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Svetla Baloutzova

Demography and Nation

Social Legislation and Population Policy in Bulgaria, 1918–1944



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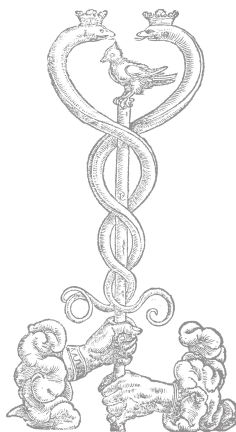
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Demography and Nation

Social Legislation and Population Policy in Bulgaria, 1918–1944

Svetla Baloutzova



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TRANSLITERATION TABLE OF BULGARIAN CYRILLIC

(according to the University of Cambridge Online Catalogue)¹

| | |
|---|-----|
| А | A |
| Б | B |
| В | V |
| Г | G |
| Д | D |
| Е | E |
| Ж | ZH |
| З | Z |
| И | I |
| Й | I |
| К | K |
| Л | L |
| М | M |
| Н | N |
| О | O |
| П | P |
| Р | R |
| С | S |
| Т | T |
| У | U |
| Ф | F |
| Х | KH |
| Ц | TS |
| Ч | CH |
| Ш | SH |
| Щ | SHT |
| Ъ | Ŭ |
| Ю | IU |
| Я | IA |

¹ The transliteration of the names of Bulgarian authors whose work has been published into English has been preserved as in the original.

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INTRODUCTION



1. Outlining the problem

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

In 2005, the European Commission published the Green Paper *Confronting Demographic Change: A New Solidarity between the Generations*, which addressed the latest developments in Europe's demographic situation, and, in particular, outlined the challenges of a new demographic "crisis." The Paper implied a positive correlation between economic performance and population growth, placed in the context of the combination of reduction in birth numbers, ageing, and the dwindling potentials for immigration. The Green Paper noted that the fertility rate within the EU had fallen below the threshold to renew the population (around 2.1 children per woman), and in many Member states below 1.5 children per woman. If the total working age population (15–64) was considered, it was foreseen that over the following two decades, the EU's population would drop by 20.8 million—which, by itself, was said to endanger the potential annual growth in the Gross National Product.¹ An exchange of the experiences of the EU Member states in their national social policies was encouraged to counteract the pessimistic demographic trend. Bulgaria, a small country at the fringe of Southeastern Europe, was among the first to respond to the EU Commission's appeal. By 2006, Bulgaria had already outlined her national demographic strategy for over a decade ahead, in which the socialist legacy of pronatalism was acknowledged.²

¹ Commission of the European Communities, "Communication from the Commission: Green Paper 'Confronting Demographic Change: a New Solidarity between the Generations'" (COM (2005) 94 final, Brussels, 16.03.2005), pp. 2, 5, http://www.berlin-divercity.de/diwiki/images/e/ee/Green_paper_demography.pdf; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

² *National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2006–2020* (Sofia, 2007).

Population anxieties are not a peculiar manifestation of a modern or post-modern mind-set, but have had their analogues since antiquity. Throughout the centuries, authorities have invested energy into “engineering” their populations by attempting to regulate the birth and child mortality trends in one direction or another, or by striving to achieve a desired “population quality” design. Whereas at the practical level such efforts seemed to have yielded short-lived results, policy preferences once made may nevertheless exert influence on decisions in the future. Institutional arrangements of an earlier time can self-reinforce historical lines of development, or, albeit in the long run, path dependency may grow less deterministic and be intersected by incidents of change.³ It has become clear that population trends and population management measures in the past need to be assessed and taken into account if current attitudes and governmental responses towards demographic phenomena are to be explained.

The history of the state endeavors of the “Great Powers” to impose control over reproduction and intervene in the family domain has become a well-recognized and prolific topic of academic research. However, while the strategies of France, Germany, Italy, and Britain to influence and regulate demographic behavior have received plentiful attention by social historians for decades, the traditions (or absence of such) in the policy realm of smaller European actors towards their fertility and child mortality rates are under-explored. This dearth of historical awareness may lead in a local frame to the implementation of measures, the choice of which could well bewilder international policy analyzers. At the same time, the paucity of historical information at a broader European level renders the issue of population management in the histories of Europe’s small nations a fascinating and rewarding subject of research.

The present work hopes to contribute to the studies pursued in the European social policy and population domain by channeling scholarly curiosity towards the less known historical path of an East European “newcomer” to the large, twenty-seven member state EU. Within the second half of the twentieth century, Eastern Europe established itself as a political region of

³ Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 414, 416; Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Polity Press, 1990), pp. 26–33; Béla Tomka, *Welfare in East and West: Hungarian Social Security in an International Comparison, 1918–1990* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), p. 19.

codified pronatalist practice aimed to advance population growth.⁴ Concurrently, the ideological determinism of pre-1989 socialist historiography has had the consequence that many of the topics in the region's national past, fully explored in Western historiography, are still awaiting their discovery. Soviet Russia and Ceausescu's Romania are among those "privileged" East European countries whose relatively recent, socialist family and population policies have been favored for analysis due to their pioneering or extreme, Drac(ul)onian natures.⁵ The comparatively balanced family policy of post-Second World War Bulgaria, too, has received a boost of academic interest over the last years.⁶ Yet little is known about the actual origins of Eastern Europe's population fears, which, judging by the example of the West, may be assumed to have had their roots in the pre-socialist era. The initial attempts of the East European countries to manage their populations, as well as the ideological justifications provided for doing so, still fall within the category of historical topics requiring full, in-depth exploration.⁷

⁴ John Besemer, *Socialist Population Politics: The Political Implications of Demographic Trends in the USSR and Eastern Europe* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1980); C.A. McIntosh, *Population Policy in Western Europe: Responses to Low Fertility in France, Sweden and West Germany* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1983), pp. 11–12; M.S. Teitelbaum and J.M. Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline* (London: Academic Press, 1985), p. 103.

