

# GENDER DYNAMICS AND POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

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## The 'White Plague': National-demographic Rhetoric and its Gendered Resonance after the post-Yugoslav Wars

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### 1. Introduction

In an article on reconciliation, anthropologist John Borneman argues that 'perhaps the most common attempt at recuperation' for those who have been subject to 'ethnic cleansing' is 'compulsive physical reproduction' as part of a broader process of 'ethnicisation' (Borneman 2002, 283). Initially warning that there is much variety amongst and within groups, Borneman goes on to state that contemporary ethnicisation works through coerced endogamy and pronatalism, mentioning Sri Lanka, Guatemala, East Timor, Rwanda, Chechnya, Bosnia and Kosovo as examples (Ibid., 285). Inspired mainly by general psycho-analytically inflected thoughts on trauma, he provides no empirical data but states that the evidence for his 'impression', which he himself admits is 'anecdotal and journalistic', is 'overwhelming' (Ibid.). The author further suggests that women may be more likely to resist pressures to reproduce after violence through education, active inclusion in politics and economic opportunity (Ibid., 286). Following his call to address questions of reproduction after nationalist wars, this chapter takes up Borneman's somewhat nonchalant reference to the post-Yugoslav context as a starting point to address some wider problems in writing on gender and national-demographic issues in the region.

Before we proceed, precisely because we are dealing with highly 'ethnified' contexts such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, we must establish which of the thousands of 'ethnically cleansed' people in this region Borneman is referring to exactly. Our hunch is that he is thinking of those with Bosniak<sup>1</sup> and Kosovo Albanian national backgrounds. Persons of both groups have been targeted in organised nationalist violence – Bosniaks by Serbian, Montenegrin and Croatian (para)military forces between 1992–5, and Albanians by Serbian (para)military forces in 1998–9. Bosniaks and most Kosovan Albanians share

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of our argument, which discusses nationalist politics, we deploy categorical national labels, fully aware of the essentialisations this entails (for a critique see Jansen 2005b). Hence, 'Croats', for example, should be read as 'those who answer "Croatian" when asked for their nationality by a census agent', but it may also include those who are defined as such by others (for example, by those targeting them in 'ethnic cleansing' campaigns but also by nationalist elites claiming to represent them). To simplify the terminology, we often use the term 'Bosniaks' when referring to Bosnian Muslims even when speaking about Yugoslav times (i.e. before the term was officially (re)introduced).

Islam as a faith or at least as a cultural heritage, and their comparatively high pre-war aggregate rates of natality and endogamy, especially amongst Albanians, have been met with allegations that they were plotting demographic territorial conquest. Their attackers have also accused them of Muslim fundamentalism. The suffering of persons of those two groups, through death, injury, disappearance, displacement and material losses, has been enormous. In fact, the 1990s death toll amongst Bosniaks is by far the highest amongst post-Yugoslavs both in proportional and absolute terms.<sup>2</sup>

In order to investigate the thesis of 'compulsive physical reproduction', we shall also take into account other victims of post-Yugoslav 'ethnic cleansing': persons with Croatian and Serbian backgrounds who were targeted by each other's (para)military forces as well as by Bosniak and, in the case of Serbs, Kosovo Albanian and NATO ones. After all, Borneman's argument implies that victimisation by 'ethnic cleansing' of any given group could be sufficient to trigger intensified natality and endogamy. By including Serbs and Croats, we do not mean to imply that responsibility for the 1990s violence is equally spread amongst the four groups mentioned here (to stick with those), nor even amongst their nationalist elites. We simply acknowledge that amongst all four groups there is a dominant nationalist discourse of collective victimisation by national Others. What remains less clear is whether Borneman is referring only to those who have been directly affected by violent practices of 'ethnic cleansing' or to any members of a national group where such a sense of victimisation is prominent. While both tracks are worth investigating, it is mainly the second one we pursue here, though we come back to the question of 'direct victims' at the end of this paper. Our focus is not only due to a relative lack of adequate data to address the fate of direct victims but, more to the point, because we wish to explore how this aspect of 'ethnicisation' and compulsion can be read against dominant perspectives on gender, reproduction, and nationalism in the post-Yugoslav states.

Within all four national groups in question, there is no doubt that 'ethnicisation' – both amongst victims and amongst perpetrators (and this sometimes refers to the same individuals) – was intensified enormously by the military violence of the 1990s. Further, as Borneman suggests, this process often took the shape of vigorous promotion of endogamy and intra-national natality, which we shall refer to as 'national-demographic' campaigns. In such a context, this explicitly explorative chapter attempts to set out some lines of investigation into the resonance of such rhetoric in the everyday lives of women and men in Bos-

<sup>2</sup> Up-to-date statistics for war deaths in Bosnia-Herzegovina are available from the Sarajevo Research and Documentation Centre [www.idc.org.ba], and figures on displacement from UNHCR. Available figures on other post-Yugoslav states often rely on disputed estimates.

nia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia (and to a much lesser extent, Kosovo) in the first decade after the 1990s wars.<sup>3</sup>

Our focus is on natality, since, in the aftermath of post-Yugoslav 'ethnic cleansing', questions of (national) endogamy involve complications that deserve to be analysed in their own right. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, as Borneman suggests, anti-exogamy propaganda, especially in cases of women 'marrying out,' has indeed been interwoven into pronatalist agendas. Namely, even if birth rates were to increase, the degree of solace this would provide to national-demographic campaigners would depend on the nationality attributed to those children. Theirs is a nationalist concern: they do not just want babies, but Serbian babies, Croatian babies, Bosniak babies etc. With regard to the effects of these campaigns on marriage patterns, suffice it to say here that the vast majority of inhabitants of the post-Yugoslav states have continued to marry 'their own', but that, as was the case before the wars, significant numbers have not. From available statistics<sup>4</sup> we can deduce that absolute figures of heterogamy have decreased, and that strong regional and urban-rural variations remain. Interestingly, taking into account the increased national homogeneity of local populations, the proportional drop seems to have been less dramatic than one might expect, probably due both to the resilience of previous practice and the contradictory effects of population movements. In any case, as we shall see, even aside from the prevalence of endogamy, marriage patterns cannot be separated from issues of reproduction, since, in the post-Yugoslav states, reproductive decisions and actions are in most cases confined, both ideologically and practically, to marriage or at least to stable heterosexual relationships.

