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## WOMEN, MOTHERHOOD, AND CONTEMPORARY SERBIAN NATIONALISM

WENDY BRACEWELL

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street,  
London WC1E 7HU England

**Synopsis** — This article considers the ways that the nationalist project sponsored by the contemporary Serbian state has redefined women's roles as "mothers of the nation" and draws attention to the differing ways in which this role is defined. It questions the extent to which the stated aim of ensuring "the biological survival of the Serbian nation" has motivated this reassessment of women's roles, and suggests that the instrumentalization of women serves the political interests of state-sponsored nationalism in a number of other ways, particularly as a means of asserting and consolidating power.

Over the last few years, nationalism — especially authoritarian, state-sponsored nationalism — has become the dominant political ideology in the former Yugoslavia. In Serbia, the rise of nationalism has entailed a public reassessment of the roles women play in the family, society, and the nation. This has stressed women's duties as "mothers of the nation," though precisely what this means has depended on changing official priorities. This article considers the ways that the Serbian nationalist project has redefined women's roles, the effect on women's rights to individual self-determination, and the political implications of the nationalist instrumentalization of women as mothers.

Socialist Yugoslavia had an official policy of gender equality derived from its commitment to a Marxist ideology, its belief in progress and modernization, and its recognition of women's contribution in the Second World War when the Partisan resistance movement made a direct link between national liberation and women's emancipation. After the war, the image of the emancipated woman functioned as a symbol of Yugoslav modernity and socialism, and the ideological commitment to women's equality was expressed in legislation. Women held equal rights to the vote, to political office, to education, and to employment. (In practice, however, they did not achieve complete equality,

as they were still largely responsible for domestic duties, their earnings averaged less than those of men, and they only rarely reached the highest levels of economic or political decision-making). The role accorded to women in socialist Yugoslavia was to contribute to the building of socialism through the family, work, and political activity.

The rejection of communism in the former Yugoslavia, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, has meant that in the process many of its ideals (including those of gender equality) have been discredited. The reaction has been in many cases a complete reversal, a return to the "traditional values" of patriarchal society, in which women's role lies primarily in the private sphere of domesticity and motherhood. Nationalist ideology has reinforced this tendency by using mothers as symbols of the nation, and by emphasizing women's responsibility for the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation. The result has been a marked change in the concept of patriotic womanhood — a woman's task is no longer to build socialism through work, but to regenerate the nation through her role as mother. However, although nationalist rhetoric may have redefined women as mothers of the nation, the precise contours of the roles they are asked to assume are contingent on specific circumstances and can be interpreted in

very different ways. This is vividly illustrated in the varying ways in which official nationalism in Serbia has defined the notion of women's responsibility to the nation (and in the ways it has been contested).

In Serbia, after Slobodan Milošević came to power in 1987, the ruling ideology of the state was transformed from Yugoslav socialism to anti-Titoist (though not overtly anti-communist) authoritarian nationalism. When Milošević redesignated the Serbian section of the League of Communists as the Socialist Party of Serbia in the run-up to the first multi-party elections in 1990, the party retained the "socialist" label, much of the ruling elite and its hierarchical character, but adopted an openly nationalist programme. It is the ideology of "official nationalism" or "state nationalism" espoused by the Serbian regime which is examined here. This asserts the primacy of national interests as the most important factor in political life, and derives the legitimacy of government (and its leader) from the defense of the national programme. A number of opposition parties in rivalry with the Socialist Party of Serbia share this emphasis on Serbian interests. However, it is Milošević who was most successful in mobilizing nationalism as a political force among the Serbs, and it is Milošević's party which has been returned to power in elections since the adoption of a multiparty system in Serbia. These elections have been striking, among other things, for the marked fall in the political engagement and representation of women. After the first Serbian multiparty elections of 1990, for example, the proportion of women in the Serbian Parliament fell from around 20% to 1.6% (*Vreme*, 29 April 1991, p. 29), and it has remained low since then. With a few exceptions, such as the small Women's Party (ZEST), political activity is commonly seen as a male preserve with very few female candidates, no concern for equal representation, and little attention paid to women as electors. This state of affairs justifies the characterization of the system as a "male democracy," to borrow a term coined by Sonja Licht, a Belgrade sociologist (Einhorn, 1993, p. 148).

