visit and they are generally not welcome there. When, during my fieldwork I went to see my old gynecologist I was not too surprised to see a notice on the wall which announced that men were not allowed in the waiting room. Still, I asked my physician what was it all about and she explained that some time ago a husband of a patient made a scene (yelled and physically threatened the staff) because he believed some patients were admitted ahead of time making him and his wife wait longer than necessary. In order to prevent similar incidents in the future the office simply decided to prohibit men from the premises which did not seem to bother anyone. A young man (in his late teens) who accompanied his girlfriend was patiently waiting in the hallway in front of the waiting room. The couple did not seem to be bothered, rather they find it amusing to communicate through the glass doors. Some of the women in waiting room were sending them sympathetic smiles, but others were rolling their eyes in disapproval. They disapproved their age, and his presence – perceiving both inappropriate at the premises.

1993:75)¹⁷⁸, only confirms that the socialist project of emancipation failed within the marriage and family.

Nationalist projects take advantage of exactly this situation in an attempt to redefine gender roles and gender organization at the macro level. The control of female procreative sexuality is an integral part of many nationalist projects and aims to ensure and maintain not only continuity, but also the 'purity' of a nation (Žarkov, 1995:113). Within the marriage, abortion serves to limit the family size while maintaining 'proper' gender roles, i.e. husband's domination and the wife's submission, in the domain of sexual relations (see Paxon, 2002, Morokvašić, 1984).

From the perspective of nationalist ideologues, however, abortion appears to undermine the patriarchal order at the broader, societal level preventing the state control of the citizens' sexuality and reproductive practices. Restricting access to abortion, in the context in which a small family is both social standard and a necessity, creates a tension between the patriarchal family on the one hand, and the patriarchal state on the other. Abortion as a method of family planning maintains the patriarchal gender relations within the family, while enabling it to limit the size. From the perspective of the nationalist, nation-state building ideologies, however, abortion and its high rates appear to be undermining the very survival of the nation.

This tension between the patriarchal family and the patriarchal state, however, is concealed by the oppositional/contrary consciousness created during socialism, according to which abortion is primarily associated with women and moreover with women's emancipation.

¹⁷⁸ Since pre-marital sexual relations are common and the mean age at marriage for women relatively high (in 1980 the mean age at the first marriage in Serbia Proper was 23, years for women and 26 years for men; in 1990 it was 24 for women and almost 28 for men. See Rašević et.al. 1999:158) we can only assume that more reliable contraception is used outside of marriage or that frequency of sexual relations is limited by the housing arrangements – young people live with their parents until they get married and very often after they get married. Another possibility is that the majority of out of wedlock pregnancies serve as a turning point in a relationship leading to marriage. In that case we could argue that abortion in Serbia is used primarily within marriage in order to space the desired number of children and after the number is reached.

The only difference is that in the post-socialist, nationalist context this equation has received a negative value for allegedly destroying the patriarchal order within the family while endangering the survival of the nation. Thus abortion became a symbol of corrupt social relations while attempts to ban or restrict access to it represented at the same time a critique of the old social order and legitimization of power struggle by newly emerging political players (see Gal, 1994)

In the following section I analyze the abortion debates in Serbia that unfolded during the mid 1990s, and the legislation that came about as a result.

Since in all discourses abortion is primarily associated with women (whether it is seen as their right or an expression of their egoism), I examine the abortion debates against the background of this chapter's analysis of gender power relations. I argued that abortion rates should not be directly associated with fertility levels, because at the micro level abortion is not a direct cause of small families. It is rather a method for achieving and maintaining a desired family size. In light of this, the popular connection between abortion and fertility levels seems utterly misplaced and resulting policies futile.

During the Eastern European socialist times, as argued above, abortion had been a medical or social issue, not a politicized women's issue (see also Maleck-Lewy, Marx Ferree 2000:114). This has changed in post-socialism and "contested definitions of women as ethically responsible or irresponsible, as self-determining or 'in conflict' [became] politically central" (Ibid.).

In the 1990s as Yugoslavia was falling apart and nationalism at its peak, abortion became reduced to the issue of biological survival of the nation.

The fact that abortions outnumbered births, in this context, became a powerful metaphor for those who claimed that low fertility was an expression of the biological and moral decline of

the nation. Expert discourses were in many different ways appropriated by political ones. One consequence was that high abortion rates were now almost unanimously associated with the low fertility by everyone, including the experts. An atmosphere was created in which the liberal abortion legislation appeared to directly cause low fertility, and new and aspiring political players started to voice their concern.

B. SERBIAN ABORTION POLITICS IN THE 1990S: FROM SOCIAL TO NATIONAL ISSUE

It is commonly believed that the political representation of women in socialism, even though higher in numbers than in western democracies, was of little or no significance, because the real power was in the high ranks of the Central Committees of the communist parties, from which women were largely missing. So the fact that the percentage of women in newly elected parliaments after 1989 dropped significantly is usually perceived only as a continuation of a practice according to which women are missing from the institutions which hold real power. Consequently, measured by real political influence, the position of women in socialism is thought to have been of little significance and not changed much after. The story of legal regulation of abortion in Serbia, however, provides a somewhat different picture about the participation and/or influence of women in political life both in socialism and in post-socialism and is also illustrative for the changing form of women's involvement in politics.

As mentioned earlier, abortion laws were on the agenda of the newly elected parliaments second only to the property laws. Abortion laws that were enacted by individual Yugoslav republics in the second half of the 1970s remained in place until the dissolution of the Federation in 1991. In Croatia and Slovenia the Catholic Church intensified its anti-abortion campaigns

right after these two republics declared independence from Yugoslavia. Still the law, which applied to abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy remained the same in both republics.

The Slovenian Constitutional Court declared abortion as one of the basic human rights. In Croatia, even though the legislation ultimately did not change it became more difficult to obtain abortion. As a result of the Church's pro-life and pronatalist campaign many physicians declined to perform abortions in the early 1990s (Kapor-Stanulović and David, 1999:298). The situation became particularly controversial in Croatia during the war in Bosnia after many rape victims arrived wanting to terminate often rather late pregnancies (see, Kesić 1995a, 1995b, Žarkov, 1999).

In Serbia it took approximately three years between the first multiparty elections, and several governments, before the issue of abortion law was taken under consideration. However, already in 1989, a bill was submitted in the old communist parliament aiming to restrict free access to abortion on request from 10 to 8 weeks of gestation. At the time, the general public was not really following the work of the legislature and the bill would probably have been passed if it were not for a woman delegate. She was a representative of the Socialist Youth of Serbia in the republican parliament and had previously almost single-handedly worked on legislation relevant for women's reproductive rights in the context of high employment.

After the abortion bill was submitted she alerted a few feminist-oriented women intellectuals. In almost no time a small ad-hoc group was formed to work on a petition which was later turned into an amendment officially submitted to the parliament by the above mentioned delegate. The group was made of 10-15 young professional and/or academic women including myself. None of us at the time was a member of any formal feminist group or political organization. It is interesting that later on when the first social-democratic party was formed in

Serbia in 1990, one of its founders claimed that the amendment was put together by her party. While it is true that she herself was among those of us who put together the petition/amendment, the social-democratic party was non-existent at the time and if I remember correctly she was the only one among us who later on joined that party.

If any institution could appropriate this successful political action it could have been only the Socialist Youth of Serbia. After all it was their representative who alerted the rest of us and all of our meetings (I think we met 2-3 times altogether) took place in the Belgrade Youth Cultural Center (Dom omladine Beograda) because one of the members of the group was its Program Director at the time. In its essence, however, the whole event could be seen as an example of the workings of civil society at its best. As a result, the proposed changes to the abortion law were not put to a vote. This was a small political victory of an even smaller number of women who acted as individual citizens and out of conviction that the proposed bill was unconstitutional and that it went against basic women's human rights, their needs and interests in the particular social context.

Several years passed between the first multiparty elections in Serbia and the beginning of the discussion of a new abortion law in the Parliament. The first elections took place in late 1990, but the bill was introduced in 1994. In the 1990 elections the Socialist Party of Serbia, SPS, (the transformed League of Communist of Serbia) won a massive parliamentary majority and Slobodan Milošević was elected the President of Serbia. In the meantime the former Yugoslavia disintegrated after the international recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia in January and of Bosnia in April of 1992. After that time the so-called "rump" Yugoslavia which now consisted of Serbia and Montenegro had several regular and "irregular" elections at both the federal and republican levels.

Serbia had parliamentary and presidential elections in 1991 when Slobodan Milošević was re-elected as the President, and the Serbian Radical Party (occupying the far right, nationalist end on the political spectrum) made substantial parliamentary gains. In late 1993 Milošević dissolved the Serbian parliament and called new elections which took part in December. In the elections both the Serbian Radical Party and Milošević's Socialists Party suffered losses. Failing to win a majority, the Socialist party after a round of unsuccessful negotiations with several bigger opposition parties made a coalition government with the small New Democracy Party in February of 1994 (see Thomas, 1999).

This was the immediate political context within which the abortion debate was opened in the Parliament. As long as Milošević's SPS had an unchallenged majority in the parliament the old 'socialist' abortion law remained unchallenged as well. As heirs of the Communist Party, the Socialists adhered to the pro-choice ideology. The issue of abortion was brought to the fore by new players on the Serbian political landscape, religious leaders being the primary example. The parliamentary debate was preceded by a broader public debate started by individual representatives of the Orthodox Church. More specifically, the debate in a way spilled out from Bosnia, which was still in the midst of war, into Serbia. The Bishop of Zvornik and Tuzla, Vasilije Kačavenda who was also a member of the Parliament of Republika Srpska, submitted a bill for banning abortion in that republic. The bill itself was formally irrelevant to Serbia, but in his public statements the Bishop called for banning the abortion in all Serbian lands¹⁷⁹. While the majority of women in Serbia seemed not to be interested in the issue, several small feminist groups responded unanimously, promptly and fiercely.

¹⁷⁹ Republika Srpska, in Bosnia, Republika Srpska Krajina in Croatia and and Republika Srbija were separate political entities that at the time framed and separated the Serbian nation.

They issued public statements condemning the initiative and organized street demonstrations in front of a historical building known as “*Konak Kneginje Ljubice*” and across the street from the Patriarch’s Office. “*Konak*” was built in the mid nineteenth century as the first European style building in Belgrade. For symbolic reasons the location (proximity) of the two buildings could not be better for the feminist demonstrators. They could at the same time protest against the “medieval norms of the Church”, and promote European values of modernity, symbolized by “*Konak*”.

Even though the demonstrations failed to mobilize more than a handful of women, mostly feminist activists, all major media reported and commented on them extensively. I collected a cross-section of newspaper reporting on what turned out to be primarily a squabble between the Serbian feminists and individual representatives of the Serbian Orthodox church. At the time the official Church had a more moderate attitude about the issue. The semi-official daily *Politika* quoted a representative of the Patriarch’s office as saying that “...even though the Church has always been against abortion it has no intention of addressing any issue in the form of ultimatum. The public was presented with the personal opinion of Bishop Vasilije.” The journalist, however, adds that while it “might be a personal opinion, the Bishop still requested that the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church¹⁸⁰ take a stand on the issue” (*Politika*, 3.31.93).