In what follows, focusing on natality, and working from ethnographic material as well as birth rate statistics, we aim to refract existing patterns against the background of gendered transformations of the post-Yugoslav states. As part of this, we explore to what extent we can understand certain post-war trends in natality as intensified forms of pre-existing (gendered) contradictions in post-war and post-socialist transformations. Thus we make a case for empirical investigations that understand gendered practices of reproduction in their Yugoslav history, and that embed them in the postwar context of national segregation as well as the postsocialist context of socio-economic transformation.

<sup>3</sup> Between them, the authors have carried out many years of ethnographic research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia (ongoing since 1996) and both have some familiarity with Kosovo (but much less developed, e.g. we don't speak Albanian). Because of this, but particularly due to a lack of reliable figures, we shall only refer to Kosovo occasionally. When we discuss Serbia – both in Yugoslav and in post-Yugoslav times – we rely on data that do not include Kosovo. All names in this text are pseudonyms, all translations are ours.

<sup>4</sup> For Yugoslav times, see Petrović 1985; Mrden 1996; Botev 1994. Some post-Yugoslav figures are available from governmental statistics offices (see also Kovačević 2006; Mulić et al. 2005). Like reproductive practices, the complexities of lived marriage practices call for more detailed explorations than we have space for here.

## 2. Rhetoric and resonance

While reproductive practices involve both women and men, they are differentially constituted, producing systematically gendered implications. The post-Yugoslav wars have confirmed, once more, that nationalist violence is itself a highly gendered business. Many studies, overwhelmingly focussing on women, have highlighted this through investigations of the practical organisation of 'ethnic cleansing' (e.g. Carpenter 2003), of sexual violence (e.g. Sofos 1996), of the symbolism and dominant discourses of nationalised subjectivities (e.g. Bracewell 1996, 2000; Helms 2007, 2008; Žarkov 1997, 2007), of opposition to both war and nationalism (Cockburn 1998; Jansen 2005a; Milićević 2006), and of post-war reconstruction (e.g. Helms 2003a/b, 2006; Seifert 2004). Providing key insights into transformations in the region, these analyses have documented the propagation of a return to 'traditional' gender roles. Similar studies in neighbouring states remind us that nationalist concerns about natality have shaped a wider postsocialist politicisation of reproduction and related gender issues (see Gal 1994; Gal & Kligman 2000), an element that, as we shall see, is also very much present in the post-Yugoslav context. National-demographic campaigns have varied across post-Yugoslav republics, partly due to different positions taken by nationalist elites towards religion and socialism, but they have shared an overarching concern with the nation as an organic community under threat from the dangers of secular modernity and aggressive national Others (e.g. Salecl 1994). In response, invoking the family as metonymically representing the nation (McClintock 1993; Verdery 1994), and condemning abortion and contraception, as well as 'mixed marriages' as self-inflicted genocide, top clergy, high-ranking government figures and academics called upon women to fulfil their duty of national reproduction as sanctified breeders and nurturers (Bracewell 1996; cf. Heng & Devan 1992; Huseby-Darvas 1996), whereas men were mobilised mainly as defensive warriors (Milićević 2006). Let us now briefly sketch some contours of post-Yugoslav pronatalist campaigns.

In the run-up to the January 2007 parliamentary elections in Serbia, Sanda Rašković-Ivić, a high flyer in the ruling conservative clero-nationalist party *Demokratska Stranka Srbije*, was asked what she considered the three most important problems facing Serbia. Her answers were, in this order: 'Kosovo and Metohija, *bela kuga*, and unemployment'.<sup>5</sup> We are concerned here with the middle one: *bela kuga* ['the white plague'] is the term used to refer to a perceived epidemic of low birth rates.<sup>6</sup> This has long been a prominent theme in the Serbian media, promoted mainly by conservative nationalist politicians and their clerical and academic allies (cf. Blagojević 2000; Drezgić 2004a/b; Zajović 1994, 2000). As in Croatia, where a similar discourse of *bijela kuga* existed amongst conser-

<sup>5</sup> *Dvo-ugao* on B92, 16 January 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Tellingly a feminine force in the languages of the region, the plague or 'black death' was seen to take especially greedy pleasure in taking away children. 'White' likely refers to the void left in their absence (Drezgić, 1999; 2004, 132).

vative Catholic nationalists (cf. Kesić 2004; Knežević 1997; Iveković 1993) this 'problem' was almost always presented through a specifically gendered, nationalist prism – our nation is dying out while national Others are over-producing children. In Serbia in particular, and especially in reference to Kosovo Albanians, such trends were often represented as a nationalist-demographic plot (Bracewell 2000). The absence of reproductive zeal amongst one's own nation was overwhelmingly blamed on women, and understood in terms of moral degradation, hedonism and careerism brought on by socialism and/or crude emulation of Western 'modernity' (Drezgić 2004a; Mostov 1995). The master-explanation for the near-extinction of the nation was then that 'our women' are reluctant to breed because they have become selfish. Proposed remedies included national-moral education, a return to family values and the overhaul of reproductive and welfare policies.

While Serbian and Croatian pronatalist campaigns are well-documented, including their portrayal of 'Muslim women' as the dangerously over-reproducing Other, it is perhaps less well-known that a more subdued but similar discourse of pronatalism has been produced by Bosniak (Muslim) nationalists in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Especially during and just after the war, leading Islamic clergy periodically called for Bosniak women to bear more children 'for Bosnia' (e.g. Latić 1993) or for the legalisation of polygyny to deal with the number of war widows and increase the numbers of babies born to the nation (cf. Karčić 2005). About a decade after the war, the question of natality resurfaced, this time led mostly by the media and concerned with all parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Čabaravdić et al. 2007; Lemo 2006; *Slobodna Bosna* 2007), a framework that can be understood as secular Bosnian nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

For almost two decades politicians, clergy, and other self-appointed national saviours throughout the post-Yugoslav states have been ringing alarm bells, proposing wholesale legislative changes and calling for radical policy measures to entice women to let go of their selfishness and produce little nationals. Their national-demographic rhetoric has received much attention in foreign and locally-produced, most often feminist, writings on post-Yugoslav reconfigurations of gender. While we commend the desire to acknowledge and redress injustice that underlies such work, this chapter takes issue with the strong tendency to focus on those calls themselves, often quoting the same statements by the same actors from text to text and treating them implicitly or explicitly as an indication of patriarchal 'hegemony' (Milićević 2006, 271).