The change in the perception of women's roles can be traced from the mid-1980s with the growth of Serbian nationalism within the Yugoslav socialist system. This nationalism was stimulated in part by a sense of the nation being under threat in several spheres: in gener-

al by a Yugoslav federal system which divided the Serb population among a number of republics increasingly acting as antagonistic nation-states, but more specifically by the prospect of losing Kosovo (center of the medieval Serbian kingdom) to the Albanians. The Yugoslav Constitution of 1974 had institutionalized Kosovo's autonomy within Serbia, giving the Albanian majority there wide rights. This was perceived by Serb nationalists as damaging Serbia's integrity. The sense of a threat to the Serbian nation was intensified by concern over demographic trends which showed a high birthrate among Albanians in Kosovo. Discussion of these trends took the form of repeated warnings that "the Serbian nation was dying out," that the Serbs were in danger of being "swamped" by Albanians, and that demographic pressure on the Serbs in Kosovo was a form of "genocide" (Macura, 1989).

The high birthrate among Kosovo Albanians was described by Serbian nationalists as the product of a deliberately conceived plan to squeeze the Serbs out of Kosovo. Such analyses presented Albanian men as the main actors in this plot, not only using force against their Serbian rivals, but also encouraging irresponsible and unsustainable population growth in order to create "ethnically pure" territories in Kosovo ("Petition of Belgrade intellectuals," 21 January 1986, cited in Magaš, 1992, pp. 49–52; *Kosovska kriza*, 1989; Cerović, 1989, p. 332). Albanian women, on the other hand, were more often portrayed as victims, backward and uneducated "prisoners of the patriarchal family," completely under the control of their fathers and husbands (*Intervju*, 22 October, 1988, pp. 93–95). The high birthrate was characterized as deviant and unnatural, achieved at the expense of women who were kept secluded and subordinate, required to bear children until exhausted, even — it was claimed — forced into polygamous marriages or subjected to incest carried out for nationalist motives (*Nin*, 9 October 1988, p. 14). Such nationalist rhetoric characterized Albanian women as "baby factories" or "demographic reactors." But they were said to have little alternative because of the patriarchal mentality of Albanian nationalists, characterized by Serb critics (at least until the eclipse of socialism) as "counter-revolutionary." "The pressure of traditional institutions on today's woman of Kosovo is enormous, and she resists it with difficulty. . . . A Kosovar

woman doesn't bear eight children because she is availing herself of her constitutional rights, but because in her patriarchal surroundings she has no rights" (Cerović, 1989, p. 332).

Though more recent writings have put less emphasis on the accusation of Albanian counter-revolution, in line with the official reaction against Titoism, the ideal of women's emancipation is still used as a measure of the shortcomings of Albanian nationalism. One recent polemicist, Milan Vojnović, member of the research Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, writes: "Albanian families in Kosovo have on the average seven children, and many have up to 10–15. Under these circumstances the emancipation of Albanian women is impossible, and they have become mere 'machines for reproduction'" (1993, p. 85). Such descriptions set up an implicit contrast with modern and emancipated Serbian women who, it is implied, are autonomous beings, educated, engaged in work outside the family, with alternatives to motherhood. In this context emancipation is a positive value for Serbian women when set against the backwardness in which Albanian women are allegedly kept. (The emphasis on this role for Serbian women also fits into a more general orientalist discourse setting up a contrast between secular, democratic, and rational "Western" Serbs and primitive, barbaric, and deviant "Oriental" Albanians.)

But at the same time there was an emerging sense that emancipation could go too far, and that these same Serbian women were shirking their duty to the nation. Since the early 1980s the Serbian nation had been seen as at a disadvantage in the demographic contest with the Albanians (and Muslims more generally) because of its low birthrate. The emotive term "white death" or "white plague" (*bela kuga*) has been widely used to describe the pattern of low birth rate (common to most developed European nations). Statistics illustrating the tendency for couples to have only one child and projections showing that according to current trends, Serbia proper would soon register more deaths than births contributed to a fear that the Serbian nation was in danger of dying out. Politicians and intellectuals used the issue to fan a nationalist consciousness. By the end of the 1980s, legislation was being proposed to stimulate Serbian natality, and there were calls supported by the Socialist Party of Serbia for

the establishment of a republican council for population policy (Upozorenje, 1992, pp. 16–19; *Politika*, 7 October 1992, p. 11).