On the following pages I analyze political discourses on abortion together with expert ones published in professional mainly demographic journals. I have identified three discursive events which triggered and/or intensified the abortion debate in the early 1990s. First is the

¹⁸⁰ The Orthodox Church is organized nationally. In former Yugoslavia the Montenegrin, Macedonian as well as Croatian and Bosnian Orthodox churches were under the jurisdiction of the Belgrade (Serbian) Patriarchate. While there were long-lasting initiatives for the autocephaly of the Montenegrin and Macedonian churches, those in Bosnia and Croatia never challenged the authority of Belgrade Patriarch. Even though the movements for the autocephaly of the Montenegrin and Macedonian churches grew stronger after the country fell apart, all the Orthodox Churches from the former Yugoslavia are still under the jurisdiction of the Belgrade Office.

above mentioned bill submitted to the Parliament of the Republika Srpska by Bishop Vasilije; second is the Parliamentary debate in Serbia on the proposed new law and the subsequent veto by then-President Milošević of the version passed in the Parliament; third, the 1994 Christmas message of the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

I have collected a cross section of newspaper articles from the major newspapers (*Poliitka*, *Večernje novosti*, *Borba*), and weeklies (*NIN*, *Vreme*, *Duga*) for the period of three months following each of these events. Since these events followed one another, I have actually collected almost everything that appeared about abortion on the pages of these five papers for the period between March 1993 and May 1995 (when the final version of the abortion law was passed). After the new law was passed abortion as a topic became more sporadic. For the period between May of 1995 and November of 1998 (the end of my fieldwork), I have selected a number of articles from *Politka*, *Naša Borba*, *NIN* and *Vreme*. While not associated with any specific discursive event, debates on abortion in this period were certainly embedded in broader socio-political discourses.

The analysis that follows identifies the main actors in the debate and through discourse/textual analysis unearths various meanings they assigned to abortion. I analyze abortion as a metaphor which various actors in the debate used differently in order to promote and/or contradict specific ideas on individual and society, masculinity and femininity, gender and nation. More specifically I am interested in gendered images of the Serbian nation as they emerged from the discourses on abortion.

1. The First Discursive Event: Bishop's Anti-Abortion Bill

Bishop Vasilije submitted his proposal to the parliament of the Republika Srpska on February 26th 1993.

Borba, at the time still an independent daily, published a short caption mentioning the initiative on March 10th. *Politika*, however, did not inform its readership about his initiative independently. It was mentioned for the first time on March 19th, in a report on feminist demonstrations against the initiative. This report at first glance appears to be neutral. It explains the reasons for the protest and gives voice both to feminists and to a priest who attended the demonstrations. A closer examination, however, shows how the opinion of one priest who approached the protesters is framed in between statements taken from feminist demonstrators.

Moreover, the priest is quoted as saying, among other things, how he “visits the orphanage in Zvečanska Street on regular basis and [he can see] how despite the difficulties children there grow to [be] happy” (*Politika*, March 19 1993). Anyone who has ever read anything about this particular orphanage or seen a TV report on it cannot but see the irony intended by the author of the text. Even though this orphanage does not come close to the infamous Romanian ones during the Ceausescu era, children there look anything but happy. Furthermore, the cultural significance of the family in Serbia is so prominent that the orphanage as a metaphor for happy childhood can be ironic at best and cynical at worst, which curiously escaped this particular priest.

A few days later, the whole section on women and the family in *Politika* was devoted to the issue of abortion. This time *Politika* was openly critical about the Bishop’s initiative to ban abortion arguing, among other things that “one could claim that under the current [economic and political] circumstances the legislator should rather determine abortion as a necessity “. Moreover *Politika* gave a prominent place to feminist views, and also was critical about the fact that not one man joined the demonstrators. The report carried statements of several leading feminists, texts of the slogans carried by the demonstrators, as well as a photograph of the

demonstrators carrying them. *Politika* also offered several possible explanations for the small turn-out at the demonstrations: “The reason may be found in a lack of information [among the citizens], in [the fact] that women are worn out by the daily struggle for survival, or in the fact that we still live in a patriarchal society” (*Politika*, March 21 1993).

Statements were taken also from two medical doctors, (one of them a gynecologist), and they both argued against banning abortion. The gynecologist, claiming that it would take us “two centuries back [in time]”, added that “the birth rates can not be increased by administrative restrictions but rather by [better] conditions created by the state“ (ibid.). The other “experienced physician” said that “banning abortion is an old fascistic claim which assigns women to children, kitchen and the church. The conditions under which women can bear children are those of peace. If they are going to bear children that are going to die tomorrow [in the war] I don’t see the purpose of it...It is not up to doctors to decide which women can have abortions and which cannot. A physician is not more qualified to make that decision than an accountant or a street cleaner. I do not think that lawyers, psychologists and ideologues are competent either. It’s up to parents and primarily to women to decide when and how many children to have” (ibid.). This was probably the most radical feminist, post-structuralist and anti-neo-liberal critique of the anti-abortion campaign that appeared in the Serbian press.

In an article published on March 31st 1993, signed by a woman journalist, *Politika* brought the opinions of several “splendid intellectuals, spiritually enlightened” [*sjajni intelektualci i ljudi od duha*], about the initiative to ban abortion¹⁸¹. Since the article contains photographs of all the interviewed, what catches the eye right away is that among the “splendid intellectuals and people of spirit” there is not a single woman. Among the interviewed male,

¹⁸¹ The interviewed intellectuals were also asked to comment on what was defined as a dramatic demographic situation in Serbia. I analyze these responses elsewhere in the book.

“splendid intellectuals” were: Marko Mladenović, a professor of family law who on more than one occasion voiced dramatic concerns about low fertility of Serbian women; Mića Popović, a painter and a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, highly regarded among nationally oriented intellectuals; Gordana Mihić, a writer, Dejan Mijač, a theatre director and Momčilo Bajagić, a rock star.

Summarizing the responses the author of the article says that “all our interlocutors agree that the abortion right is one of the achievements of our civilization [in the realm of human rights] and that even though it should be the last on the list of means for family planning that right must not be revoked and the decision itself belongs to women”. Closer examination of the individual responses, however, reveals more diversified answers. No one argued that abortion should be banned but one man claimed that “family reasons¹⁸² as legally accepted reasons for abortion [after the 10th week of pregnancy] should be significantly restricted”. In order to support the argument he claimed that “a movement for banning abortion is on the rise among scientists, statesmen, and practitioners, particularly in Europe“.

Another among the interviewed called for tolerance of difference in opinion: “Any question can be raised, the thing is how the society responds to it.” Yet another stressed that the issue at hand was not the official stand of the church. Only one of the interviewed was actually adamant in rejecting the Bishop’s suggestion: “Banning [abortion] is not going to solve anything because banning something never solves the problem”. Despite all the nuances in the answers the author of the article concludes that “as we can see, it seems that “female” and “male” opinions on this issue are more or less identical. It is possible to notice that women’s reactions to abortion [banning] are more emotional but that almost goes without saying.”

¹⁸² He probably referred to “social” reasons.

Since no woman was interviewed for this article we can only assume that the author is making a reference to previously discussed feminist criticisms. That women “without saying react more emotionally” here is not a reference to the Cartesian worldview but rather to the fact that pregnancy and abortion are not only about women’s bodies by default but also that culturally women in Serbia rarely share experiences of pregnancy and birth and even more so abortion with their partners. Or to put it differently, men on average do not express a lot of interest in women’s very bodily experiences of the kind nor are women willing to relate these experiences outside of all female contexts. While Family laws in former Yugoslavia allowed both men and women to use a year of paid (maternity) leave in order to care for a newborn child, hospitals did not permit men to be present at birth. Nowadays some hospitals allow it but not many men seize the opportunity, neither had many taken the leave. Such an attitude is a result of a strict separation between male and female spheres of reproduction where the male role ends with conception.

It could be argued that in its reporting on the abortion debate *Politika* was addressing the female population of Serbia who, like other East European women, relied on abortion as a primary means for family planning. While giving prominent place to feminist voices, *Politika* was not necessarily (if at all) promoting feminist ideology. It was actually hiding behind the feminist and experts’ arguments against the initiatives to ban abortion - something a majority of Serbian women wanted to hear. Bringing the voices of the “splendid intellectuals” on the issue, however, served at least two purposes. First it softened *Politika*’s initial complete rejection of the Bishop’s initiative. As shown above, a closer look at the individual responses reveals that some of the interviewed were not against considering the idea of a somewhat more restrictive abortion law.

The selection of the interviewed was not incidental either. Being “splendid intellectuals”, they represent the experts’ modernist discourse. Talking from their other designation as the “people of spirit”, representatives of the so called “high culture” they stand for the nation’s (male) soul (see Verdery, 1995). While not all of them had the reputation of being nationalist intellectuals, they all were perceived as patriots who understood the nation’s culture and even more importantly have made significant contributions to it, each in his respective field.

The authority of the “splendid intellectuals” conveys an image of Serbia as modern and closely related to the West. The selection of the individual intellectuals, those whose works have a strong local mark, points to Serbia’s distinct national culture. The most curious, at least at the first glance, was to include a rock musician among the “splendid intellectuals”. While there is no agreement about the definition of the concept of an intellectual, rock musician would hardly fit in any of the existing definitions. But rock culture in socialist Yugoslavia represented one of the strongest ties with the West. What made this specific rock musician a particularly convenient interlocutor was the fact that in his lyrics as well as in his public statements he projected strong local identity together with the cosmopolitan one¹⁸³.

Večernje novosti, another pro-regime daily (Thomas, 1999:xvii) addressed different audiences in its reporting on the abortion debate. The only voice that this newspaper represented in the article on March 12th 1993 was that of Bishop Vasilije, the author of the abortion ban proposal. The article is titled Abortion Endangers the Nation, and leaves a little doubt about where the author stands in the debate.

¹⁸³ One of his ballads has become a nostalgic hymn for the members of Yugoslav rock generation living abroad. This generation had a privilege to start the adult life during the most prosperous time in the existence of the socialist Yugoslavia. A significant number of people of this generation left the country during the war. For all of them regardless of the region they come from this song entitled “My Friends are Like Pearls, Broken Out Around the World (*Moji su drugovi ko’ biseri rasuti po celom svetu*) evokes memories of “normal life” and of common, Yugoslav cultural space if not identity.

In explaining the motives for his initiative the Bishop provided three reasons in the following order: “the massive losses of the Serbian people [in the war]; God’s Commandment ‘Do not kill’; and finally the word of God ‘Procreate and multiply’”. He continues claiming that abortion is “against the natural laws [and its prevalence represents] a prenatal war...which is more brutal than [the war among people] because [the prenatal war] kills the unborn...Each murder is sanctioned by both secular and divine laws and forced termination of pregnancy - is nothing but the killing of an unborn child...For the church, abortion is not simply ethically wrong, it is truly a murder and a mother is a murderer nothing less than one who raises her hand to a child she gave birth to...According to the church cannons any one who assists in an abortion is a murderer. An accomplice in this sinful murder is even a man who begets a child if he did not want it“ (stress added).

From the Commandment “Procreate and multiply” the Bishop concluded that children give meaning to one’s life and continued: “Many [people] were killed in this war. Many are not able to enjoy in their children any more because they sent them away or lost them. But life goes on and [we] Serbs need new births...Serbs as a nation are endangered today and they need [some] fresh blood (*nove snage*)¹⁸⁴.” It is rather amazing how the Bishop accepts the loss of life in war with a philosophical distance, while only a few lines above he did not spare harsh words to condemn those who have anything to do with abortion and primarily women who have them. The Bishop condemns socialism for “emptying human souls of the idea of God in the name of some fake freedoms and rights...” and for its liberal abortion laws.

But in the same paragraph he regrets the lack of a very socialist institution - commissions which used to consider requests for abortion: “the opinion of some social structures like the three

¹⁸⁴ The expression “*nove snage*” translates literally as “new forces” and belongs to the vocabulary of the League of Communists. It was integral part of reform discourses within the Party connecting political reforms with personal reform of the leadership.

member commissions is not required any more. It is left to irresponsible parents to make a decision on their own”. Since individuals make irresponsible decisions, acting exclusively from their own particular interests, social institutions, organized by the state, have to make decisions for them, thus protecting the interests and well being of the whole society. All totalitarian regimes have been fond of this modernist ideal of social engineering. The ideology was very popular in the early 20th century Western Europe. It was turned into practice through numerous social policies of the fascist regime in Italy (see Horn, 1994). Similar kind of ideology is behind what Verdery named the “paternalism” of the socialist state (Verdery, 1998).