An example of this can be found in an article by Shiffman, Skrabalo and Subotić (2002). The authors reel off a well-known list of programmatic documents, proposals and quotations from a phalange of the usual clero-nationalist

<sup>7</sup> A 2007 cover story in the Sarajevo weekly *Slobodna Bosna*, for example, warned that 'Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats will become an "exotic minority" in their own country' because workers will have to be brought in 'probably from the African and Asian continents' to keep the economy going (Buturović 2007, 49).

suspects in Serbia and Croatia, to argue that there has been a 'continuous pronatalist assault on reproductive rights', consisting of 'coercive' and 'incentive-based pronatalist policies' (Shiffman et al. 2002, 632). This analysis displays remarkable slippage about what constitutes policy. To be sure, there has been an 'assault' of campaigning, but it is also important to acknowledge that the vast majority of 'calls', 'warnings' and other national-demographic exhortations by nationalist elites have failed to transform into actual measures. Sermons, manifestos and media interviews are not policies – most of the legislative drafts on these issues did not even make it into parliament. The authors themselves provide ample evidence of this, referring only to some limited legislative and policy changes, such as restrictions on the extent to which abortions and contraceptives are covered by health provisions (e.g. a reduction of the period for free abortion) and paid maternity leave measures. These changes may indeed warrant alarm, but the fact remains that, partly because of active and well-organised feminist opposition and, we suggest, also due to a lack of enthusiasm among populations, campaigns for 'demographic renewal' have not led to radically conservative legislation, certainly if considered on a wider comparative European and global level. What's more, those pronatalist measures that have been taken, for example through incremental cash payments for third and fourth children, are widely considered ineffective even by demographers in favour of pronatalist policies (Živić 2003a; Čudina-Obradović & Obradović 1999; Rašević 2004). Indeed, we may recall here that even the very harsh measures in Ceausescu's Romania in the 1970s and 80s led only to temporary increases in the birth rate until the population found ways to return to more desirable practices that reflected longer-term trends (Kligman 1998; and see Bradatan & Firebaugh 2007).

Let us make clear that we do not wish to belittle the significance of national-demographic campaigns and their alarming implications for norms of reproduction, gender ideology, marriage, and sexuality. Indeed, we have critically examined such discourses in our own work (Helms 2008; Jansen 2005a). Yet in this chapter, we propose a step beyond the *contents* of the rhetoric on the 'white plague' by nationalist elites through an explorative analysis of its resonance in everyday practice.

### 3. The figures

A straightforward way of investigating reproductive practices is to look at the systematic and publicly available figures collected by government institutions. It is remarkable that authors do not refer to these figures more often. Even Lilly and Irvine (2002), in an important article that does in fact explicitly investigate women's dealings with nationalist gendered rhetoric rather than only its contents, do not include any statistics. We have collected the figures on birth rates in Table 1 (see page 226). Of course large scale natality statistics invariably obscure all kinds of variations (Jeffery & Jeffery 2002), but they are necessary to analyse the resonance of 'white plague' rhetoric, which does, after all, concern

itself with the natality of large-scale groups, namely those conceived as (ethnic) nations. Note that post-Yugoslav 'white plague' campaigns normally target groups defined by nationality, not by citizenship, but, on the whole, only nationally undifferentiated figures per political unit are available. Yet, precisely because of the nationalist violence, the states in question, and the various entities and cantons in Bosnia-Herzegovina, now contain very large majorities of persons who declare the dominant nationality in the census.

Overall, Bosnia-Herzegovina counted 15.6 live births per thousand of the population in 1991, around 13.4 just after the war, and less than 9 in 2005. We have not found comprehensive war-time statistics here, but reproductive health professionals in Sarajevo identified a very sharp decrease in natality during the war (partly due to the prioritised evacuation of women and a rise in abortions), with a small upturn immediately after (Ahmetašević 1996). Then birth rates dropped further, by all accounts, for all three main national groups. Due to post-war residential segregation, previously documented inter-national differences in average natality rates were now reflected in differences between the two entities. In Republika Srpska (RS), with an estimated 95% Serbian-identifying inhabitants in 1996 and around 90% a decade later, the post-war rate decreased from 9.6 in 1996 to an all-time low of 7.9 in 2005. The drop was steady, with only one small recovery in 1999.<sup>8</sup> In the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH), where over 70% of the population declared Bosniak nationality in the 2002 census (and with large Croatian majorities concentrated in certain cantons),<sup>9</sup> year-on-year figures have dropped most drastically of all: after the small upturn in 1996, natality has decreased each year, from 15.2 in 1996 to 9.4 in 2005.

In Croatia, where just under 90% declared as Croats in the 2001 census, and in Serbia, with over 80% declaring as Serbs in the same year, the number of births had already slipped under the 'replacement level' during Yugoslav times and they further decreased before, during and after the wars (Živić 2003a, 312; Penev 2006, 4). While natality in both states increased for a brief period in the first post-war decade, it then quickly dropped to below pre-war and wartime levels. For Serbia, we know that fertility rates have dropped sharply amongst all national groups (Penev 1998, 10). In Kosovo, now well over 90% Albanian-inhabited, birth rates are comparatively very high for European standards (and still estimated to be around 20 per thousand), yet they have fallen steadily for decades now. No recent statistics are available, but all estimates show a drop in live births despite improvements in perinatal mortality.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The year when significant returns of non-Serb DPs began.

<sup>9</sup> Croat-majority areas have on average lower birth rates, partly reflecting previous patterns, and partly due to the fact that many Croat women from Bosnia-Herzegovina give birth in hospitals in Croatia, for reasons of citizenship/residence of the baby and quality of healthcare, maternity and child benefits (cf. Buturović 2007, 51).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. reports by the United Nations Population Fund [[www.unfpa.org/focus/kosovo/unfpain.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/focus/kosovo/unfpain.htm)], and the World Health Organisation (Fernandez & Castañeda n.d.) as well as work by demographers in Serbia on the basis of previously collected statistics

Table 1: Live Birth Rates per 1,000 of population

	Croatia	Bosnia-Herzegovina			Serbia (without Kosovo)
		FBiH		RS	
1970	15	23			14
1981	14.6	17.2			14
1991	10.8	15.6			11.5
1992	10.5	(...)			11.1
1993	10.8	(...)			11.2
1994	10.9	(...)			11.0
1995	11.2	(...)			11.1
1996	12.0	15.2	(13.4)*	9.8	10.6
1997	12.1	14.6	(13.0)*	9.8	10.3
1998	10.5	14.1	(12.6)*	9.6	9.8
1999	9.9	12.3	(11.5)*	10.0	9.3
2000	10.0	11.0	(10.6)*	9.7	9.6
2001	9.2	10.4	(10.0)*	9.2	10.1
2002	9.0	10.0	(9.6)*	8.5	10.4
2003	8.9	10.0	(9.4)*	8.2	10.6
2004	9.1	9.6	(9.1)*	8.1	10.5
2005	9.6	9.4	(8.9)*	7.9	9.7

Sources: Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske [www.dzs.hr], Republički zavod za statistiku Republike Srbije [www.statserb.sr.gov.yu], Republički zavod za statistiku Republike srpske [www.rzs.rs.ba] and Federalni zavod za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine [www.fzs.ba].