Who was to blame for this demographic crisis among the Serbs? Ultimately, the cause was seen to lie with Yugoslav socialism which, wittingly or not, had weakened the family and thus the nation by upsetting the "natural" gender order. Maja Gojković, vice-president of the right-wing nationalist Serbian Radical Party, was unusual in putting the blame explicitly on Serbian men, who had allowed themselves to be neutered:

Women in general succeeded in preserving their femininity [under communism], but a significant part of the male population suffered serious injuries in the region of the backbone and the heart. This is one of the causes of the "white plague." In order to decide to create a new life, a woman needs inspiration. You can't ask a woman to bear children to men who have capitulated in advance to every threat. In order to raise natality we must awaken and develop the spirit of masculine honor and heroism. We must help men to be that which nature and tradition intend them to be. (*Duga*, 16 August 1992, p. 52)

(This can be seen as a clever adaptation of the Muslim taunt that their low birth rate was due to the Serb male's "lack of balls.")

But far more often, the blame was placed squarely on Serbian women, for communism had made them believe they could be equal to men. Whether or not they acted consciously on behalf of Serbia's enemies, it was women who were responsible for the impact of the "white plague," shirking their responsibility to reproduce the nation out of selfishness. Milan Vojnović presented women's ambitions outside the home as part of a moral decline aggravated by egotistic materialism, concluding: "It is no wonder then that [Serbian] women as a rule do not wish to bear children, since in their rush to satisfy modish and narcissistic ambitions they disregard motherhood" (Vojnović, 1993, p. 29). Thus, though Vojnović deplores the restrictions tradition places on Albanian women, making them mere "machines for reproduction" in contrast to modern Serbian women, at the same time he condemns the individualism of Serbian women as one of the causes of the "white plague"

and a threat to Serbian survival. In the context of such nationalism, women are valued primarily for their reproductive potential, a far narrower social role than that envisioned by socialist ideology.

The cures proposed for Serbia's demographic (or national) crisis have depended on the diagnosis. The initial response to the high Albanian and low Serbian birthrate was to frame legislation in the Resolution of the Assembly of Yugoslavia on the principles of the policy of population growth and family planning (1989) that would "strive towards moderate and balanced natality, gradually overcoming existing regional, demographic, social and economic irrationalities" (*Kosovo: Past and Present* [n.d.] pp. 376–379). In essence, this meant a population policy based on national criteria rather than individual rights. Legislation proposed in Serbia sought to stimulate higher natality among Serbs (by taxing childless couples who were primarily Serbian) and to penalize it among Albanians (by taking benefits away from families with more than three children, who were overwhelmingly Albanian). In regard to the Serbian population, the tendency has been to concentrate on measures aimed at increasing the birthrate. Intellectuals and politicians have begun a crusade calling for a national renaissance among the Serbs, understood in a very literal sense, as "rebirth": the Serbian birthrate has to be increased if the nation is to survive.

A good deal of the discussion of this perceived imperative has focused on abortion rights. The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution stated that "it is a human right to decide freely on childbirth," and abortion could be restricted only on a medical basis. (Large numbers of abortions were carried out, in part because of the unavailability or unreliability of other forms of contraception.) Since 1989, however, the right to abortion has been challenged on the basis of explicitly national interests. (Even some leaders in the Serbian Orthodox Church have phrased the problem as primarily one of Serbian national interests, and only secondarily as a moral issue. One example is the demand made by Bishop Vasilije Kačavenda of Tuzla and Zvornik that abortion be banned legally for the following reasons, in order of priority: (a) "the mass dying out of the Serbian nation"; (b) the Biblical commandment "thou shalt not kill"; and (c) the Lord's command to "go forth

and multiply" (*Politika*, 12 March 1993, p. 8; *Vreme*, 22 March 1993, pp. 22–23).