In a separate box titled “Moral Fall” the article presented data which were given by some other church representatives in order to argue that legalization contributed to an increase in numbers of abortion not only in Serbia but in other parts of the world as well (Japan, USA and Romania were mentioned). It was also argued that behind the legalization of the abortion are some economic interests, without specifying whose, though. Finally, it was claimed that abortion is an expression of the moral decline of the nation, “and a nation which is dying out is easily overrun by biologically stronger nations” (the latter a reference to Albanians).

Another text is framed individually and titled “The Silent Scream”. The readers are informed that the question of when life begins is not a matter of religious beliefs any more, and that the Church supports its dogma by arguments put forward by the American physician Bernard Natanson, who filmed¹⁸⁵ the abortion of a 12 week old fetus. It is claimed that after seeing this film many physicians have changed their opinion about abortion. Few of my informants who had more than one abortion and who saw the documentary told me that had they seen it earlier they probably would not have so easily opted for abortions. Unlike public debate and new legislation that had a little resonance in women’s lives and decisions, this documentary originally made for

¹⁸⁵ During my fieldwork, almost all TV stations in Serbia had shown this documentary.

the US audience was apparently making much greater impression on women making them to reconsider their attitudes about abortion.

When contacted by a journalist from the independent daily *Borba*, Bishop Vasilije responded “we are in the midst of war here [in Bosnia] and I do not have the time for conversation” (*Borba*, March 27-28). The article in *Borba* carried a clear ‘pro-choice’ stance, but following the credo of objective journalism it tried to get opinions from various groups in the political spectrum. At the time it seemed that none of the significant political players supported the initiative for banning abortion. *Borba*, however did not manage to get an official statement from the Serbian Radical Party, whose PR representative apparently considered the question inappropriate [“*neozbiljno pitanje*”]. *Borba* published his explanation for offering no comment: “Leave me alone, please! Why don’t you call other parties and ask them [what they think]? I don’t have the time to talk about it”.

His and the Bishop’s refusal to talk to a liberal paper testify to the pervasive lack of dialogue between major political actors in Serbia at the time. Political issues were discussed in a confrontational manner with no desire for reaching any kind of compromise on specific issues. Political battles were fought from separate, well fortified trenches, and abortion was no exception. This type of exclusiveness characterized attitudes of the general public as well which among other things meant that newspapers were read according to one’s political preference and not much interest was expressed in what the opponents had to say. The opinions of the others were accepted or rejected according to their political affiliation, rather than argumentation. From that perspective neither the Bishop nor the rightist, nationalist politician had an interest in sharing his opinions with the audience of a liberal paper.

In addition, Serbian politicians seemed to espouse the same kind of hesitation in taking up the issue of abortion as their Western European colleagues did in the 1970s (see Outshoorn, 1997:154), with the slight difference that Western European Parliaments in the 70s were under pressure to liberalize (in some cases decriminalize) the existing abortion laws, while Serbian Parliament in the 1990s was under the pressure to restrict the existing liberal abortion law.

Outshoorn argues that “Parties will not easily take a stand on abortion, which touches on the secular/religious divide” (Ibid.). In Serbia, however, the same issue had a somewhat different spin – while most major political actors seemed to take a pro-choice stance, some were afraid to go counter to the rising influence of the Orthodox Church, and some others did not want to undermine the Church’s newly regained authority¹⁸⁶. I would also add that in both Western and Eastern European contexts the public/domestic divide contributed to the politician’s hesitation to address the issue. According this world view abortion belongs to private and expert/medical discourses. In the public/political discourses it becomes a matter out of place or “a joke” [*neozbiljno pitanje*].

Borba also interviewed a few citizens of Belgrade. The common opinion seemed to be that the Church should have no say in the issue. One of those interviewed added that “our Church is beginning to apply the Vatican’s methods. It seems that everything comes to us from the West”. Like in other post-socialist countries, public opinion was against restricting the access to abortion but had little influence on Parliamentary decisions, at least initially.

In the same issue, right below this article, *Borba* published a biting commentary by one of its regular commentators, a persistent critic of Serbian nationalism and Milošević’s regime and a member of a small, liberal opposition party. The commentary was titled: “Children in

¹⁸⁶ Both political position and opposition in Serbia in the 90s was careful not to get into an open conflict with leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, specifically with the Patriarch. Both sides were hoping to use the great respect and moral authority that Patriarch Pavle enjoyed, in order to influence voters.

Orthodox [hand-knitted] Socks” and subtitled: “The Serbian ’lebensborn’”. It compares the initiative for banning of abortion with Mussolini’s population politics and with Nazi Germany’s lebensborn project. The author made unbecoming remarks about some prominent elements of Serbian national mythology: the nation’s peasant origin, symbolized by hand-knitted woolen socks; Orthodox religion; and alleged military superiority: This last element found its expression in the frequently used lament of Serbian nationalists: “We always lose at the negotiating table what we win in war.” / We win wars but we lose in peace“. And here is the author’s comment:

I already can see numerous little Serbs growing up so that they can die wearing the woolen socks that Serbian women knit for them with their Orthodox needles while waiting to be impregnated again, so that they can give birth to more children that can serve as gun fodder in some future war after Serbia loses another peace (*Borba*, March 27-28, 1993:14).

The style here is not much different from the style of the liberal political opposition elsewhere in East Europe. Analyzing the abortion debate in Hungary, Gal describes the opposition writing as ironic, and with “the titles that are playful, the articles [...] filled with puns, bitter parody, or savagely funny put-downs” (Gal, 1994:276). All of this “[i]n contrast to the dramatic, even grandiose, rhetoric of the populists and the doctors and lawyers warning against abortion” (ibid.)

A couple of weeks later, on April 8,th *Borba* published another critical commentary by a woman journalist. This article pointed out that the argument about the abortion law was framed between two opposing ends, between representatives of the Orthodox Church and feminist organizations. The author quoted some of the most extreme statements of a couple of priests in order to deconstruct a patriarchal plot/ideology behind it.

The journalist’s comment was accurate: the main dispute was between feminist organizations and individual representatives of the Orthodox Church. The official church

remained more or less silent on the issue. The reasons for the silence were inadvertently explained by the director of one of the gynecological/obstetric clinics in Belgrade. Asked to comment on the possibility of banning abortion he said: “I am a bit surprised by this demand. Not so much for its content but rather because it appeared as an isolated voice. I had a chance to talk about demographic problems with his Holiness, Patriarch Pavle. We agreed that the church should not act on its own regarding such a delicate issue” (*Novosti*, March 13th 1993). Apparently there were some behind the doors talks about the issues of demography and family planning between the church, medical, and political institutions. We can only speculate why they agreed that the church should not voice its opinion separately.

As a response to the feminist demonstrations against his demand for the banning of abortion Bishop Vasilije accused them of not being Orthodox, and hence not real Serbs.

If they were [Orthodox] they would not demonstrate against the church which teaches them good and how to live according to God’s Commandments. These groups are connected neither to the church nor to the being of the Serbian nation [*narod*]... (*Borba*, March 27-28 1993).

Another member of the clergy who voiced his support for the Bishop’s demand was more specific about what makes someone a real Serbian woman, and being feminist and/or emancipated certainly did not qualify. “[S]omething must be seriously wrong with the hearts of those who demonstrated... We have been appalled by crimes inflicted on us by Muslims in Bosnia and by *ustaše*¹⁸⁷ in the Republic of Srpska Krajina. But do you know that sometimes we ourselves are worse than *ustaše*. When a mother goes against her own child, it makes us worse [than *ustaše*]. If only in Belgrade we have between 80 and 100 000 abortions per year¹⁸⁸, which

¹⁸⁷ It is interesting how he singles out the extreme nationalists in Croatia as perpetrators of the crimes against Serbs, but does not make the same distinction among the Bosnian Muslims.

¹⁸⁸ Actually, the statistics for 1993 show that the total number of induced abortion for the whole Serbia was 136.000 (source, Statistički godišnjak Srbije, 1993).

compares to the dying out of whole cities, then it becomes apparent how much we are our own enemies and *ustaše*.”

This priest continues by comparing gender relations among Serbs and Albanians in order to condemn the former. “With our neighbors, the Albanians¹⁸⁹, it is still clear who rules in the house and who has to obey. Their women understand that they are to obey. Our nation, however, has the so called emancipation [of women]. But that is not the kind of emancipation in which a person grows. It is, rather the emancipation of destructive [elements] in Serbian women. It is the emancipation [which turns woman into] a whore, [it is] emancipation for a woman who wants an easy life [*lak život*]. It is emancipation of women who want to avoid motherly duties” (*Politika ekspres*, April, 4 1993).

The true womanhood symbolized by motherhood, according to the priest, was corrupted by the socialist emancipation. The consequences have been grave because in his worldview women have a destructive streak which has to be controlled by their husbands if ‘natural’ gender roles and the stable society were to be maintained. Consequently, a society with uncorrupted gender roles (i.e. Albanians in Kosovo) is not only more numerous, but more vital as a nation as well. The perceived superiority of the Albanian nation in the struggle for national territories is explained by the lack of emancipation among the Albanian women.

Responding to the feminist slogan “we don’t want to be baby factories” [*nećemo da budemo fabrike dece*], the same priest who was the rector of the Theologian Seminary in Prizren, Kosovo, stated that he did not want to imply that women should be “procreation factories” [*fabrike dece*], but added that it does not mean they should be “baby crematoriums” either.

Analyzing the rhetoric and symbolism of the abortion politic in the US, Woliver states that “by referring to doctors who do abortions as technicians and the clinics as ‘factories’, or

¹⁸⁹ The priest used here an disputed designation for Albanians: Šiptari

‘industries’, pro-life groups try to make abortion distinct from legitimate health care and birth control” (1996:16). With this, she argues, pro-choice arguments and rationale are undermined and disregarded by symbolic images: “Because those doctors have a ‘direct financial interest’ in abortion, their credibility as physicians is questioned” (Ibid:16).

Serbian abortion politics uses the “industrial” metaphors, differently. In feminist discourses the metaphor of “baby factories” serves two purposes. At one level it invokes the image of the assembly line with assigned output quota, and oppressed workers/women who have no control over the ‘production’ process in which they are the key agents. At another level, but related to this, the metaphor stands for the co- modification of children by pronatalist and pro-life ideologues. The metaphor of crematorium in the priest’s narrative, however, is there to invoke images of calculated, cold-blooded, industrial, mass killings, perpetrated in the concentration camps by the Nazis during the WW 2 and thereby to deny not only femininity and Serbian national identity, but also bare humanity to women who have abortions.

Even though the priest denied the accusation that he saw women as merely ‘baby factories’, he still assigns a quota of 6-7 children per woman. Women with as many children should, according to him, qualify for pensions. Unlike Bishop Vasilije who, at least, tried to divide the responsibility for having or not having children between men and women (though not equally), this priest addresses exclusively women.

Like almost all other participants in the debates on abortion and reproduction, this priest assigns an important role to the state in stimulating births. “The state has to [stimulate birth rates] if it wants to have conscripts, students [in schools] and workers” (*Politika ekspres*, *ibid.*). However, the state here is not perceived as a service for its citizens, but vice versa – the citizens are in the service of the state and the state needs not only a lot but also specific kinds of citizens.

It needs conscripts to protect its borders and sovereignty; and it needs workers and students for social development.