\* Rough overall BiH average calculated on population estimates of FBiH/RS, at a 2/1 rate.

(Penev 1995). For an interesting comparative background analysis, including insights on the importance of perinatal mortality and non-national factors among Albanians and Slavs in Macedonia, cf. Brunnbauer 2004.

Taken as a whole, these figures clearly go against the grain of what one would expect in Borneman's paradigm of compulsive physical reproduction. Here we have four dominant nationalist discourses that represent their titular nations as victimised by 'ethnic cleansing', and, despite vigorous pronatalist campaigns of varying intensity, overall birth rates have decreased in all four cases (we look closer at the short periods of slightly increased natality below). In fact, at the time of writing the figures are systematically on the lower end of the European (and therefore world) rankings, except amongst Kosovo Albanians, who maintain very high rates, but still lower than in Yugoslav times, and falling. These figures contain a dry but effective caution against assuming that the rhetoric of clero-nationalist elites necessarily results in actual trends of compulsive physical reproduction. It is precisely because the immediate effects of such campaigns are far from obvious that national-demographic activists repeat their message over and again. For those concerned about 'the white plague', there is indeed reason to worry: the statistics show that, after almost two decades of tireless campaigns for the national-demographic cause, women in the region are on aggregate having considerably fewer children than in the years of presumably godless, anti-national, anti-family socialism.

How do we explain this? Serious empirical research would be required to provide insights into the effects of national-demographic campaigns on people's understandings and practices of gender, sexuality and reproduction, as well as on their decision-making with regard to reproduction. Amongst other things, such investigations into the practical resonance of pronatalist rhetoric would take into account demographic statistics and legal and welfare provisions, embedding those in ethnographic analysis. The latter would allow an understanding of circumstantial and future-oriented considerations, as well as of the force of practices, norms of sexual and gendered morality, and senses of entitlement carried over from socialist Yugoslav times. In the following sections, partly drawing on our own ethnographic work, we suggest some starting points for possible routes that such research could fruitfully explore.

#### 4. Contradictions of gender and reproduction

A first point to make is that demographic indicators should be understood against longer term patterns. With regard to natality this is especially important when considering aggregate differences by nationality. Kosovo Albanians and Bosniaks tended to have higher average birth rates than Serbs and Croats before the wars (Petrović 1985, 54), so that any post-war differences may in fact reflect a continuation of previous Yugoslav patterns.<sup>11</sup> One thing is clear: if, after the violence, Kosovo Albanian (certainly) and Bosniak women (perhaps) tended to have more children than those of other nationalities in the region, this was not

<sup>11</sup> They may therefore also reflect diverging age structures of these populations, with larger proportions of Kosovo Albanian and Bosniak women of 'reproductive age'.

because of post-war compulsive reproduction but rather *despite* a drop in natal-ity rates, that drop itself being a continuation of developments started before the military conflicts.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, 'ethnicisation', including national-demographic campaigning, did not start after victimisation by 'ethnic cleansing' but was well under way before the wars (cf. Jalušić 2004). The best-known example emerged in the late 1980s, when one of the springboards for Milošević's rise to power was a national-demographic campaign about Kosovo, where many Serbs resented becoming an ever smaller minority. Whilst attributing different degrees of causality, several authors have argued that the Serbian nationalist outcry in the late 1980s over alleged inter-national rape (of Serb women by Albanian men) in Kosovo actually formed an important backdrop to the sexualised violence that appeared during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bracewell 2000; Meznarić 1994; Žarkov 2007, 19–42). They argue convincingly that it was precisely because similar gendered national logics prevailed among different 'sides' that sexual violence could be deployed as a weapon of expulsion, torture and humiliation. Hence we should place post-'ethnic cleansing' questions of gender and reproduction against the background of longer historical patterns and of the rise of nationalism.

Furthermore, pronatalist rhetoric and its resonance must be understood in relation to broader, gendered post-Yugoslav transformations from self-management socialism to some form of capitalism. Numerous studies have argued that the post-1989 changes in Europe generally represented a retrograde movement in terms of gender equality and/or liberation, amongst other things in terms of women's participation in the labour market and other public spheres (e.g. Einhorn 1993; Funk & Müller 1993; Watson 1993). Gal and Kligman (2000) trace how such processes of postsocialist transformation have revolved around the (re)constitution of gendered moral subjects. The disintegration of Yugoslavia took shape through such transformations alongside nationalist war; national-demographic campaigns existed at this crossroads. As already mentioned, despite the fact that reproductive decision-making and practice usually also involves men, pronatalist campaigns have typically been directed squarely at women. It was thus women who were held up to be morally judged according to their reproductive and life choices.

In a post-socialist context where emancipatory causes – of women, but also, for example, of workers – were often represented as outdated and mistaken relics of state socialism (Gal & Kligman 2000, 98–102; Dojčinović-Nešić 2000),

<sup>12</sup> Even if Bosniak women continue to have more children on average than others in Bosnia-Herzegovina – the evidence remains unclear – having started from a much higher pre-war average baseline, they may have reduced their fertility *more* than others. The 15.6 pre-war rate was an average for all Bosnian citizens, yet we know that pre-war birth rates amongst women declaring Bosniak/Bosnian Muslim nationality were comparatively much higher on average. Hence they were necessarily much higher than the 1996 figure of 15.2 for the whole FBiH population. See also Lemo 2006; *Slobodna Bosna* 2007.