Restricting abortion has been seen by many nationalists as the most effective way of encouraging (or coercing) women to carry out their responsibilities for national regeneration. One demographer, Dr. Stojan Adašević, made the principles behind such a restriction quite clear:

In order for the nation to survive, every woman must bear at least three children. . . . Those groups who praise free and planned parenthood, and the unchallengeable right of a woman to abortion, should not forget that in a state subject to the rule of law no one is the master of his own body, whether male or female. A woman must bear herself a replacement, and a man must go to war when the state summons him." (*Vreme*, 19 April 1993, p. 55)

There have been several official attempts to restrict the use of abortion, but the measures that have so far been enacted are limited to restricting abortion by charging women the full cost of the procedure. (This has cut the number of abortions performed in one clinic in Belgrade by four, down to 20–30 abortions daily from a height of 100–120; *Vreme*, 13 September 1993, *Vreme zdravlja* [supplement], p. 9) However, the nationalist parties have announced plans to propose further changes to the abortion law in the national interest, and activists have also called for propaganda programmes detailing the threat to Serbian survival posed by low natality.

As this material on the debate over abortion suggests, the main emphasis in the crusade for a Serbian national rebirth has been on women. Because it is they who are usually seen as responsible for the "white plague," it is they who must rectify it by a return to motherhood (that is, I'm tempted to say, by becoming "machines for reproduction"). If they are to be proper Serbs, women must take their duties as wives and mothers more seriously. A group of young women on the nationalist right have garnered much publicity by founding a women's group called *Samo Srpinja Srbina Spasava* ("Only a Serbian woman can save a Serbian man" — a play on the historical Serbian slogan *Samo sloga Srbina spasava*: "only unity can save the Serb"), and promoting the idea that the defense of the nation requires that women

carry out their duties in the private sphere. Isidora Bjelica, one of the founders of the group, has declared that one of most important aspects of national identity for a Serbian woman is that "as a Serbian woman you can create little Serbs," and that "Serbian women should put their talents and intelligence where it is most needed — and at the present moment that is in the service of the Serb who is prepared to give his life for the defense of the Orthodox faith and Serbdom" (*Pogledi*, 7 September 1992). In spite of the press coverage they have received, these exponents of the "New Right" are not taken very seriously, but they do voice a widely held opinion that the nuclear family, the moral foundation of society, had been endangered under socialism, in large part because of women's distraction from their "natural" roles; that as a consequence the nation itself is under threat; and that the solution lies in a return to traditional patriarchal values of motherhood, sacrifice, and submission. Milan Vojnović sees this redefinition of women's roles as involving a moral revolution. Serbian mothers "must return to the morals of their mothers . . . The traditional ornament of our woman is sacrifice without limits for her family, her existence" (Vojnović, 1993, p. 29). Accordingly, it is the woman's sacrifices in the interests of her children and family that gives her life its meaning. Not only does this limit women, but it puts them under an immense burden and responsibility: For by bearing children and soldiers, they have it in their power to save the Serbs. If women reject this role, they are at best failures, at worst traitors.

The low birthrate was not the only factor contributing to perceptions of a demographic crisis among the Serbs. Fears that the Serbian nation was faced with extinction were heightened by the outbreak of war in 1991 — fears that were intensified by the memory of massive population losses suffered by the Serbs in the First and Second World Wars. Now many Serbs believed themselves threatened with genocide not just in Kosovo, but also in Croatia, where according to Academician Vasilije Krestić they were faced with "biological extinction" (*Nin*, 12 July 1991, p. 24), and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Radovan Karadžić, the president of the so-called *Republika Srpska* (or "Serb Republic" set up on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina), believed that "all the Serbs will be liquidated if they cease to strug-

gle" (*Nin*, 17 July 1992, p. 7). By 1993 a panel of Serbian academicians and other notables agreed that in the current circumstances the most important objective for the Serbs as a whole was the "biological survival of the nation" (*Nin*, 16 April 1993, p. 12).

Such perceptions strengthened the conviction that it was more necessary than ever for Serbian women to carry out their duties as mothers of the nation. But the war also changed the character of this task. With the first news of armed clashes at the Slovenian borders in 1991, women were called upon to make good Serbian war losses: "For every Serbian soldier dead in battle in Slovenia, Serbian mothers must bear 100 more soldiers" (Rada Trajković, member of the presidency of *Postojbina*, the organization of Kosovo Serbs, Priština, June 1991; *Vreme*, 6 January 1992, p. 56). This is an extreme example, but the same basic thought was echoed in the many comments, both from the nationalist opposition and from regime spokesmen, that it was impossible to wage war with an army of soldiers who were their parents' only sons; that Serbia could no longer be called a warrior nation, because if no children were born, there was no one to fight and die. It had become women's responsibility not just to bear babies, but to bear fighters. (It's a sad irony that a woman could be censured for aborting a foetus because this deprived the nation of the opportunity to send him off to die in battle. Yet, this was the effect of linking the evils of abortion and the need for soldiers.)