This is only a slight modification of the popular communist rhetoric in which “workers, peasants, and students” [*radnici, seljaci i studenti*] were often called for as the moving force of the social development in the former Yugoslavia. Initially, this kind of rhetoric may sound unusual coming from a priest. It however, exhibits the pervasiveness of the communist ideology across the social fabric. Moreover it also shows the continuity between the nationalist and socialist conceptions of modernity. The difference between these two projects is not in the relationship between the state and the society, but rather in the social composition i.e. in who is seen as a driving force of the modernization. This specific priest apparently learned all too well the socialist interpretation. His omission of peasants does not mean the exclusion of them from the national state. It rather signifies their ‘inborn’ connection with the state in nationalist ideology as soldiers were in the communist.

Feminist argumentation against banning abortion focused on several points. The first was the right of women to decide whether, when and how many children to have, interpreted as one of the basic human/women’s right. A second had to do with the social consequences of criminalizing abortion which, they argued would, lead to an increase in life-threatening, illegal abortions. Finally feminists argued against interference by the church in public life. Some of the slogans at the demonstrations were: “We do not want to be incubators controlled by the church, state and nation”; “Unwanted child - unhappy child”; “Free abortion [is] a precondition for democracy”: Illegal abortion [is] a legal death of a woman”; “Less Church, more condoms”.

One issue that all participants in the debate about abortion agreed upon was the role of the state in providing and maintaining the material conditions which would motivate people to

have more than 1-2 children. While the majority of citizens believed that the Church should have no say in the issue of abortion, those experts who expressed their concern over the low birth and high abortion rates, were of a different opinion. Many of them deemed the Church an important player in creating reproductive policies. “The power of medical profession goes beyond its authority and prestige as a rational science and healing enterprise. Its authority spills over its clinical boundaries into arenas of moral and political action for which medical judgment is only partially relevant and often incompletely equipped”(Woliver, 1996:17).

In order to give moral flavor to their anti-abortion arguments, experts in Serbia needed the moral support of the church because according to socialist heritage its authority is based primarily on reason and rationality. The most vocal pro-life gynecologist in Serbia after stating that there is no difference between killing a school age child and an abortion went on to suggest that the church should deny to perform religious services (for example weddings) to those who had an abortion (*NIN*, November 8 1996). On the other hand the church on its way to regain social/political status and influence needed scientific support for its moral arguments, for the very same reason – the dominance and popularity of experts’ discourses. I remember, growing up, that my mother often used the expression “experts argue” [*stručnjaci tvrde*] when she wanted to fortify any argument or give advice.

2. The Patriarch’s Christmas Message and the Parliamentary Debate

It took two years, however, for the Orthodox Church to embrace officially something that started as an individual initiative of one of its Bishops. In his 1994¹⁹⁰ Christmas message the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church spoke about several predicaments that afflicted the nation, in the following order: poverty, war and refugees; the advent of various other Christian congregations

¹⁹⁰ Since the Serbian Orthodox Church follows the old, Julian calendar which runs a couple of weeks behind the Gregorian calendar. Thus, according to the Gregorian calendar, the message was announced on January 1 1995

into Serbia¹⁹¹; abortion; and the civil war which had brought not only international sanctions but also further divisions within the Serbian nation (*Politika*, January 7 1995).

The Patriarch started off his commentary on abortion by blaming it for the low birth rates:

It is our duty to warn about another epidemic that has inflicted the modern world and unfortunately our Serbian nation as well. This epidemic threatens to extinguish the descendants of St. Sava. [The name of the] epidemic is the ‘white plague’¹⁹² - infanticide which causes low population growth. Because of that we have nowadays more graves than cribs in some parts of our country. Mothers conceive because [it] gives them enjoyment and gratification but they do not want to raise children because it is difficult and allegedly impinges on their comfort. Many schools that used to resound with the joyous voices of children are closed today because there are no children.

St. Sava a medieval Patriarch of the Serbian Church, was the one who brought the Serbian Church to Orthodoxy. His brother, Stefan Nemanja, was initially crowned by the Pope, but St. Sava decided to ally with the Patriarchate in Constantinople, and by that act made the Serbian medieval Church and state part of the Orthodox world. By referring to Serbs as the ‘descendants of St. Sava’, patriarch Pavle defines the whole nation as an Orthodox patrilineage, which was a common metaphor in the nationalist discourses throughout the 1990s. Since according to the Church’s canons, St. Sava is the patron of education, the nation that descends from him must also be enlightened and progressive. At the same time, the Patriarch singles out women as primarily responsible for dying of the nation. Moreover, in what some might see as a rather cynical manner the Patriarch scolds mothers who lost their children during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia for their tragedy.

¹⁹¹ The representatives of other (mainly protestant) Christian churches who were active in Serbia at the time the Patriarch described as “sectarians’ flocking over with Western money, preying on our misery in order to steal the soul of [our] people”.

¹⁹² The “white plague” [bela kuga] was a common metaphor for describing the consequences of low fertility. I analyze its meaning in section chapter 3.5.

Many mothers who did not want to have more than one child are now pulling out their hair and crying their eyes out over the loss of their only child in the war. They are often cursing God and others for that but they are forgetting to blame themselves for not bearing more children that could remain to comfort them.

The Patriarch than explains his criticism citing social/political consequences of the low birth rates:

It has been mathematically calculated that the Serbs will in only twenty years become a minority in their own country if population growth remains the same. Then, of course, they will not be able to make their own decisions about themselves and their destiny because as the saying goes 'The mountain belongs to those who own the flock'.

Only after offering social/political reasons for his concern, the Patriarch brings up the moral issues related to abortion, and the question of the beginning of life. But instead of citing the Bible he uses scientific rhetoric and allegedly scientific evidence for the beginning of life at conception. The same evidence, according to the Patriarch, makes the mother a mere vessel of reproduction and women who have abortions, sinners worse than any other murderer.

[M]ost importantly, infanticide [*čedomorstvo*] is a devastating [*vapijući*] sin in front of God. Science has made it possible today for the contents of several books to be transferred onto only one square centimeter of microfilm. It has [also] been proved that one does not become a person only after birth but right at conception. At the time of conception the embryo [*zametak*], invisible to the human eye contains a complete future personality: the color of eyes and hair, facial features and physic, character and all other characteristics. Later on, through nurturing and rearing, the mother only cares for that already shaped being in itself. It is a sin in front of God to take [another] man's life. It is an even greater sin not to allow one's own child to see the daylight, [to let it] at least be kissed by the sun.

The last few lines of the message may suggest that sending children to die for the nation is less of a sin than terminating pregnancy¹⁹³.

Feminist groups this time responded in written form accusing the writers of the Christmas message of sexism and militarism. Only a couple of independent media published the protest

¹⁹³ The war in Bosnia was still in the full swing when the message was issued.

signed by all the major feminist groups from Belgrade. This silence of the state controlled media about the feminist reactions to the Christmas message, suggests a more orchestrated action against abortion this time. As a response to the accusations in the message that limiting family size is an expression of women's selfishness, the feminists argued that limiting family size was an expression of women's sense of responsibility. The letter also pointed out that the message denies women the right to control their own bodies. Then it explained why women resort to abortion as the last means of family planning:

[w]omen have abortions because they do not have an adequate sexual education, contraception is not available, their partners do not protect them,¹⁹⁴ because they live in poverty and they do not want to increase the number of suffering ones, while society does not maintain peace or a possibility [for people] to live off of their work, and because they are social, educated and cultured beings that cannot be reduced solely to their reproductive roles. They also have abortions when they are raped in or outside of marriage and when their bosses, family friends and clients force them into sexual relations (*Vreme*, January 16 1995).

Finally, the letter condemns the Patriarch together with the Catholic and Muslim religious leaders for not taking an official and public stand against the rapes committed against women during the war in Bosnia.

The church's official response came three days later and was given by the Center for development of Orthodox-Christian Education:

The Serbian Patriarch, addressed the believers and talked about the morality and rules of the Orthodox religion. His Holiness was not addressing you, dear ladies, who are suspicious of everything because of your ignorance which results from the fact that you do not know the first thing about our faith [*vera*]. Had you made an effort you would have learned that the essence of Christianity is in love, mercy and tolerance of the other. Because of that it was unreasonable and discriminatory on your part to hurt someone's feelings and particularly [to hurt] the pure and praying [*molitvena*] soul [*ličnost*] of our Patriarch who is a rare bright spot in these dark times of ours (*Vreme*, January 16 1995).

¹⁹⁴ This is a reference to *coitus interruptus*.

By referring to Orthodoxy as “our faith”, religious leaders, yet again, defined the Serbianhood as Orthodoxy. Feminists, who are not only un-Orthodox, but also un-Christian, atheists and cosmopolitan, must be non-Serbian and immoral too.

The Christmas message came about only a month after the Serbian Parliament endorsed a new abortion law. This was a second version proposed by the government since the first one which was passed in the spring of 1994 was vetoed by Slobodan Milošević, the president of Serbia at the time, on the grounds that it infringes on women’s basic rights. The Parliamentary discussion on the abortion law, proposed by the Ministry of health, started in May of 1994. The major changes, compared to the old socialist law, had to do with abortions after the 10th week of pregnancy. The proposed legislation did not introduce any changes before the 10th week during which period abortion was available at a woman’s request. After the 10th week of pregnancy the legislators proposed access to abortion based only on a few medical reasons and did not recognize social reasons at all. Many amendments were submitted to the Parliament and most of them were ignored except for a couple suggested by the Democratic Party which requested that the law should provide for abortion be performed in gynecologists’ offices at the Primary Health Care Centers and not only in clinics¹⁹⁵; that abortion should be approved after the 10th week if the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest; and finally that doctors who perform abortions should be licensed by the Ministry of Health. Interestingly enough the representatives of the far right Serbian Radical Party abstained from voting and criticized the suggested law for being restrictive arguing that the law should respect “the right of woman to decide whether she wants to keep or to terminate a pregnancy“ (*Politika*, 28 May 1994).

¹⁹⁵ This demand makes a perfect (economic) sense because the state funding that clinics receive for abortions is much higher than funding received for contraceptive services (see Rašević, 1993:36).

The socialist majority however, passed the law incorporating not only the above mentioned restrictions, but also making it more difficult for minors between the age 16-18 to obtain abortion by requiring consent from both parents. Knowing, however, that married women make the biggest percentage among those who have abortion, it could be suggested that the real intent of the legislators was not to increase the number of births (relatively low incidence of teenage pregnancy). Also it is more likely for menopausal women to fail to note pregnancy before the 10th week, so restrictions imposed for later pregnancies were going to affect primarily these women - again a group which is not likely to contribute to the reversal of fertility rates. Despite many criticisms, primarily from feminist groups, opposition parties, medical and other experts, the Parliament passed the law, and its creators defended it arguing that their intention was not to solve demographic problems with the law and moreover that the law was based on the experiences of many European countries.

If the Minister of Health, who thus defended the new law, wanted to say that the procedure for obtaining an abortion after the 10 weeks of pregnancy was vaguely defined by the new law, as are the requirements in many Western European laws, she was right: “Most of the laws [in Western Europe in the 1970s] necessitated compromise and much of the legislation was often deliberately drafted in ambiguous terms so one has to read between the lines to interpret the intent of the bill in question” (Outshoorn, 1997:153). The intent of Western European Parliaments, according to Outshoorn, was to make legal abortions more accessible to women while incorporating restrictions demanded by religious leaders.

The restrictions introduced in the new Serbian abortion law made teenagers and menopausal women the most vulnerable since they have been most numerous among the seekers of the late gestation abortions. The vaguely defined conditions for abortion can work both ways,

they may make access to abortion easier while appeasing the abortion opponents in the Parliament; but they can also make access to abortion more difficult. Serbian law which regulates late gestation pregnancies is an example of the latter. Since the procedure for implementation of this section of the law has not been specified yet much room is left for improvisations and various interpretations in practice (see Konstantinović-Vilić, S., N. Petrušić, 1997).