the media were saturated with national-demographic role models underpinning such judgements. Take, for example, two prominent women in Serbia: Milanka Babić, a law graduate, businesswoman, aspiring politician, and wife of the (since 2006) fugitive Bogoljub Karić, undisputed leader of the Karić Brothers empire, and Svetlana 'Ceca' Veličković, a mega-selling highly sexualised young singer from Southern Serbia, businesswoman and wife, then widow of paramilitary commander Željko 'Arkan' Ražnatović. Always using their husbands' surnames, these immeasurably rich mothers of four and two respectively regularly proclaimed their traditionalism, with the former expressing pride in the 'patriarchal' (sic) Kosovo Serbian family in which she had grown up with a sister and two brothers 'in a patriotic spirit and a traditional value system – loyalty to one's nation and faith, dedication and attachment to the family.'<sup>13</sup> With both women omnipresent in the media, the audience could not fail to notice that they certainly did not stay around the proverbial hearth that one would expect to be the place for women with such beliefs (as is the case for so many high-profile anti-feminist women elsewhere). Moreover, we should note that, particularly in the 1990s, these role models were not part of a uniform pattern in Serbia, but rather co-existed with 'progressive' ones, since the Milošević government was particularly adept at bidding for legitimacy through both Serbian-nationalist and Yugoslav-socialist rhetoric.<sup>14</sup>

Contradiction was also rife in the mainly Bosniak-inhabited Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where stories circulated about women's responses to the call by *Reis ul-Ulema* Mustafa Cerić, the highest Islamic cleric in the state, for every Bosnian Muslim woman to bear five children (Latić 1993). In these accounts, a woman stands up and informs the Reis, 'as soon as your wife has two more, we'll go ahead ourselves!' Such stories may be nothing more than 'urban legends', but their (re)telling is a way of exposing the hypocrisy of the religious establishment (the Reis and his wife have three children) and of evoking popular resistance through the figure of the no-nonsense Bosnian woman (cf. Helms 2008). Even the head of the Fetva Council of the Islamic Community, in a private interview, dismissed the Reis' calls for bearing more children and for prac-

<sup>13</sup> Taken from her biography on [www.karicfoundation.com](http://www.karicfoundation.com).

<sup>14</sup> Shiffman, Skrabalo and Subotić (2002) argue that 'demographic renewal' efforts have been more successful in Serbia than in Croatia but their own material shows that differences in actual policies were minimal. In addition to sidestepping the Milošević government's ambiguous balancing act between socialist and nationalist bids for legitimacy (Jansen 2000, 2005a), their epilogue ventures somewhat surprisingly that the post-2000 Koštunica government would likely be more benign on reproductive issues. Vojislav Koštunica in fact always promoted a conservative, clero-nationalist agenda, certainly infinitely more so than Slobodan Milošević, whom nationalists saw first and foremost as a 'communist' (and whose politician-wife, Mirjana Marković, a self-proclaimed Yugoslav socialist who frequently employed discourses of emancipation, they often blamed for this). For example, the new Koštunica government forged very intimate ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church.

tising polygyny as statements made in jest: 'The imams know there is no way to force women to have more children if they don't want to,' he explained, citing the difficulty in current economic conditions of caring for large families.<sup>15</sup>

In such a contradictory context, but with warnings on the 'white plague' prominent in the public sphere, poll research suggests that many people's stated values on parenthood were actually compatible with much of the national-demographic campaigns. In a questionnaire study (Rašević 2004, 16), many women respondents in Serbia proclaimed a strong desire for marriage, a preference for marriage over cohabitation and a belief that having a family with children was the most important aspiration in life. In fact, demographers in Serbia have calculated that only a very small proportion of women there remain voluntarily childless (Penev 1995, 9). Polls and media coverage in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina alike have also reported people's statements favourable to government reproductive incentives (Peršić 2007; *Nezavisne Novine* 04/05/2007, 8; Rašević 2000, 17–18; Lilly & Irvine 2002, 131–133). Yet in our ethnographic experience, the suggestion that people's actual reproductive practice would be informed by national-demographic considerations was most likely to provoke ridicule. In the polls too, even though leading clergy, frontline soldiers in the national-demographic struggle, ranked high in popularity, few respondents felt that these people should decide about their reproductive practice (Lilly & Irvine 2002, 132) and most were against the restrictions on contraceptives or abortion they promoted (*Ibid.*). As the statistics show, very few can have acted upon pronatalist calls (generally or specifically: there is no evidence of certain sections of society suddenly raising their fertility levels). Hence, while some people in the post-Yugoslav states might have *pronounced* a degree of agreement with national-demographic concerns, most people were reluctant to translate this into practice in their own lives, pointing to a discrepancy between national and individual or family interests (Drezgic 2004a; cf. Das 1995).

Such findings confirm the impressions we gathered from ethnographic work: all things being equal, we found, most women and men would like a family, and most expressed a preference for marriage and two children. It was very common for couples with one child to say that they would ideally like to have another one, often to 'go for' one of the opposite sex of the one they already had. Actual developments in reproductive behaviour were contradictory: some divorce rates went down, as did abortion rates (which remained comparatively high), yet the age of first marriage was being postponed, along with the age of first childbirth (e.g. Mrđen & Friganović 1996; Rašević 2004). The overall result was that, a decade after the wars, women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia had fewer children on average than ever before since records began. Why did post-Yugoslav national-demographic exhortations fail to entice women and

<sup>15</sup> Helms, interview with Enes Ljevaković, Secretary of the Council of Fetvas (ar., *Fatwa*), 20 April 2007.

men into action? We now suggest how this should be investigated in relation to socio-economic conditions.

### 5. Reproduction in difficult times

Yugoslavia suffered enormous population losses in WWII, many of them due to 'ethnic' violence. As in most of Europe, Yugoslav birth rates rose steeply in the post-war period. Yet demographers do not explain this with reference to compulsive reproduction. Instead they refer to 'higher marriage rates and postponed reproduction amongst those already married, and [...] the presence of general enthusiasm and a belief in a "better tomorrow"' (Penev 1998, 9). In terms of gender relations, women in socialist Yugoslavia went on to make significant gains in terms of literacy and education, labour market participation, health, reproductive rights and legal equality (e.g. Ramet 1999; Woodward 1985), despite limitations such as a segmented labour market, political under-representation and the well-known double/triple-burden or second-shift phenomenon (Massey, Hahn & Sekulić 1995; Einhorn 1993). From the 1960s onwards, higher degrees of urbanisation, women's educational levels and labour market participation correlated with decreasing birth rates – and such trends ran systematically across all national groups (e.g. Penev 2006, 68; cf. Jeffery & Jeffery 2002). Natality declined as living standards rose, and soon many couples actually started having fewer children than they ideally desired, for they wished to provide the children they did have with the security and comfort they had come to consider normal.<sup>16</sup> The significance of increased contraceptive use, easy access to abortion, and the ways in which this altered the sexual and reproductive practices of women and men in various social positions must also not be overlooked. Despite the unevenness of these changes, few could argue that post-Yugoslav educational, economic and political conditions for women, which Borneman identifies as key determinants in the success of pronatalist endogamism (Borneman 2002, 286), have been as bad as in the other places he mentions, even after the wars. Nevertheless, embedded as they were in the postsocialist transformations and the relative perceptions this entails, conditions were considered to be very bad indeed (and certainly worse than before) by many inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and even relatively richer Croatia.