But in the context of war, nationalist motherhood had become more than merely a matter of producing babies. Women were not only expected to sacrifice their own interests for their families, but also had to be prepared to sacrifice their children to national needs. While a man was expected to fight and die for his nation, a woman's heroism and patriotism lay in her willingness to sacrifice her sons for the same cause. The image that was repeatedly evoked was that of the Mother of the Jugovići, the epic heroine whose nine sons died fighting the Turks at Kosovo, who did not weep over her dead, but whose heart burst when she recognized the hand of her youngest son, dropped in her lap by ravens from the field of battle. Sections of the Serbian press have used this comparison to glorify hero-mothers from the current conflict, such as the mother of Djordje Božović-Giška, a former member of the Belgrade underground

and commander of the paramilitary Serbian Guard, who was killed while fighting in Croatia ("A courageous mother, like the Mother of the Jugovići, conscious of her son's sacrifice for the ideals of liberty, justice and truth . . . once again confirming the centuries-long truth about Serbian mothers, who bear their children's deaths stoically, believing in the just struggle of their sons"; *Srpska reč*, 14 October 1991, p. 77). As Dušan Makavejev, the film director, put it ironically: "the more arms and legs of her children dropped into a mother's lap, the greater and more majestic a Serbian and Montenegrin mother she is" (Makavejev, 1992, p. 113).<sup>1</sup> Even efforts to reward and encourage motherhood that are not overtly linked to the imperatives of war carry dark undertones of the sacrifice that will eventually be expected. In a ceremony in Priština on Vidovdan, 28 June 1993 (the date of the 1389 defeat of the Serbs at Kosovo and a national holiday), dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church honoured Serbian mothers of more than four children with medals called after the Mother of the Jugovići, the mother who raised nine sons only to see them die in battle — presumably without intending any irony (*Politika*, 29 June 1993, p. 10).

Official priorities have, for the most part, determined the meanings of patriotic motherhood. But there have been attempts by women opposed to the policies of the regime to reclaim the rhetoric of motherhood and use it against the imperatives of state nationalism. The peace movements that spread across Yugoslavia in 1991 are a good example of the use of nationalist discourse to articulate the interests of women in opposition to the state and the difficulties this posed. The first hostilities in Slovenia were accompanied by demonstrations of parents calling for peace and for the return of Yugoslav Federal Army conscripts from the battlefields. On 2 July 1991, for example, a group of mothers and fathers stormed the Serbian Assembly, declaring "We have not borne our sons to die for Milošević!" Similar demonstrations were held all over Yugoslavia, confronting the generals with the cry: "Give us back our children!" It was apparent from the news reports that these demonstrations were made up of parents, including fathers of the conscripts, yet the headlines largely concentrated on the role of the mothers. The slogans and demands that were reported depended to a great extent on the language of motherhood: "Mothers

of soldiers, unite!"; "The mothers of all Serbia demand that our children be returned at once!"; "Let us not permit women once again to play the role of the Mother of the Jugovići, searching the battlefields for their children" (*Danas*, 9 July 1991, p. 34; *Borba*, 2 July 1991, p. 29). These statements seemed for a while to undercut the claims of the politicians to be fighting to defend the nation's mothers and children. Precisely because of the way in which women, and particularly mothers, could be seen as symbols of the nation and its future, they were able to use that privileged status to protest against the war and for peaceful negotiation in a way in which men (even fathers) could not. Serbian women could claim a moral authority to speak out for peace precisely *because* they were women and mothers.

Although these women's protests made effective use of the language of motherhood and nationalist symbolism, they were not particularly effective at preventing the outbreak of war, or even at getting their sons out of their barracks. From the beginning they were open to manipulation for official purposes. The targets of their anger (the Federal army, the leaders of other republics) made them into useful propaganda tools for their own governments, who used their protests to justify the creation of individual republican armies or to propagandize separatist national causes (Milić, 1993, p. 119). They were not perhaps as different as might be thought from those other groups of mothers and widows (first Serbs, later Croats) who gathered to block the aid convoys sent to the besieged Bosnian towns of Srebrenica and Mostar. These women, too, were driven by deeply felt emotions and used their role as grieving mothers to legitimate their protests — and acted, consciously or not, in the interests of the nationalist leaders.