Milošević, still the president of Serbia, however, used his constitutional right and vetoed the law created by the government and passed in the Parliament controlled by his own party. He proclaimed that the law “goes against the basic human rights and freedoms, because it restricts the freedom [of people] to decide about having children, which is one of the basic human rights” (*Politika*, June 26 1994). During the discussion of the new law in the Parliament the only clearly pro-life stand came from the representative of the Democratic Party of Serbia. He argued that there was “no dilemma about the fact that termination of a normal pregnancy always goes against the basic right to life. This means that in a lawful state [*pravna država*] legal access to abortion always undermines the right to life. Because of that legalization of abortion signifies either lack or loss of awareness of the people about notions on which depend the very survival of the nation; it means a lack of awareness about human essence and about one’s own nation” (*Borba*, June 6 1994).

It is interesting that *Borba* did not carry the unusually liberal arguments of the representatives of the Serbian Radical Party during the discussion of the abortion law, nor did *Politika* quote the representative of the Democratic Party of Serbia with his pro-life narrative. The latter can be explained by the simple fact that abortion issue in Serbia was only rarely framed as a pro-life issue. In as much as right to life ideology influenced the abortion debate it

was always only second to the arguments related to ‘national survival’. *Politika*, while using the abortion issue as a forum for sending political messages to specific audiences, certainly, never espoused the pro-life ideology. Liberal oriented journalists and editors in *Borba*, on the other hand, apparently could not believe their ears, being convinced that the representatives of the Radical Party could not hold a single rational and/or liberal idea. In addition, due to the antagonistic relationships on the political/public scene which were discussed earlier, journalists of the liberal paper could not allow to share even a single idea with an opponent from the diametrically opposing end on the political spectrum.

The first version of the law was passed in late May 1994, and in early June president Milošević vetoed it. In June *Politika* again published an article in which prominent figures were asked for their opinion on abortion. But while in the article discussed previously the interviewed were introduced as “splendid intellectuals“ this time they were referred to as “our readers“, even though they all were prominent public figures in their respective fields.

This time unlike on the previous occasion discussed above, among the interviewed there were equal numbers of men and women (four each). All the women were artists: a ballerina, a cello player/composer, an opera singer and an actress. The men on the other hand were from various fields: a gynecologist, a demographer who was also a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, a writer and again a rock star. The choice of the rock star may suggest that *Politika* had in the meantime changed its target audience catering now more to the hard line nationalist audiences. This particular rock star (Bora Djordjević), unlike the one from the article discussed earlier, was known for his strong nationalist statements and for mocking other nations of the former Yugoslavia.

All of the interviewed women agreed together with the rock star that deciding about children is an individual right and that the state has no business in interfering in that decision by banning or restricting access to abortion. Some among them pointed out that the state should provide material conditions conducive to having more children as well as free and easy access to modern contraceptives. One of the interviewed women pointed out that an abortion, no matter how early in the pregnancy, always ends life, making the very decision tormenting for women. But she adds that “the state cannot control anyone’s conscience“(*Politika*, June 15 1994).

All the interviewed men, except for the rock star, in a way answered a different question from what they were asked. The question was “what [do you] think about [the newly adopted abortion law] which [imposes] restrictions to woman’s undisputed right to decide for herself how many children she wants to have” (*Politika*, *ibid.*). While none of the interviewed women made any connection between the issues of abortion and the survival of the nation, all but one among the interviewed men made this linkage. Even the rock star who believed that the state has no right to intervene and/or restrict access to abortion pointed out that the state should provide material conditions conducive to having more children because “I agree that more Serbs should be born...And since we all know the technology of making babies we should just get on with the job” (*Politika*, June 15 1994)

The gynecologist criticized the fact that the new law allowed performing abortions in any gynecological office¹⁹⁶, and concluded that “anyone who brings this kind of law does not have the well-being of my people [*narod*] in mind” (*Politika*, *ibid.*). The writer answered the question by addressing the issue of demographics saying that he was “afraid that a day will come when our state will be called Serbia but the Serbs will be a minority in it. Don’t you think that we should [better] change [our] life philosophy” (*Politika*, *ibid.*). Finally the demographer was

¹⁹⁶ According to the old, socialist law, only hospitals were licensed to perform abortions.

“concerned with the fact that abortion is a great evil which can cause secondary sterility. Because of that women should be careful in using their right to abortion” (*Politika*, *ibid*).

After Milošević's veto, the new abortion law was back in the hands of the government, which decided to start working on a completely new version rather than changing individual acts. It took six months for the government to come before the Parliament with the new version of the abortion law, in December of 1994¹⁹⁷. With this, the government made a breach of procedure since it failed to put the president's veto of the first version of the law for a parliamentary discussion before started working on the new version. This raised suspicion among the opposition parties:

According to the Constitution the Parliament is above the President which means that after he vetoed the old [abortion] law the Parliament should have put it into procedure again. Only after the Parliament would have confirmed its [otherwise] obvious faults, the law could have been withdrawn and the procedure for creating the new one could have started. The Parliament was skipped and a dangerous precedent has been set which can be repeated [on some other occasion], an MP from the Democratic Party of Serbia was quoted in *Politika*, (November 27 1994).

The new law was adopted on May 12, 1995 (Serbia, 16/95). According to this law abortion is available by woman's request up until the 10th week of pregnancy except when it is established that abortion could seriously harm woman's health (Article 3). After the 10th week of pregnancy abortion can be obtain when specific conditions are met: pregnancy is life threatening or, may seriously harm woman's health; fetus is defective; the pregnancy is result of rape.

¹⁹⁷ While the debate was going on in the Serbian parliament, one of the maternity wards in Belgrade had to be temporarily closed due to an outbreak of salmonella (21 babies and one women were infected, one baby died). It turned out that the salmonella outbreak was only the tip of the iceberg for many problems this maternity ward had. That winter, due to mechanical failures, the hospital did not have either hot water or heating. That the authorities did not consider closing the hospital due to the lack of hot water and heating is telling about the overall conditions in the maternity wards in Serbia. An obstetrician commenting on it said: “These are the absurdities of our society. On the one hand, we have all this talk about birth rates and suggestions to ban abortion, and on the other hand the conditions under which women have to give birth are unbearable. Maternity wards are empty, there isn't enough hot water, not enough beds and bed sheets, baby's diapers, antibiotics...Not to mention what is necessary to obtain for a baby at home” (*Vreme*, January 16, 1995).

This version of the law is more restrictive than the old socialist law and than the first version, vetoed by Milošević. First, it does not include any social reasons for obtaining abortion after the 10th week of gestation. Second, the law still requires minors between the ages 16-18 to obtain parental consent for having an abortion. Finally, the law does not specify procedures for obtaining late gestation abortions. The law “does not specify the length of time in which...a decision about request for pregnancy termination has to be made; it does not require explanation of the decision. Moreover, all decisions are final and cannot be appealed” (Konstantinović-Vilić, Petrušić, 1997:24-5). From what we know about reproductive/contraceptive practices of Serbian women, all the restrictions and imprecisions are going to affect those age cohorts that do not contribute significantly to the overall fertility rates. It is thus difficult to see a real policy motive behind them. Politics, once again seems to have take precedence over policy.

Unlike the previous version, this one does not include any of the amendments put forward by the opposition parties which may help to understand better Milošević’s veto of the first version of the law. It seems that the real purpose of the veto was to override a few opposition amendments that had been included in the first version. Along the way he personally gained some political points from women voters and the Parliament appeared to follow democratic procedure, responding to and endorsing opinions of the representatives of the opposition parties. The first version of the abortion law which was passed represented a rare, if not the only, occasion when the socialist majority in the Parliament accepted any of the opposition’s amendments. In addition, Milošević himself appeared as someone really concerned for women’s rights.

While in 1993 the abortion debate was primarily an argument between feminists and individual representatives of the Orthodox Church, in 1994 and 1995, during the parliamentary

discussions of the new abortion law the anti abortion camp grew in numbers. First of all, the Church took an official stand against it in the Christmas message. Second, some other political groups as well as individuals joined the anti-abortion campaign. Feminists remained consistent and vocal defenders of the right to safe, legal abortion. While public opinion polls suggest that the majority of the population was against restrictive abortion laws, no other group or individual was so persistent.

Even the medical professional organizations appeared somewhat skittish in backing this otherwise routine and safe procedure. For example, while the gynecological/obstetric section of the Serbian Physician's Association, did organize a round table to discuss the proposed abortion law, no official statement was issued. Moreover, the roundtable was organized only after the new law had been proposed. According to the news reports from the roundtable (cf. *Borba*, April 2, 1995) there was an agreement among the medical professionals that legal, medical abortions protect women's health and interests, and criticisms were voiced against the restrictions proposed by the new law.

Unlike in other countries (cf. Croatia, Poland, Hungary), where many gynecologists stopped doing abortions claiming the consciences objector right, to my knowledge, only one gynecologist did so in Serbia, after thirty years of routinely performing them. Even though he became one of the most vocal and radical critics of abortion, he did not support a complete ban of abortion: "Banning abortion would be ridiculous" (*Duga*, April, 23 1997). He rather argued for reestablishing "of committees [...] that we used to have before the infamous Constitution of 1974. The committees should work to prevent extreme and unjustifiable abortions" (*NIN*, November 1996). Unfortunately he does not specify what would be 'extreme and unjustifiable' abortions.

In nationalist discourses, the ‘infamous’ Federal constitution of 1974 was often perceived as a result of anti-Serbian conspiracy concocted by the communist leaderships from other republics, because it gave broad political autonomy to Serbia’s two provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, undermining Serbia’s status within the Federation.¹⁹⁸ As mentioned earlier, the constitution of 1974, also declared that “deciding freely about children [as] a basic human right” which led to further liberalization of the abortion laws in all the republics. If the broad political autonomy given to the two provinces undermined Serbia’s political strength, liberal abortion law, granted by the 1974 Constitution, in the eyes of nationalist elites, threatened the nation’s very biological survival.

The gynecologist quoted above was among those who believed that egoistic reasons motivate people to have only a few children if at all. He was also among rare who blamed equally men and women for having only a few children. For him, this phenomenon was an expression of egoism and moral decline of both men and women. He argued that these “social ills” could be overcome if society “reached back to Christian morality and renewal”(Ibid.) and offered a few specific suggestions how this could be reached, framing them to resemble the tone of the Christian Commandments:

Do not engage in sex before the marriage. If you do – get married and bear children; Woman, do not have abortions before you have three children; Husband, respect your wife so she does not have to get an abortion due to your unreasonable behavior or attitude; Woman, your freedom is death for the conceived yet unborn child (*Duga*, Ibid).

¹⁹⁸ Due to the fact that all political decisions had to be based on consensus of all the relevant political subjects, the consequences of this new institutional arrangement were twofold for Serbia. First its internal political and institutional system was affected by the fact that the autonomous provinces were part of the decision making process at the republican level, but republican institutions could not influence the decisions at the level of the provinces; second, at the federal level, the Kosovo and Vojvodina had separate votes and could side with other republics voting against the interests of the Republic of Serbia.

As the above analysis shows, there was much more at stake both for the critics and the defenders of legal abortion in Serbia. It was a forum for a political struggle. To begin with, the Orthodox Church used abortion to regain its public presence and influence in an attempt to gain the hegemonic status for its own values and ideas. The magazine *Vreme* alludes to this with the title of the commentary of the 1994 Christmas message and the feminist response to it: “Black mantle¹⁹⁹ against the white plague” [*Crna mantija protiv bele kuge*].

Under the same rubric, *Vreme* (January 16, 1995), also published a report on conditions in Serbian maternity wards. The situation appeared anything but inspiring for having many babies (see note 47). The message of the magazine clearly was that the political/religious rhetoric calling for numerous births was incongruent with the socio-economic reality, symbolized with impoverished maternity wards that often lacked such basics as hot water, bed sheet and diapers. The conditions in maternity wards, however, were only partly a consequence of the impoverished society. Even before the onset of the deep economic crisis, maternity wards in Serbia were not the most comfortable places, to say the least. Moreover, as a rule, women in labor were patronized and very often treated with little respect by doctors and nurses. Women having abortions were treated even worse.