After the wars, we are therefore presented with a context where all Borneman's boxes could be ticked for the different national groups: a collective sense of 'ethnicised' victimisation, a generalised subjective experience of loss in terms of material and political conditions, highly nationalised politics, and exposure to sustained national-demographic campaigns. Yet natality is down to similarly

<sup>16</sup> The interesting exception was among Kosovar Albanians, at least in the 1970s and 80s, when demographers found that Albanian women were having *more* children than they ideally desired, a finding that was subsequently deployed in debates in the late 80s and early 90s over the failures of modernization in Kosovo (Drezgic 2004a, 110–111).



low levels as in most neighbouring post-socialist states, and quite a bit lower than in some states in North-West Europe. We suggest this should be considered not in terms of absolute political and socio-economic conditions, but rather in the contrast they posed to the previous modernising, developmentalist Yugoslav state project, including its gender policies. Much as the creation of national post-Yugoslav successor states entailed high hopes for parts of the population, throughout the first post-war decade optimism on the societal level appeared only in certain areas and was overshadowed by cynicism, despondence and frustration. Ethnographic research since the wars indicates that, regardless of their position on national issues, many people have been preoccupied with socio-economic survival and the creation of some degree of security for the next generation (Bougarel, Helms & Duijzings 2007; see also Helms 2006; Jansen 2006, 2007).

In such conditions, even though they might desire a second (or third) child, many people have refrained from having them (cf. Blagojević 1997). Our ethnographic work suggests that two key factors in decision-making here have been the interrelated issues of employment (i.e. a regular income) and housing. Sejo and Amela Hodžić's situation, for example, is typical for post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina: after getting married in 1997, it took them nine years of living in small rented flats to save enough money to buy a one-bedroom place of their own. During this time, Sejo gradually managed to secure a permanent job (though he had to commute an hour each way to another town) and Amela, after years of waiting, was also finally employed. It was only then, in 2006, that they had a baby. But they said there is 'no question' of having a second child, even though they had always wanted to have two. In 2007, Sejo was finally making a decent salary by post-war Bosnian standards, but Amela had lost her job at a local NGO that ran out of donor funds, so they were still watching their finances. The biggest obstacle was housing: their one-bedroom flat would be just big enough to give their son the bedroom when he got bigger while Amela and Sejo would sleep in the living room. The chances of finding a larger flat that they could afford were bleak, not to mention that they now had loans to pay from buying their current flat, so they were resigned to having just one child. Many other couples, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, related similar problems in realising their two-child ideal, given the difficulties of securing regular and adequately paid work and the rising costs of childcare and schooling since the collapse of the socialist welfare state.

The employment question further complicated those pronatalist measures that were in place. Many women found that having more than one or two children – or having children at all – was too difficult to balance with paid work. This tension was sharpened further by the fact that a large number of women had become the main or sole breadwinner in their households and few fathers were taking on primary responsibility for childcare. In this context of everyday making-do under conditions of postsocialist transformation, exacerbated and

augmented by the wars, many seemed to have either postponed or abandoned plans for having (more) children. Moreover, the potential effect of comparatively generous maternity leave policies, which were instituted or left in place by various post-Yugoslav governments, were limited because they could only benefit those women with officially registered employment and not the many engaged in temporary or undocumented (or, very frequently, partially documented) work. When explaining decreasing natality figures, available research highlights *reduced* access to maternity leave and organised child care, as well as unemployment and, especially, problems with securing household accommodation (cf. Živić 2003a/b; Rašević 2000, 16ff; Čabaravdić et al. 2007; *Slobodna Bosna* 2007; Lemo 2006). To a degree, this represents an intensified combination of some of the factors that led to low natality in the 1980s.

Furthermore, new cohorts coming of reproductive age seemed to find conditions unfavourable to setting up new households: in all post-Yugoslav states, this generation, especially in smaller towns and villages, were amongst the most likely to experience unemployment and by far the most likely to wish to emigrate. Gendered expectations, while contradictory, for the most part added to the factors discouraging reproduction. Let us mention another example from Bosnia-Herzegovina, for it is here that the interplay of postsocialist and postwar transformations is most readily visible. Senad Čengić was a twenty-year-old graduate of a vocational high school and a Bosniak returnee to a village on the outskirts of a small town in RS. A man with a full social life – his mobile phone was one of his biggest expenses and most valuable assets – Senad only earned a sporadic income through occasional manual construction labour. His mother was hopeful that he would soon meet a girl to marry and thus give her grandchildren. But Senad just rolled his eyes at this, declaring that none of the girls would even talk to him – 'they're all just *sponzoruse*,' (a term widely used in the region for girls seeking men with money to 'sponsor' them). Anyway, he continued, he wouldn't want to marry until he was in a stable financial situation. Most people would agree though that the best way to do that, given the scarcity of jobs, especially for persons of minority nationality like him, was to go work in 'the West'. Some of his female contemporaries had married Bosnian men living abroad; no one blamed them as they saw little future for young people in this region. This was a widespread pattern amongst young women in Serbia and Croatia too, relying on the tendency of many long-term migrants and more recent refugees and émigrés from the post-Yugoslav states to seek spouses in the old country. This practice seems not to be confined to particular classes or places: women married to emigrated co-nationals familiar to the authors included unskilled labourers, post-doctoral scholars, housewives, state administrators, artists and so on, hailing from cities, towns and villages. However, it is our impression that this is more common amongst women than amongst men. In fact, Senad, for example, was sceptical about unmarried migrant Bosnian women coming to Bosnia from 'the West' in search of spouses – if they couldn't find anyone to marry them

there then there had to be something wrong with them, 'so they come here and find some victim' who then lives to regret it. That wasn't the way to go abroad, Senad was convinced, at least not for a man, whose dignity depended on his ability to financially support a family. Only when he had secured that would Senad think about marriage.<sup>17</sup> Given that, especially in rural areas, reproduction happened almost exclusively within marriage, such delays or failures in finding spouses meant that births were also postponed or simply did not happen. In urban areas across the post-Yugoslav states, where it was considered more acceptable for non-married couples to cohabit, similar patterns still arose, partly due, as we have seen, to housing pressures.