The problem was that it was extremely difficult for women to extend the terms of debate beyond narrow national interests. This was attempted, as in a characteristic letter explaining the motives behind the demonstrations in 1991: "A mother is a mother, whether she is a Serb, an Albanian, a Slovene, a Muslim or a Croat" (*Borba*, 15 July 1991, p. 21). These were also the arguments advanced by such anti-war groups as the Women in Black, which argued that "women's solidarity does not recognize national, confessional or state boundaries, even when the regime intentionally aggravates

and divides them" (*Žene u crnom — protiv rata*, n.d. [1991]). But such attempts to build solidarity among all women, regardless of national ties, laid the peace movements open to charges that they were traitors or fifth-columnists (e.g., *Pogledi*, 1 October 1993, pp. 11–13). It was in any case very difficult to divorce the language of motherhood from the rhetoric of nationalism. The mothers were, in fact, not simply mothers, but Serbian mothers, Croatian mothers, Slovene mothers, and so on. This tendency could be clearly seen in the mutual suspicion and distrust of the groups of parents who met in Ljubljana in the early days of the war, and in such slogans as "Let every Republic care for its own children" which were heard at the parents' demonstrations. But it was also difficult to use the nationalist language of motherhood for purposes that ran contrary to the aims of the nationalist leaders and governments. When Serbian women tried to emphasize their role as Serbian mothers responsible for the nation's future and its children in order to legitimate their pleas for peace and negotiation instead of conflict, they were accused of mollycoddling their sons (*jorgandžije*) and were faced with the compelling counter-image of the hero-mother who willingly gives up her sons for the good of the nation (*Nin*, 4 October 1991, p. 14).

The assumptions that lie behind this renewed Serbian nationalist emphasis on motherhood and the birthrate are not so different from those that operated under Yugoslav socialism. Both, state socialism and authoritarian nationalism approach reproduction and motherhood from a collectivist perspective, though in the former case the relevant collectivity was the working class. The difference, as far as women were concerned, is that under socialism, family planning (which in practice usually meant abortion) and social benefits in theory allowed women an equal role, or at any rate a wider range of choices. Freeing them from some of the duties of motherhood meant that they would be expected in return to contribute to the building of socialism by working outside the home. The nationalist attack on abortion and the reemphasis on the duties of motherhood can, thus, be seen as part of an attack on socialist values (including gender equality), but one that is still driven by collectivist assumptions — that women must act for the good of the collective first and, only secondarily, according to their

own needs and desires. Fulfillment, in both systems (and for both men and women), is supposed to come not through following one's own desires, but through selfless service to a higher ideal — either socialism or the nation.

Thus, one of the most important points to make about the nationalist discussion of motherhood in Serbia is that, although women are at its centre, it is not their needs and desires that are central. These issues affect women directly: their health, their control over their bodies, their emotional well-being, their economic circumstances. Yet public debate has made it clear that these individual interests must be subordinated to the collective interest of the nation. This is particularly graphic in the demands that Serbian women must bear not more children, but more soldiers. However, it also emerges from the emphasis on boosting the birthrate while ignoring the actual conditions in which parents bring up their children (e.g., the cost of nappies and other basic needs, the availability of childcare, employment, social stability, peace) and the coercive strategies chosen to achieve this goal (e.g., limiting or banning abortion). Though the national imperative of "biological survival" may demand an increased birthrate, many Serbian women must find it impossible to contemplate raising children in conditions of unemployment, hyperinflation, sanctions, and war. Nonetheless, the emphasis on returning women to the home and legislating to encourage motherhood, without reference to women's desires or indeed representation, means that women's rights to self-determination and full citizenship are being limited as they are elsewhere in Eastern Europe under the influence of nationalist ideologies (Einhorn, 1993, pp. 256–260).

It is legitimate to query whether the oft-stated goal of increasing the Serbian population is indeed the main goal of nationalist policies concerned with women and motherhood. It is not obvious that banning abortion would necessarily have the desired effect of raising natality substantially (and it certainly is not going to provide more soldiers for at least 17 years). Similar efforts elsewhere (notably in Ceausescu's Romania) had only limited success, as women resorted to various other means, including illegal abortions, to control their fertility. The emphasis on the birthrate alone, and the lack of serious political consideration of other means of encouraging larger families, raise the question of whether the authorities' population policies

are primarily aimed at ensuring the nation's "biological survival" (especially when some of these authorities are actively engaged in increasing mortality rates by supporting Serbian involvement in war in the former Yugoslavia).

