

(PRO)CREATING THE NATION: THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION IN POST-COMMUNIST SERBIA

Summary: The proposed research will examine changes in the ideology of reproduction in post-communist Serbian society as it intersects with the processes of national self-definition and construction. The research will apply the concept of „politics of reproduction“ in order to explore contesting ideas about gender and nation as they are formulated within the discourse on reproduction in the current public debates about demographic issues and about abortion. The same concept will be applied for analyzing how current struggle over female reproductive capacities is reflected in personal narratives of a selected number of women from Serbia. Data for this research will be collected using multiple techniques: archival research, semi-structured interviews, life-histories, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

Key words: reproduction, post-communism, nation, demography, abortion.

Aim and Scope of Project

The research proposed here focuses on gender-nation inter-relatedness by analyzing the conjuncture between nationalist discourses and the discourses on human reproduction in post-communist Serbian society. The fieldwork will be conducted in and the analysis focused on Serbia, but comparison with analogous processes in other parts former Yugoslavia will be made.

The research is designed to contribute to current discussions on the inter-relatedness of gender and nation in post-socialist transitions in Europe (Drakulic 1987, Gal 1994, Kligman 1992, Kurti 1990, Meznaric & Zlatkovic 1991, Milic 1993, Papic 1995, Verdery 1995). Discourse analysis will be the primary methodological tool for the investigation of shifting meanings of gender and reproduction in reconstructing individual and collective (cf. gender and nation) identities in a changing society.

Assertions of imbalanced reproduction (low fertility rate of one's own nation compared to the „other's“ fertility rate) and the abortion debate are presently at the center of discourses on reproduction in Serbia, other parts of former Yugoslavia, and throughout Eastern Europe. The abortion debate emerged in connection with the differential birth rates of ethnic/national groups and as an important ingredient in pro-natalist nationalist discourses.

Various aspects of pronatalist policies of the current Serbian regime have already been analyzed (Milic 1993, 1994; Papic 1995). However, this work has not included analysis of the production of competing discourses and how they are related to the constitution of new subjectivities. The 'muted voices' of those women who are more distant from the public political scene – how they perceive the ongoing struggle over their reproductive bodies, how they experience the undergoing discursive and practical changes – are conspicuously missing from scholarship on gender and nation interrelatedness. The research proposed here intends to approach these important but as yet unstudied aspects of the politics of reproduction in present-day Serbian society.

To explore the formation of discourse on reproduction in Serbia which assigns special roles to women as child bearers within the context of national self-definition and construction, the proposed research will utilize the concept of the „politics of reproduction“ as defined by Ginsburg and Rapp (1991). This concept brings together analytically individual, local, and global interests that influence reproductive practices, public policy, and the exercise of power.

At one level the aim of this research is to investigate competing ideas and shifting meanings of gender, nation and reproduction in a society which is undergoing substantial structural and political changes. At another level this research aims to investigate culturally informed reproductive beliefs and practices, which have resulted in widespread use of abortion as a contraceptive method in a society in which all other modern contraceptive methods have been available and covered by health insurance for the last thirty years. Perhaps most importantly, this research will investigate how both popular and „experts“ ideas about the female body and reproduction shape the ideas on nation and vice versa.

The research will have two major segments: 1) the analysis of public discourse and, 2) the analysis of personal narratives of selected number of women.

1. Public discourse will be divided for analytical reasons into three sub-segments: immediate political discourse, experts' discourse and the popular discourse. Although these three segments of public discourse are closely related and intertwined, analytical separation will be helpful for organizing the research material, and heuristically fruitful for determining how are they mutually informed.

The major actors of the immediate political discourse are viewed as political institutions (Serbian Parliament, Government and its Ministries, President of the Republic); and major parliamentary parties: Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička Partija Srbije-SPS), Serbian Renewal Movement (Srpski Pokret Obnove-SPO), Democratic Party (Demokratska Stranka-DS), Democratic Party of Serbia (Demokratska Stranka Srbije-DSS) and the Radical Party of Serbia (Srpska Radikalna Stranka-SRS). Parliamentary parties are chosen according to their relative influence on the Serbian political scene measured by number of party members, number of seats in the Parliament and popularity of their individual leaders. Other social actors that will be included in this research as a part of immediate political discourse will be the Serbian Orthodox church, and various feminist groups and organizations.