While more systematic research would be required to make definite statements on these issues, the examples drawn from our ethnographic work suggest a different logic from the one Borneman outlines. Rather than assume that an improvement in the socio-economic and political situation of women (or men) would reduce birth rates (as it often tends to do in different conditions), the post-Yugoslav context seems to indicate the opposite tendency. Here, the shifts in reproductive practices that tend to accompany such developments had already taken place before the violence occurred, at least in the aggregate. With the disintegration of the socialist state and in the wake of nationalist wars, it may be that people in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia did wish to have more children, or at least reach the ideal of two per family, but that they did not wish to have them in the current situation because they were not confident they would have the conditions to raise them well. Conditions of increased hope, or at least diminished despair and perceived chances for a 'normal life' (Jansen 2006, 2007), might have even led them to have more, rather than fewer, children.

In this context, let us examine for a moment the upward blips in the birth rates in Bosnia-Herzegovina 1996, in Croatia 1996–7, and in Serbia 2001–3. Note that we are out on a limb here, for we are working with undifferentiated overall figures, and we are not statisticians. These increases are small, and even the largest, in Croatia 1996–7, was short-lived, so that the 'effects of a post-war compensation period with higher overall birth rates have not materialised' (Živić 2003a, 312). Yet they did momentarily overturn the downward trend. It could be hypothesised that these baby 'boomlets' relate to periods in which there was a sense of 'normalisation' for many in the (majority nationality) population. In Croatia, the increase followed the end of war, the reintegration of territories controlled by Serbian nationalists and the fulfilment, through expulsion of much of the Serbian population, of the national project of a Croatian state. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the outcomes of the peace agreement were less definitive, perhaps reflected in the lower increase as compared to Croatia, but at least the end of violence and the reduction of absolute deprivation may have reduced the tendency of couples with plans for children to delay any longer. Indeed, we came

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that Senad said he wasn't concerned about the religious-national background of his future spouse, but his mother was adamant that he not marry a Serb.

across a number of such cases in zones of direct conflict where couples who married just before the war were waiting for the shooting to stop, for medical care to become more reliable, and even for the availability of nutritious foods, such as meat, for both babies and pregnant women. A perceived return to some forms of 'normality' may also have led fewer women to have abortions, which were still one of the main methods of family planning (even as they were often used to achieve desired family size rather than to prevent births altogether) (cf. Drezgić 2004a, 197–213). In Serbia, where the effects of actual military violence were much less present, a short period of increased birth rates came after the end of the 1999 NATO air strikes and the 2000 removal of the Milošević government. Again, one could hypothesise that the diminishing intensity of authoritarian politics and isolation may have fostered a sense of 'normalisation' of life (Golubović, Spasić & Pavičević 2003), which may have decreased the postponement of reproduction. In any case, in all three states, the hope accompanying peace and possible 'normalisation' soon faded, along with the birth rates, which dropped to levels well below the very low wartime figures.

#### 6. Direct victims of 'ethnic cleansing'

The case of Senad Čengić's village also offers a window on the question of compulsive reproduction amongst people who not only belong to national groups with a strong collective sense of national victimisation, but who have also been directly affected by the violent practices of 'ethnic cleansing'. As mentioned above, here especially, we are only able to outline some parameters for further investigation. The residents of Senad's village, all Bosniaks, were violently expelled by Bosnian Serb forces at the beginning of the war. Many young men who would have started families a few years later were killed, large parts of the population were incarcerated in camps, and many women were raped. In a typical refugee scenario, the population had settled in various countries around the world and only a small number returned after the war. Among the returnees were Asima Softić and her two sisters whom war and displacement had hit just at the time they might have married and started families. They were now entering their forties and had resigned themselves to never having children. Asima, whose boyfriend had been killed in a Serb-run camp, did not now regret being unmarried but she was sad that she had never had a child, 'to know why I'm living.' Such exclamations were also common amongst women of similar age in Croatia and Serbia whose lives had been overturned by 'ethnic cleansing'. Svjetlana Đurić, for example, who fled the violence in her now Bosniak-dominated hometown to seek refuge in Serbia when she was twenty-two, recalled the feeling of having to start from zero in all respects. A decade later, she harboured a strong sense that the war had disrupted her 'normal' life trajectory, by forcing her to seek refuge and deal with human and material losses, as well as cutting off her social networks in education, work, leisure, and so on. Being a self-proclaimed shy person, Svjetlana felt that this had also removed her from an

accessible pool of potential marriage partners, which she had not been able to build up in her new town. Like Asima, Svjetlana did not entertain the possibility of conceiving a child outside marriage – leaving both women blaming the war for preventing them from pursuing a 'normal' life course of marriage and children.

Returnee villages such as the one where Asima Softić and Senad Čengić lived, contained scores of rebuilt houses standing empty, now essentially vacation (and later perhaps retirement) houses for Bosnians living abroad (cf. Stefansson 2006; Jansen 2007). Moreover, the returnee population was disproportionately made up of the elderly, while many of the younger people who did live in such places were either leaving the country or, like Senad, dreaming of doing so. Other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, even those where people would be part of the national majority, held little attraction, because the job situation there was not much better. Even younger married couples with children were generally trying to leave, for employment but also to avoid sending their children to schools where prominence was given to versions of history and religious education unacceptable to them. While a few had managed to secure housing and jobs in other parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to move there, most people could not do this and were leaving for 'the West.' Thus, not only had the marriage pool dwindled, but even those children who were being born were not staying in Bosnia.<sup>18</sup>

Our research therefore suggests that a straightforward link between victimhood and compulsive reproduction cannot be made and that reproductive practices must be researched in their wider gendered context. Firstly, factors such as employment and housing tended to be even bigger problems for direct victims, especially the internally displaced. These people were often subject to resentment either as 'invaders' in towns dominated by their own national groups (Stefansson 2007; Jansen 2005c) or as unwanted returnees to the regions from which they had been expelled in the first place (although housing was somewhat less of a problem for the latter group with reconstruction allowing more space to accommodate new families). Also, with families having been separated as a result of 'ethnic cleansing', direct victims were less likely to find the extra help with childcare that has typically been provided by extended family members, particularly grandmothers. This was all the more necessary with the restricted access to childcare centres after the collapse of state socialism. Sejo and Amela Hodžić, for example, had met when Amela and her family had fled to Sejo's town. But now that Amela's mother had returned to their hometown, she could not look after her grandson and thus free Amela to find a job, which would help pay for a bigger flat and another child. A similar chain of disruptions affected established

reproduction and child-rearing practices for other direct victims, sometimes, even across state borders.