It is apparent that these policies also serve very different political purposes. By reasserting the rights of the nation over "their" women, nationalist politicians can make political currency out of a number of deeply emotional issues: the survival of the nation, the security associated with traditional values, the sanctity of motherhood, perhaps even a fear of emancipated women. At the same time, they can demonstrate their anticommunist, nationalist credentials at little expense to themselves. (This is a particularly useful exercise for the politicians in the Serbian leadership who survived unchanged from the Titoist era.) Sending women back to the home to devote themselves to motherhood answers economic needs as well, allowing the market to shed surplus labour and permitting the state to reduce expensive social welfare provisions (Einhorn, 1993, pp. 117, 129–134). Though women are the objects of these policies, and are vitally affected by them, it often seems that their primary significance lies elsewhere; that nationalist debate about the role of women and mothers is a ritual carried out in the political sphere largely by men for other men. Perhaps this helps to explain why the precepts of state nationalism in regard to women can be so inconsistent and contradictory, praising Serbian women for their emancipation in contrast to their Albanian sisters, but at the same time demanding that Serbian women return to patriarchal values; requiring that women bear more children for the nation, or that they sacrifice these children to the nation as soldiers, or even that mothers themselves join the ranks of fighters for the national cause in Bosnia (*Independent*, 4 February 1994). The only constant is that women are instrumentalized according to national interests, and these are repeatedly redefined according to changing priorities. Women serve as small change in the workings of contemporary Serbian state nationalism, primarily as symbols, only rarely as actors or autonomous citizens.

The use of idealized images of motherhood as an instrument of nationalist politics is not at all unique to Serbia. Similar patterns have been traced in other areas and periods. Whether in the context of fears for the demographic and economic well-being of the nation in nine-

teenth-century France (Offen, 1984), resistance to colonial rule in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengal and Egypt (Baron, 1993; Sen, 1993), the social and military policies of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany (Caldwell, 1986; Koonz, 1984; Mosse, 1984), or the post-communist reforms of other contemporary East European states (Funk & Mueller, 1993), nationalist ideologues have linked the idea of motherhood to national regeneration, and have used this link to justify state intrusion into the "private" sphere of sexuality and reproduction and the assertion of state authority over the individual. Such comparisons can offer an insight into the character of authoritarian nationalism which relies, both, on symbols of home and motherhood to embody group identity, and asserts its power through controlling women. To quote Joan Wallach Scott on authoritarian regimes in general:

Emergent rulers have legitimized domination, strength, central authority, and ruling power as masculine . . . and made that code literal in laws (forbidding women's political participation, outlawing abortion, prohibiting wage-earning by mothers, imposing female dress codes) that put women in their place. (Scott, 1988, p. 47)

It is often noted that national identity is defined by reference to an alien "other" outside the nation, thus shifting attention from distinctions within the boundaries of the nation and encouraging a sense of community. But this should not obscure the ways in which homogeneity can also be sought by singling out "others" within the national collectivity. Thus, for example, Serbian nationalists have denounced both homosexuals and opponents of the regime as "bad Serbs" or "poor quality Serbs," implying that they alone are "proper Serbs," and laying claim to the right to define national authenticity in their own image (e.g., *Duga*, 16 August 1992, p. 73; *Duga*, 27 March 1993, p. 21). In a context in which politics is largely a male preserve, women too can act as a convenient internal "other," over which nationalist politicians can assert their power with impunity, inviting the complicity of the rest of the nation in this reordering of gender roles according to a new, nationalist doctrine of separate spheres, and in the process vindicating their claim to legitimacy. In Serbia, as elsewhere, authoritari-



an nationalism has asserted authority and claimed support through gendered metaphors and policies which treat women more as symbols than as autonomous individuals. Indeed, the very power of "woman" as a symbol muffles the voices of individual women, insofar as they express aspirations that conflict with the dominant nationalist ideology.

### ENDNOTE

1. The distinction between Serbian and Montenegrin would not have been accepted by Serbian nationalists who see them as one and the same, regardless of their separate state traditions.

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