The treatment of women in maternity wards can be explain by dominant cultural conceptions of women’s body, reproduction and labor that medical profession has not been able to shad off for over a century. In his speech backing the establishment of the “sanitary fund” in the Serbian Parliament in 1889, a physician Vladan Djordjević, criticized the existing notions of labor and child birth:

¹⁹⁹ The expression ‘crna mantija’ (black mantel) was used pejoratively by the Communists to signify the backwardness of the Church as an institution and was a symbolic expression of the Marxist designation according to which “religion is the opium for the masses”. It is interesting here that a self-proclaimed liberal magazine of Western orientation espoused this kind of ideology.

We like to brag about how our mothers give birth [by themselves] in the mountains and than bring the baby back home in their aprons. We [are bragging about it] not only because we like to think of ourselves as being courageous, but also because of our notions of labor. I know that in many instances...a woman in labor has to leave the only heated room in the house and in the middle of the winter go out to the most far off corner of the backyard, in order to give birth. And why does she have to do it? Because the father and the household head is in the only warm room in the house and it is the greatest *shame* if he hears a single scream [coming] from this most sacred pain. Shame! What a horrible notion of etiquette (*Politika*, February, 5, 1992).²⁰⁰

Nowadays women, who do not give birth silently despite the pain, experience the worst treatment in the maternity wards.²⁰¹

3. *The Feminist Response*

The significance of the Patriarch Christmas Message and of the Parliamentary discussion of the new abortion law have to be examined not only by their content but also by the fact that they reopened the abortion debate in which feminists were the most vocal pro-choice advocates. The character of the debate is best illustrated through the argument that unfolded on the pages of *NIN* magazine between December of 1994 and March of 1995. The debate started after *NIN* published an article by Zorica Mršević, one of the leaders of the Belgrade feminist movement, entitled “Who is Going to Feed Us, Who is Going to Defend Us” (*NIN*, December 30th, 1994). The author criticized the new abortion law, under discussion in the Serbian Parliament. A critical response to this article was signed by Slobodan Grković, president of the Christian-ecological movement and appeared in the same magazine under the title “Don’t Bear Children” (*NIN*, February 17th 1995). An answer to his criticism came from another prominent feminist, Nadežda Četković, under the title “Bear Only Wanted Children” (*NIN*, February 24 1995). It is not insignificant here that the response came from a feminist who is a mother of three, unlike the

²⁰⁰ This nineteenth century speech was reprinted in the rubric: From Our History

²⁰¹ See Emily Martin, 1987 on similar attitudes in the US clinics.

author of the initial article who does not have children. Finally, the polemic ended with a letter to the editor, titled “Biological War and Self-defense” (*NIN* March 24, 1995).

The initial article had the headline “Abortion to be banned”, which was more than a small exaggeration because the proposed law, like the old socialist one, granted abortion on request during the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. Mršević never specified that her criticism refers to restrictions proposed for later pregnancies (after the 10th week). The proposed law restricted access to abortion after 10 weeks to medical reasons, unlike the old socialist one which used to allow for socio-economic reasons for terminating later pregnancies, between 10 and 20 weeks.

While her criticism is well placed, particularly given that the majority of requests for late abortions were based on socio-economic reasons, the article should have been more specific if the author wanted to represent the proposed law accurately. But accuracy, apparently, was not the primary goal of the article. The criticism of the new abortion law here had a broader agenda. It served as a critique of the existing social and political order and to offer guidelines for better ones.

The author argued that the proposed law was motivated by “mercantile population theory which was born towards the end of the middle ages” (*NIN*, December 30 1994). This type of pronatalism, argues Mršević, has characterized every totalitarian regime and she mentioned Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Pinochet and Ceausescu, as examples. Moreover, she argues that legal abortion has been a long standing women’s right, another exaggeration. Finally the author claims that the current treatment of the abortion law in Eastern Europe stands as “undisputable proof for how far away from democracy these societies still are“ (*ibid.*). Needless to say, most of the West European countries would not have passed her democracy test before the 1970s, and a few would not pass it today: Ireland, Malta and Monaco, where abortion is still illegal; and

Portugal, Spain and Germany where abortion is allowed under the specific, narrowly defined conditions (see Outshoorn, 1997:149).

Mršević is more accurate in discussing some possible social consequences of the proposed abortion law. She, for example, predicts, an increase in health and life threatening illegal abortions because “women always have their own ways and methods” (NIN, December 30 1994:24). Her prediction of an increase in the number of unwanted and abandoned children as the consequence of the new abortion law, however, is absolutely ungrounded. Still Mršević uses it as a powerful metaphor for Milošević’s rule and the bleak future he was creating for the citizens of Serbia and the whole society:

the saviors of the nation will be children conceived in rape, or other types of forceful sexual encounters; children of poor, single mothers with five and more children; children who are unwanted because their mothers cannot provide for themselves and much less for the children; children of teenage mothers who are rejected and left by their partners, and because of shame [rejected] by the families as well. These children will be left in garbage cans, in front of orphanages, in waiting and restrooms. They will be growing up unwanted, unloved, and rejected by those who had them because they were forced by law (ibid.).

Had abortion been banned and criminalized, Mršević would have had ample historical evidence in support of her argument,²⁰² but that simply was not the case. There is little doubt that Milošević’s regime was in many ways detrimental for Serbian society, leading it to an unforeseeably austere future. The new abortion law, however, passed in the Parliament controlled by his Socialist party, was hardly a part of that picture and was certainly not going to produce an army of unwanted and abandoned children.

The new abortion law was restrictive as compared to the old socialist law, but all restrictions applied to abortions after the tenth week of pregnancy. Considering that over 95% of

²⁰² Kligman, 1992, 2000, and Kertzer, 1993 offer sound analysis and compelling evidence about social costs and consequences of criminalized abortion. Gal examines abortion legislation in Romania under the Ceausescu regime; Kertzer studies the activities of Catholic Church in nineteenth century Italy aimed at preventing abortions.

all abortions in Serbia is done before the tenth week of pregnancy (see Rašević, 1994) it was going to affect a very small percentage of women, and mostly those age groups that have low reproductive rates (teenagers and women over 45). While the possible consequences of the new abortion law were not insignificant, they were certainly not as dramatic as Mršević's article depicts them.

While the text in a separate box which accompanied the article reported on precisely what kind of changes the new law introduced and when during the pregnancy, Mršević's text, read by itself, suggests more drastic changes. This made her article an easy target for criticisms by those who wanted to see more restrictive abortion law or argued for banning it. Grković, the president of the Christian-ecological movement, begins his response to Mršević by blaming her for deliberate misrepresentations of the new law.

Grković accused Mršević for feigning humanism and for forging the facts, claiming that the proposed "draft [law] is nothing but a mask behind which Milošević's regime is hiding its real intent: to continue the...GENOCIDE of Serbian babies while introducing limited restrictions [in the abortion law]" (*NIN* February 1995, stress, original). Grković also believes that the proposed changes in the abortion law came as a result of population trends. He believed that the regime simply "could not ignore the NATAL CATHASTROPHY of the Serbian nation and its main reason: infanticide" (*ibid.* stress, original).

He pointed to the fact that 95 percent of abortions were performed within the first ten weeks of pregnancy which makes the feminist response looked blown out of proportion. He then poses a seemingly logical question, why "raped women, victims of incest and poor members of the weaker sex should postpone the execution of this appalling act until after ten weeks" (*ibid.*). "Minor" details like shame and psychological trauma which certainly influence a delayed

decision and also often prevent victims of rape from even reporting it and much less pressing charges, escaped Grković.

He compares abortion with Jasenovac, the concentration camp in which many Serbs, Roma and Jews were detained and executed during World War 2 in the Independent State of Croatia, ruled by the puppet Fascist government. An implicit message here is not only that Serbian women who have abortions are murderers. More importantly, Grković suggests, women having abortions commit genocide of their own nation.

Grković recreates a common perception according to which abortion is women's method of contraceptive choice and thus holds them responsible for 'mass killings' of the 'Serbian babies'. To make this point clear, he cited the alleged testimony of a woman who decided to have abortion in the 4th month of pregnancy. "A gynecologist pulled off of the baby's body an already fully formed arm. He took it out of the womb raised it up in the air and exclaimed in disgust: look [at this] and remember! This is the result of your irresponsibility" (ibid.)!

While Mršević associates free access to abortion with democracy, Grković identifies it with socialism, totalitarianism and moreover with communist conspiracy against the Serbian nation. Abortion and low fertility rates are according to him an expression of the "barbaric-communist emancipation of Serbian men and women" This "barbaric emancipation" is "the ideological continuity – from Rosa Luxemburg...to current witches in black²⁰³ [which] has born its fruit: modern Serbian woman has turned against men, the family has been destroyed, and Serbia is the second in the world according to number of killed unborn children" (*NIN* February 1995).

The nationalist discourses only had to take over the popular view, supported by the official communist ideology, according to which feminism is anti-men and according to which

²⁰³ Allusion to 'women in black', the most persistent and most vocal anti-war movement in Serbia in the 1990s

all the feminists want is to replace male by female domination. The only difference is that nationalist discourses perceived not only the socialist project of emancipation, but socialism itself as a feminist project which emasculated individual man and the nation.²⁰⁴

In response to Mršević's association of restrictive abortion laws with totalitarian regimes, Grković poses the question: "If we compare the success of different social models, measured by the level of material wealth, aren't Germany, Italy and Chile more advanced than Russia, Cuba and Yugoslavia, countries with unlimited women's freedoms and [countries] of absolute biological, moral and economical disintegration" (ibid.). He conveniently omits Romania where abortion was banned during the Ceausescu era, as a measure of material prosperity while voicing a rather common dilemma in Serbia at the time, between an authoritarian political system (as socialism was in the former Yugoslavia) combined with a significant degree of socio-economic security, on the one hand, and democratic system with its market economy and accompanying social insecurities on the other. Grković, however, redefines this dilemma as one between communist totalitarianism symbolized not only by women's emancipation, but also by women's rule which in his mind is not different from a blind rule of instincts. His solution seems to be totalitarian political regime based on national unity which, according to him, can bring material prosperity.

For Grković, both Milošević and abortion symbolized dark and destructive communist past. Mršević, on the other hand, takes up both Milošević and restrictive abortion laws in order to

²⁰⁴ This negative image of feminism was a rather widespread trough out the socialist world (see Heitlinger, 1980 on Czechoslovakia; Zielinska 2000 on Poland; Einhorn, 1989 on DDR). This image was produced by the official communist ideology and widely accepted across society. When I presented this dissertation proposal in the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory where I had worked before started the PhD program in Pittsburgh, one of the colleagues commented during the discussion: "I don't understand why you feminists want to replace the male rule by the female rule?" Nothing in my presentation suggested anything like that but I did say that the research was informed by feminist theory and methodology and that I was interested in women's experiences of changing politics of reproduction in Serbia.

project a future even darker than the present. While Grković sees in Milošević a communist and hence anti-nationalist, Mršević uses the abortion law, to portray him as a nationalist.

A response to Grković's article came from another prominent feminist and the mother of three. She accused the author of misogyny and the text itself as an incoherent jumble that should not have been published, because while the statements it contained are stupid they are also dangerous. She stated that "abortion is neither genocide nor infanticide...but a legitimate method of birth control" (*NIN* February 24, 1995). To challenge this right means to challenge "women's human rights and it goes against existing laws in FR Yugoslavia. These rights and laws are protected by the United Nation's Convention (CEADW) and by the Constitution of this country" (*ibid.*). – In response to Grković's indirect defense of the rights of fetus, Četković, together with other feminists, puts forward an old and rather dated liberal feminist argument of women's rights.