Moreover, gendered and national moral codes worked against any inclination direct victims may have had towards having babies. Take, for example, Bosniak women survivors who were expelled from Srebrenica as their husbands, fathers and brothers were massacred. Many sought refuge abroad. Others stayed in Bosnia-Herzegovina as displaced persons or returnees. In addition to intensified versions of the usual package of factors discouraging births, the widows in this group also feared moral condemnation if they were to remarry or have a(nother) child with another man. Indeed, representatives of two of the most prominent Srebrenica women's associations declared that widows were not remarrying out of respect for their dead husbands. Remarriage and having (more) children were clearly morally charged issues, but in rather more complicated ways than suggested by the notion of compulsive reproduction. It questioned women's dedication to finding their men's remains and campaigning for justice, the very basis of their claims to the right to state benefits. Moreover, it could be seen as dishonouring the dead through the betrayal of personal loyalties both to lost loved ones, and to the nation, given the way in which survivors, especially of Srebrenica, were such visible symbols of national suffering and moral standing. Having said that, individual priorities often took precedence over considerations about the nation as a whole. In fact, many younger widows *had* entered new relationships, though often not official marriages so as not to lose survivors' benefits. Others had remarried and gone abroad.

As for victims of wartime torture, especially survivors of rape, it is usually assumed that they were effectively prevented from further marrying or having children (e.g. Stigmayer 1994), following the logic of such forms of violence as weapons of 'ethnic cleansing' (Sofos 1996; Žarkov 2007, 85–169). Little is known about the actual numbers or experiences of such victims, except that many of them went abroad and that women forced to give birth after being raped often abandoned their babies (Carpenter et al. 2005; Salzman 1998; Stigmayer 1994, 131–137). Helms' research with women's organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina suggests, however, that such women have had a range of experiences with different consequences for reproduction (and cf. Skjelsbaek 2006). Some were indeed physically or psychologically unprepared for (re)marriage and/or giving birth, while others felt they were passed over for serious relationships and marriage because of their stigmatisation as rape victims. While there were nevertheless many rape survivors who did go on to marry and have (additional) children, all indications are that they were unlikely to desire to give birth to compensate for wartime losses and traumas, but rather *in spite of* them, as part of their efforts to re-enter 'normal life.'

Even less is known about male victims of sexual torture, but one can assume that psychological trauma and challenges to the norms of heterosexual manhood, combined with strong social taboos against homosexuality and male

<sup>18</sup> One could argue that this does not indicate a lack of intention on the part of survivors of 'ethnic cleansing' to reproduce. However, if such people were so concerned with replacing the dead with more members of the nation, taking those children abroad was hardly a good way to ensure their continued membership of that nation.

sexual victimhood (cf. Žarkov 2001) would work against these men (re)entering the marriage and reproduction 'market' in great numbers. On a more general level of wartime experience, evidence points to a situation in which men who were placed in the role of victim, who had to kill or, worse in the military code of masculinity, refused to do so, were having trouble coping with these traumas on top of the expectations to perform as breadwinners. In the devastated town of Vukovar, one therapy project reported that these pressures and traumas meant that the men who had been of fighting age at the outbreak of the conflict were having extreme difficulties dating, much less marrying and procreating.<sup>19</sup>

What all of these cases indicate is that norms of sexuality and gender roles were having contradictory effects on direct victims of 'ethnic cleansing' too, with uncertain outcomes in the realm of reproduction, even regardless of socio-economic obstacles. While this question needs further research, it is clear from this cursory outline that reproductive practices are the result of many more factors than psychological 'compulsion.' Furthermore it is not enough to attend to economic constraints or political campaigns, but the complicated terrain of gendered social realities are crucial to any understanding of people's responses to devastating violence.

## 7. Concluding remarks

In this chapter we followed Borneman's suggestion that we take seriously issues of reproduction after 'ethnic cleansing' and we set out some lines for critical investigations of the resonance of the national-demographic rhetoric that has been so prominent in the post-Yugoslav states over the last two decades. We found no evidence of post-war 'compulsive physical reproduction' but rather a remarkable resilience of previous demographic patterns as well as strong indications that those changes that have occurred should be understood not simply as conditioned by 'ethnic cleansing' but also by broader postsocialist transformations, including regional, cultural and political variations. We argue that analysing these patterns in this wider context enhances our understandings of national-demographic rhetoric and of its resonance in people's lives, thereby contributing to a better grasp of the gendered nature of social transformations. Given the availability of birth rate statistics, one could wonder whether there isn't a touch of Balkanism about the prominence that many commentators afford particular post-Yugoslav instances of national-demographic rhetoric. Would one consider the Roman Catholic Pope's statements on contraceptives, abortion, homosexuality and masturbation to be crucial to analysing practices of gender, sexuality and reproduction in 'Catholic' Belgium? Do Balkan people (and women in particu-

<sup>19</sup> Helms, interview with Dr. Charles Tauber of the Coalition for Work With Psycho-trauma and Peace, Vukovar, Croatia, April 2004. The situation for this generation of men was further complicated by the heavy anti-depressant drugs they were being prescribed by local doctors, some of the side effects of which were impotence and loss of libido, further challenges to their sense of manhood.

lar) somehow comply with greater ease to hegemonising projects? We argue that, in the Balkans, as in Belgium, the degree of such compliance should remain a question to be researched, and in this text we have proposed some routes of analysis that we believe to hold productive promise.

While Borneman's thesis fails the empirical test on natality in the post-Yugoslav states during the first post-war decade, our ethnographic work suggests that his wider argument on the importance of reproductive patterns in exacerbating future tensions may stand, as shown, for example, by the prominence of concerns about the future of 'mixed' children even amongst those willing to consider exogamous marriage. Moreover, differences in average birth rates between groups of women in the post-Yugoslav states were indeed correlated with political, social and material conditions (e.g. through education and urbanisation), but this was a continuation of previous patterns and the question remains to what extent they have been affected by 'ethnic cleansing'. The ideal of having children remained in place but, while some concurred with the national-demographic concern over the 'white plague', and many voted for nationalist politicians or expressed respect for clerical figures, this resonance was clearly not translated into practices toward increased reproduction. On the contrary, it seems that the tendency to have fewer children than ideally desired, which was already present in most parts of socialist Yugoslavia, was greatly intensified in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. We argue that a productive way to analyse this would be to investigate how overall gendered postwar and postsocialist transformations, and in particular the problems of employment and housing, made potential parents anxious that they might not be able to bring up the children they wanted as they aspired to do.

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