The expert's discourse will focus on demography and medicine, two disciplines traditionally interested in reproduction, and disciplines with a self-perception of scientific objectivity and neutrality. Since this perception is widely shared by common sense „knowledge“, experts' opinions coming from these two disciplines tend to be very influential.

The popular discourse – media of popular culture: newspapers, magazines, television & radio programs, popular music. Special attention here will be given to symbols and rituals, as more subtle, but powerful forms of ideology. (see Macdonald, 1987 pp. 3)

2. At the individual level women's narratives about nation and reproduction will be examined. Focus will be on meaning of reproductive experiences and sexuality for their individual and collective identities. The rhetoric used by respondents will be compared with the rhetoric of a male dominated political/public discourse.

Methodology

The research will be conducted as a field study in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and Bor, a medium size industrial town in Eastern Serbia. For the analysis of public discourse data will be collected mainly in Belgrade, while data on women's experiences will be collected in Bor. The choice of Bor is determined by the researcher's intention to investigate women's experiences in a setting with a more limited range of public discourse, a situation more typical for the whole country than the cosmopolitan and vivid scene of the capital. Besides, the researcher believes that for the purposes of this research, participant observation can be more successfully conducted in a smaller community.

Data will be gathered using multiple techniques: archival research, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, life histories, and participant observation.

In this research it is assumed that social signifiers (cf. nation, gender, and reproduction) are assigned multiple meanings and that meanings change with context (see Herzfeld 1992, Lincoln 1989). Such a theoretical position renders discourse analysis an appropriate tool (see Meijer 1993, Valverde 1990). Focus will be on dominant rhetoric, tropes, metaphors and symbolism as associated with different social actors. Not only words, or speech, but any type of signifying practice will be treated as a discourse, regardless of its ontological status (Valverde, 1990:67)

Theoretical Background

The research proposed here will join the slowly emerging scholarship in which gender is viewed as a constitutive element in the processes of nation formation. National processes and gender relations were, until recently, treated by scholars as two discrete and autonomous constructs. Theoretical scholarship on nationalism (see Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983, Smith 1987, Verdery 1991), with only few exceptions (see Mosse 1985, Parker at al. 1991), tended to be „gender blinded, leaving women, rather than men invisible“ (Oonagah 1994, pp.193).

By their introduction to the 1994 winter issue of *East European Politics and Societies* Verdery, and Borocz point to the im-

portance of „widespread use of female symbols to personify the nation“, but also to the „deeply gendered nature“ of the processes of nation and state formation (1994 pp. 224).

Katherine Verdery, in her article, concludes that concepts of gender and nation are both „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 (Verdery, 1994. pp.229).

Although a vast literature is available about the nationalist processes in former Yugoslavia (Ramet, 1990; Katunaric, 1991; Glenny, 1992; Hayden 1992 and 1992a; Golubovic et al. 1995), none of it includes a gender perspective. Since this research will focus on the discourse on reproduction as it figures in the (pro)creation of the Serbian nation, it will contribute to the literature in which the concept of politics of reproduction is applied for investigating various social processes.

The present research will result in a detailed description of the mechanisms and processes of gendering of the Serbian nation. It will contribute specifically to the scholarship on nationalism in different parts of former Yugoslavia, and other ex-socialist countries, focusing on the intersection of categories of gender and nation.

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(PRO)KREACIJA NACIJE: POLITIKA REPRODUKCIJE
U POSTKOMUNISTIČKOJ SRBIJI

Apstrakt

Podprojekat će ispitivati promene u ideologiji reprodukcije u postkomunističkom srbijanskom društvu na tačkama ukrštanja sa procesima samoodređenja i konstruisanja nacije. Pojam „politike reprodukcije“ poslužiće za propitivanje međusobno konkurentskih ideja o rodu i naciji, onako kako su one formulisane unutar diskursa o reprodukciji u tekućim javnim raspravama o demografskim pitanjima i abortusu. Isti pojam biće iskorišćen za analiziranje kako se tekuća borba oko ženskih reproduktivnih kapaciteta odražava u ličnim pričama jednog odabranog uzorka žena iz Srbije. Podaci za ovo istraživanje biće prikupljeni pomoću niza tehnika: arhivskog istraživanja, polustrukturisanih intervjuja, životnih istorija, dubinskih intervjuja i posmatranja s učestvovanjem.

Ključne reči: reprodukcija, postkomunizam, nacija, demografija, abortus.