The woman's movement argues for advancement of women's rights and [is against] diminishing or challenging already existing rights. No one in the woman's movement is against births. Feminists support responsible parenthood [...] We will never agree with nationalists and warriors that women should bear children to enable them to redraw the borders and have enough gun fodder. We gladly support all state actions that make it easier for women to have children. We do not agree when state wants to impose parenthood on women by repression, pressure and restrictions (*ibid.*).

It is ridiculous to treat the fetus' and woman's rights equally - it turns woman into an incubator" (Staša Zajović, another leading feminist in *Politika*, March 3, 1993:16).

This approach, however, makes the feminist position vulnerable to criticism because "[t]he individual-right-to-choose argument unwittingly reinforces the powerful rhetoric of anti-feminism through the idea of fetal rights. By definition, rights pertain to every individual. The fetus as a person or a potential human has a right to life, to be protected by the government. This sets up a conflict of competing rights...and the debate is framed as a clash of absolutes"

(McBride Statson 1996: 215). For that reason the feminist discourse in the West shifted “from the idea of rights to the idea of reproductive freedom”(ibid.)

According to McBride Statson the concept of reproductive freedom has the advantage of being applicable to individual women, as well as to women as a group. In addition,

[f]reedom implies the consideration of a set of their needs, with access to abortion being only one of them. These [needs] include sex education based on exploration of female sexuality, attention to contraceptive methods and their availability, parental care, child care, economic status, housing – in short all social relations of reproduction. According to the concept of needs, activists should argue for a liberal abortion policy as part of this larger set of needs to achieve reproductive freedom (ibid.:216).

Indeed it is not difficult to argue that safe, legal, medical abortion is even more than a need for women in Serbia. It is a necessity which comes about as a result of unequal gender power relations in general and unequal social relationships of sexuality and reproduction in particular, a point I return to later in the chapter. Četković, however, like the other Serbian feminists based her pro-choice arguments on the liberal ideology of women’s rights. Her final blow to her Christian opponent, however, came in the form of a reminder that the ideas he professed had originated in the Catholic Church and the USA, both viewed as agents of anti-Serbian conspiracy by the nationalist discourses.

It seems safe to argue that feminists while defending abortion as one of the basic human/women’s rights, much like the clergy used the abortion debate in order to gain public recognition and political influence. In addition, for all the participants the debate served as pretence for saying something about the regime and to project a more desirable image for Serbian society and/or nation. For both sides in the debate, feminist and “the Christian”, the proposed abortion law was a metaphor for Milošević’s rule.

For feminists it symbolized an undemocratic, totalitarian regime. For Grković it symbolized a continuation of not only socialism but of communist and fascist conspiracy against the Serbian nation which had resulted in its biological moral and spiritual degradation.

“Fifty years of satanic communist rule...has brought Serbian men and women to a temple in which they sacrifice their souls at the altar of the King of Darkness...[and] now we are all in a kind of hypnotic trance led [only] by our instincts” (*NIN*, February 17, 1995). Much like populist writers in Hungary, this Serbian religious commentator “locate[s] the high rate of abortion as part of the immoral atmosphere of state socialist society” (Gal, 1994:273). The atmosphere that the current regime, according to the same author, was perpetuating.

While for Grković the liberal abortion law symbolized a retrograde society and degraded nation, for feminists the proposed restrictions in the law symbolized the future that was to come as a result of the regime’s politics. At a broader level the polemic was yet another expression of irreconcilable differences among various actors on the political scene in Serbia. While most of them were critical of the regime their criticisms were based on opposing ideologies and projections of society. Commenting on the abortion discourses in unified Germany, Maleck-Lewy, and Ferree noted that “[a] key conceptual element in both forms of post-socialist discourse is the definition of democracy and its relation to reproductive politics” (2000:113). The same can be said for the abortion politics in Serbia in the 1990s.

The debate on the pages of *NIN* described above, ended with a letter to the editor. The author of the letter starts off by pointing out how both sides in the debate were voicing their opinions from firmly fortified ideological trenches without much concern for an “objective approach to such a complex issue” (*NIN*, March, 24 1995). But his aim is not really the “objective approach” to the issue at hand – the abortion law and population trends. His agenda is

to send a message about the urgent need for national unity vis-à-vis the threat posed by the Kosovo Albanians and their alleged policy of demographic expansion. Along the way he defines the Serbian nation as modern, European and civilized and, indirectly the Albanian as less civilized. He sees Kosovo Albanians as participants in a Muslim expansion in Europe (together with the Bosnian Muslims). Demographic explosion as a political project, according to this author “is not congruent with the mentality and with the achieved level of civilization of the Serbian people” (ibid.).

In the context of the “struggle for living space, not only for current but also future generations [the Albanians] have declared a biological war on their rivals...The nation on which war has been declared has to find the [proper] weapon of self-defense” (ibid.). Because “the future of the Serbian nation will be greatly affected by its size” (ibid.), an undesirable future, according to this author, is one in which the Serbian people would make a minority in its own state²⁰⁵. For this reason, experts from various fields (demographers, sociologists, physicians, lawyers) should design specific measures aimed at increasing fertility. But “in that context the issue of abortion should not be dominant” (ibid.).

The Author of this letter probably expressed the feelings of the majority in Serbia at the time. Serbian nationhood was defined vis-à-vis Albanian nationalism. The latter was perceived as expansionist, and as deliberately aiming to change demographic balance. A majority also believed that the state should provide the right material conditions and that expert institutions should design specific measures aimed at increasing the fertility rates among the Serbs. Restricting or banning abortion was not seen by the majority as the right way to go about this.

²⁰⁵ This was actually a recurrent concern of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s and 90s., and I discuss it in a greater detail elsewhere. It should be noted here that same fear contributed to the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. In the Yugoslav context, Slovenian and Croatian politicians were against building any kind of a viable federation with direct parliamentary elections because Serbs were in majority within the federation.

More importantly no one felt personally obliged to have more children in order to save the future of the nation.

There is no doubt that the great majority of the women in the sample is aware that the population growth in Serbia proper is below the replacement level. [T]hey identify these phenomenon as a serious [social] problem...[However]the majority among them do not feel any individual responsibility in solving this problem that they identify as a serious one. ..Only one women in the sample said that she would have a third child and stressed that she wants to do it for Serbia (Rašević, 1993:127).

Abortion legislation, in a way, illustrates how citizens of East European countries have experienced new democracies, politically. In Poland, Hungary and Serbia, (Fuszara, 1993; Gal, 1994) public opinion was predominantly against banning or restricting the existing laws. Still all three parliaments passed laws which went counter to the popular view. The same paradox between the ideology of democracy as the rule of the majority, and the reality of party-dominated political life, exists in most Western democracies.

Unlike the Western societies, the Eastern European ones have not had enough time to create myths which would help reconcile the paradox, to paraphrase Levi-Strauss. That is why in many East European countries reformed communist parties won the second parliamentary elections. By giving their votes to the former communists, the citizens of these countries expressed, among other things, their disappointment with representational democracy. “The G.D.R. citizens imagined democracy as something other than a clash of parties and party interests. The abortion decision²⁰⁶ thus became emblematic of the ‘democracy deficit...’” (Maleck-Lewy , Marx Ferree 2000:114) and this ‘deficit’ was felt in almost all other areas of political and social life, throughout post-socialist Eastern Europe.

²⁰⁶ A reference is to the decision of the parliament of the unified Germany which in 1992 passed one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe (save for Ireland and Luxemburg), despite sharp public criticism that was voiced by many political actors, as well as general public in the Eastern part. See Maleck-Lewy , Marx Ferree 2000:114. While abortion remained legal it is available only if a woman meets certain medical and social conditions even during the first trimester (see *ibid.*).

Some local legal commentators, however, focused on different aspects of the new abortion law and joined the religious leaders in addressing the issue of not only the right to life, but also the rights of men and national collectivity, opposing these rights to women's rights.

The termination of pregnancy must not be understood as a 'women's right'...Personal autonomy is not an absolute right and it can be exercised only as long as it does not interfere with the rights of others. And others [in this case] are the community, the men [and] the unborn child. We cannot discuss the population replacement as an issue related only to [individual] human rights and freedoms (Ponjavić, 1996:60).

The order of priorities here, like in the Patriarch's Christmas message analyzed earlier, is not incidental. Abortion threatens first, the survival of the community i.e. the nation, second, men's rights to offspring, and only thirdly, the right to life of the unborn. All three, however, have been overpowered by women:

Previously, a man was able, due to his privileged position in the society and the family, to enforce a pregnancy on a woman. Today the situation is substantially different. Being legally equal to man, a woman can enforce a termination of pregnancy on her husband by declining to give birth.... The termination of pregnancy became an expression of woman's right to control her own body. The question rises [though] whether the right to terminate pregnancy should be seen as a woman's right and isn't she now holding the ancient right of the *pater familias*, who can decide about life and death of [his] child (Ibid.: 52).

Discussing the question of when life begins, which in many legal systems serves to determine the gestation period during which abortion is available on request, Ponjavić takes the position that life begins at conception and that the fetus' rights should also be protected. While elaborating his position, this author not only defines 'biology as women's destiny' but also argues that this 'destiny' should be reinforced by (human) laws.

The mother offers a sanctuary, warmth and food to this [new] life, because such are the laws of nature. Why than, we hesitate to impose on a woman (the mother) the respect for life of the conceived child [which would be] an expression of a general duty of all to protect life of others" (Ibid.: 63).

Taking up the legal status of the father Ponjavić claims that “the rights of men are completely neglected” (ibid:69), and while defending the interests of the community, he argues that “in these times of transition we have to search for a new balance between the respect for human rights and freedoms, on one hand, and for a social project aimed at increasing the number of births, i.e. at decreasing the number of terminated pregnancies, on the other” (Ibid.:69).

Finally this author voices his criticism against the domination of medical science in the issues of abortion:

The European countries have given too much power to medical institutions and to physicians [to decide] about the issues of abortion. It is a well known tendency among physicians to approach every issue from exclusively medical perspective and to [want] to give a final word on everything. [Abortion], however is the issue of concern of the whole society and consequently it is a legal issue as well. Lawyers should closely oversee the implementation of the laws that regulate pregnancy termination. Without this, physicians’ work is not subjected to any control and pregnancy termination remains only a medical issue. This ultimately leads to [a situation] in which liberal individual rights related to one’s body are, too liberal, so to speak... (Ibid.:65)

The above quote expresses the crucial differences between the pro-life discourses in the West, and anti-abortion discourses in the East. While the first are embedded in the rhetoric of universal, individual, human rights (including that of a fetus), the latter are primarily concerned with the collective rights, or the survival of the nation. As the analysis above shows, even religious leaders in Serbia were superimposing the national survival to the right to life in their arguments against abortion. For that reason, I make a difference between the pro-life and anti-abortion discourses. Save for Bishop Vasilije, the creator of the bill for banning abortion in Republika Srpska, almost no one else really argued that abortion should be banned. More than a few, however, did call for sharp restrictions in the existing law primarily in order to prevent alleged dying out of the nation.

The pro-choice feminist discourses, on the other hand, framed by the rhetoric of women's rights, freedom and autonomy were embedded in the liberal political ideology and strongly anti-nationalistic. The expert's pro-choice arguments focused on the issues of women's/public health, and espoused a broad spectrum of political ideas from very conservative, nationalist, to ultra liberal. Only a few experts, however, regardless of their political inclinations, failed "to claim [that they] 'know better'" (Gal, 1994:280), about abortion and its risks not only for the health of individual women, but also for the well being of the overall society as well. The whole abortion debate suggests that ideas of social engineering wrapped in many different political colors were firmly embedded in the ideological fabric of Serbian society in the 1990s.

The abortion debates in Serbia began and unfolded as Orthodox clergy and feminists were (re)appropriating space on the political and social scene in Serbia. Unlike in Hungary where feminist had a marginal role in the abortion debate (Gal, 1994), or Germany (Maleck-Lewy and Ferree 2000) and Poland (Zielinska, 1993) where it created divisions in the feminist movement, in Serbia, feminists had a prominent role in the debate. Moreover, the abortion issue served as a centrifugal force for the feminist movement rather than a point of division. As in other post-socialist countries, however, the debate did not mobilize larger numbers of women.

The argument between feminists and Orthodox clergy soon turned into a forum for much broader political struggle. The struggle intensified at several occasions: during the Parliamentary discussions of the new abortion law; after the first version of the law was vetoed by the president and finally after a revised version of the law was passed. Approached from this angle, discourses on abortion appear to be a commentary on society and the state, their past, current and future relationships, and about the nation. Gal's analysis of the abortion debate in Hungary is instructive:

[The] debate has had a symbolical role in constructing the symbolic, discursive aspects of the transition, the ways in which people imagined, represented and understood their practical opposition to state socialism and their own interest in its demise. It is central also in... claims about who is better able to govern, or who is better suited because of morality, identity, and expertise to administer the legal medical bureaucracy of the state (1994: 285).

In as much as the debate was about abortion, in Serbia, it was about demography and public health, about women and gender.

Nationalist/populist discourses, thus, portray women as corrupted by a wrong (socialist) type of modernity, one which emasculates not only individual men but the whole nation bringing it at the verge of biological extinction. Abortion here symbolizes the nation vacant of children and of male power. It also symbolizes totalitarian socialist state.

For feminists, on the other hand, abortion stands for women's rights, freedom and autonomy. It symbolizes democracy, rule of law and the principle of equal rights. This image of autonomous women having an abortion as an act through which she asserts control over her own body and life is not less distorting than the other two (expert and nationalist).

When a woman seeks an abortion she is already pregnant; the important question is how she became pregnant. Did she have full freedom over her sexuality at that moment? When men and women meet in heterosexual encounter they often follow male-defined norms, with the result that women do not feel they have control (McBride Statson, 1996:214-5).

All gender images described in the above analysis, serve to create specific type of order (Doelling, Hahn and Scholz, 2000) and to project a specific picture of modernity. At the one end of the abortion debate in Serbia was a vision of a nation-state as the only possible road to modernity in which male-based nation is nurtured by women's feminine virtues which projected an ethnic image of nation. At the other end was the feminist projection according to which men

and women are equal partners in the project of modernity, and the state does not privilege or marginalize any group.

Even though feminist discourses were wrapped up in the rhetoric of human rights, civic society and multiculturalism all prominent in current political discourses in the West, in Serbia they bore too much resemblance to the socialist past and fed into the nationalist accusations of feminism as a socialist project detrimental for the national well being.

Throughout the 20th century, abortion had been simultaneously liberalized and prosecuted by most totalitarian regimes (cf. Russia under Stalin, Germany under Hitler; Romania under Ceausescu), and criminalized by some of the longest standing democracies in Europe. For that reason it could be treated as a prerequisite and as symbol of democracy by feminists, and as a symbol of totalitarian regimes in anti-abortion campaign of the 1990s in Serbia.

VI. CONCLUSION

A pronounced interest in human reproduction makes an eye-catching similarity between population studies and nationalism. Fertility has been the central topic of demography from the eighteenth century to the present. Nation, on the other hand, is related to "birth" not only through its Latin based etymology (*natio* = to be born), but also because it is a community imagined through metaphors of human reproduction (Verdery 1994:223). National(ist) rhetoric "projects powerful images of hearth, warmth, love, unconditional acceptance, likeness, loyalty" (Verdery 1994:223-4). It was probably this embeddedness of "birth" within the concept of nation that was responsible for the stereotype of nationalism as being automatically pronatalist.

Nationalism, however, is always concerned with *population renewal*. Consequently, the role of demography - at the same time a diagnostic and prescriptive discipline - becomes crucial for nationalist ideologies. Whether renewal will be envisioned in terms of general increase of the birth rates and population size, or in terms of regulating composition and "quality" of the population, is determined by the specific historical circumstances. Or to be more precise demographic renewal of the nation is always at the same time about the numbers and about the quality: it is always concerned with 'overbreeding' of one segment of society and 'underbreedign' of another.

Demographic discourses play an important role in the political struggle for redefinition of the meaning of reproduction and on it based gender relations. Demographic discourses thus make apparent the centrality of reproduction in the intersection of the categories of gender and nation. With the focus on reproduction of specific national populations, demography points to the significance of gender in the conceptions of nation.

In 'nation-states' throughout the world, the imagined community of nation is constructed through metaphors of human reproduction and its basic organizational form, the

family...The very word *nation* is rooted in the imagery of reproduction and its Latin-based, female-centered etymology relating to 'birth' is found in the vocabulary of all East European languages except Hungarian; and even there, the word *nemzet* is constructed from the closely related but male-focused term *nemzeni* [to procreate] (Borocz & Verdery 1994:224; see also McClintock, 1993).

Similarly, the Serbian/Croatian noun *narod* is derived from the verb *naroditi* which means to procreate in abundance.

Katherine Verdery concludes that both gender and nation are "essential for the hegemonic projects of modern state-building", and that the family is the key metaphor and organizing principle in the nation/gender intersection. She shows that this metaphor of nation-as-family continued to be invoked under socialism, and has grown even more important in post-socialist transformations making gender an essential element in these processes (1994: 229). In the former Yugoslavia, which collapsed as its individual republics exited socialism by adopting the ideal of the nation-state, the metaphor of family played an equally important role.

In this research I argue that for the Serbian nationalisms in the 80s and 90 demographic issues were associated with the concerns related to continuity of the nation in its temporal and special dimension. Demographic discourses also projected a specific visions of modernity recreated gendered images of the state and nation, of "self" and the "other". Finally they participated in the processes of the radical social change by redefining the meaning of reproduction and by reshaping gender roles.

This research was concerned with the question of how expert and political discourses on population in Serbia intersected and changed during the last two decades of existence of the socialist Yugoslavia – in the 1980s and 1990s. I analyzed demographic discourses as part of broader nationalist discourses in Serbia in the given period, and argued that demographic discourses were constitutive of the processes of nation-state building in Serbia. Furthermore, I

argued that, with its focus on reproduction of ethnic populations, demographic discourses created very specific gendered images of “self” and the “other”, and discussed how the new politics of reproduction that emerged against the backdrop of demographic discourses reshaped the ideas of gender and gender relations in post-socialist Serbia.

I showed that gender-cum-ethnicity construction of politics of reproduction positioned Albanian and Serbian women on very different scales of custom, tradition and culture and, through them, positioned Albanians and Serbs as ethnic groups on different scales of modernization, and ultimately, of civilization. Thus, ethno-national groups were defined and differentiated through specific reproductive practices and their gendered and ethnicized interpretations. Since modernization of reproduction was set as a prerequisite to socio-economic modernization (Avramov, 1994a:4), Albanians were designated as “biologically, economically and psychologically incapable of following the progress of humankind” (Berić and Belopavlović, 1992:159).

Next to this, nationalist population discourses also designated specific roles to Serb and Albanian women *within* their respective societies, placing the blame for both ‘over-population’ and ‘under-population’ on them. Abortion debate in Serbia is a case in questions. Within the anti-abortion discourse, for example, Serbian women, are deny the true womanhood symbolized by motherhood, and portrayed as corrupted by the socialist emancipation. According to this worldview women have a destructive streak which has to be controlled by their husbands if ‘natural’ gender roles and the stabile society were to be maintained. Consequently, a society with uncorrupted gender roles (i.e. Albanians in Kosovo) is not only more numerous, but more vital as a nation as well. The perceived superiority of the Albanian nation in the struggle for national territories is explained by the lack of emancipation among the Albanian women.

From the above it follows that in nationalist population discourse, low fertility, i.e. “controlled” reproduction of Serbian women symbolizes a modern, progressive nation whose biological vitality and survival were threatened as a consequence of women’s emancipation which created “unnatural” gender roles. At the same time high fertility, i.e. “uncontrolled” fertility designated a “backward”, “un-developed” but biologically stronger nation founded on “natural” gender roles.

The study also deals with the symbolic position of men and masculinity within the narrative of reproduction of the nation. The case of ‘imported brides’ from *Seoski Prag* confirms the significance of paternal lineage as the lineage of national reproduction. It also reveals the complex and paradoxical workings of the intersections of class, ethnicity and gender, and exposes the necessity of dominant hierarchical gender relations for the narratives of national reproduction.

Being concerned with the intersections of demographic and nationalist discourses, I paid special attention to media representations of both policies and practices of reproduction. It is through the analysis of media that I could show the (sometimes frightening) ease with which a specific expert discourse was integrated into the politics of reproduction. Demographic knowledge assumed many different forms, using everything from medicine to social science, from history to ethnography and popular science, and was systematically present in media. Be it in form of interviews with professors, academics and researchers, through presentation of various research results or through presentation of events such as conferences and round tables, demographic knowledge in daily and weekly press became a fodder for nationalism.

This concern with intersections between scientific, expert discourse and

discourses on nationalism in the domain of politics of reproduction makes this research an ultimately epistemological project. The research has unveiled common epistemological properties shared by population discourses (within the transition theory as well as its socialist/Marxist modulations); the dominant discourses on gender relations and hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity (with their naturalized and essentialized hierarchies); and nationalist discourses (about origin and development of nations, and about survival of and threat to the national 'stock'). Consequently, these discourses emerge as not only mutually dependent, but actually, mutually constitutive. Modernist bias that allowed demography to embrace 'scientific objectivity' in representation of population trends also allowed nationalist discourses to embrace images of 'backwardness' and 'progress'. An inherent gender dimension of this bias furthermore allowed both demographic and nationalist discourses to employ the same hegemonic images of masculinity and femininity – images commonly shared by the editors and the readers of the press, by those who made policies and those for whom they are made, and, not surprisingly, by both pronatalists and antinatalists.

The most interesting, and potentially the most significant aspect of this research, in epistemological sense, is my finding that these expert-cum-political discourses on reproduction are continuously struggling with internal ambivalence and ambiguities. While analyzing different policies and practices on reproduction, their media representations and their gendered and ethnicized interpretations, I have encountered, time and again, tensions and paradoxes. The hegemonic discourse on omnipotent masculinity, for example, is potentially threatened by the image of passive and rather helpless village men as presented by the *Seoski Prag*. Nationalist discourse of pure origin is potentially undermined by the introduction of different national group into the reproductive process. Discourse of civilizational progress employed to construct

difference between Serbs and Albanians could potentially backlash when Western Europe comes into picture.

Each of these ambiguous situations needed a very specific discursive resolution, appropriate for and applicable to the specific context, a solution that will leave the logic and consistency of the larger nationalist narrative intact (Žarkov, 1999). This is where the intersections between expert knowledge, nationalist discourse and discourses of gender were the most significant - in the continuous production of very specific knowledge about Serbian nation and the survival and reproduction of its people, as well as about the threats to this survival, for very specific contexts – be it for the Parliamentary debate, abortion policy or brides-to-order. Of course, gender discourses offered an apt solution to some of the ambiguities and ambivalences – if paternal lineage is the only one that matters, bride-to-order may be a foreign one. But it is the scientific, expert discourse that produced knowledge applicable and appropriate for each of the given situations, and it was the power of this expert knowledge that offered itself to the power of nationalism.

Of course, gender discourses contributed greatly to the preservation of the internal logic of nationalist discourses of reproduction – if paternal lineage is the only one that matters, than the myth of origin is preserved even with the introduction of foreign mothers. This, however, does not imply that the notions of gender are unambiguous.

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