⁵ On the history of the family and family policy in Soviet Russia, though less from a population angle, see Wendy Z. Goldman's classic study, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The latter follows the evolution of Soviet family policy and its reversal from a libertarian state vision of unfettered love and freedom of reproduction to a conservative resurrection of the definitions of family and tight fertility control. On the Romanian socialist version of "radical" pronatalism in both law and practice, see Gail Kligman's well-known work, *The Policy of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶ For instance, see Anelia Kassabova-Dintcheva, *Migration und Familienforschung und Politik: Am Beispiel Bulgariens* [Migration and family studies and policy: A case-study of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Variant, 2000, 2004); Iljia Iliev, "Familie, Ideologie und Politik: Die Grossmutter in der städtischen Familie nach 1945" [Family, ideology and politics: The grandmother in the urban family after 1945], in Ulf Brunnbauer and Karl Kaser (eds.), *Vom Nutzen der Verwandten: Soziale Netzwerke in Bulgarien 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [The use of relatives: Social networks in Bulgaria in the 19th and 20th c.] (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), pp. 89–114; Ulf Brunnbauer, "Sotsialisticheskite semeistva v Bŭlgariia: mezhdŭ ideologiia i praktika" [Socialist families in Bulgaria: Between ideology and practice], *Bŭlgarska Etnografiia* [Bulgarian ethnography], XX (2001), pp. 40–65; Ulf Brunnbauer and Karin Taylor, "'Creating a socialist way of life': Family and reproduction policies in Bulgaria, 1944–1989," *Continuity and Change*, No. 2 (August 2004), pp. 283–312; Karin Taylor, *Let's Twist Again: Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria* (Studies on South East Europe, VI) (Berlin–Hamburg–Münster: LIT Verlag, 2006); Ulf Brunnbauer, "Die sozialistische Lebensweise." *Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie und Politik in Bulgarien, 1944–1989* ["The socialist lifestyle": Ideology, society, family, and politics in Bulgaria, 1944–1989] (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007).

⁷ Important, very recent "break-throughs," though from the point of studying attempts at qualitative, racial "engineering" of the national populations in early twentieth-century Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe, are Maria Bucur's case-study of Romania, and M. Turda and P. Weindling's collection embracing research on Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Lands, Estonia, Greece, former Yugoslavia (Croatia), and Bulgaria.

The current work sets itself several interrelated objectives. Its foremost goal is to uncover the early stages of state-instigated policies toward the family and future generations in Eastern Europe by selecting Bulgaria as a case-study. While ever since the late 1920s Bulgaria's overall fertility rate has been on a steady decline, it plummeted steeply below the replacement level in 1990 and has not recovered yet (1.27 and 1.42 in 2005 and 2007, respectively).⁸ As a result, Bulgaria's media and political life presently abounds with troubled demographic analyses, uneasy population forecasts,⁹ and uncoordinated incidents of eager pronatalist appeals.¹⁰ Whereas impor-

For further information, see Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (eds.), *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2007).

⁸ Giampaolo Lanzieri, *Population in Europe: first results* (Eurostat. Statistics in Focus, 81/2008), p. 6, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-08-081/EN/KS-SF-08-081-EN.PDF; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

For a recent, overall review of trends in Bulgaria's fertility rates, see Vetka Zhekova, "Retrospektiven analiz na razhdaemosta v Bŭlgariia (1900–2001)" [Fertility in Bulgaria—a retrospective analysis (1900–2001)], *Naselenie [Population]*, No. 1–2 (2005), pp. 74–88.

⁹ According to Eurostat data, Bulgaria can anticipate the worst population loss amongst current EU states over the period 2010–2060: a decline of over twenty-five per cent, from 7,564,300 to 5,488,666, which is matched by Lithuanian, Latvian, and to an extent, Romanian negative data projections. See further <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tpso0002>; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

¹⁰ At a governmental level, see the creation in 1997 of the National Council on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (*Natsionalen Sŭvet po Etnicheskite i Demografski Vŭprosi*), succeeded in 2004 by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues (*Natsionalen Sŭvet za Sŭtrudnichestvo po Etnicheskite i Demografski Vŭprosi*), with twenty-two regional sub-branches, and under the direct supervision of the Bulgarian government. For further details, see <http://www.nccedi.government.bg/>; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

For further details on scholarly considerations related to Bulgaria's demographic development, see the numerous publications in *Naselenie [Population]*, the journal of the Center for Population Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and in particular, Minko Minkov, "Bŭlgarskite demografi iskat da pomognat za otseliavaneto na bŭlgarina i bŭlgarshtinata" [Bulgarian demographers want to help the Bulgarian national spirit survive], *Naselenie [Population]*, No. 1 (1992), pp. 5–7; "Niama miasto za iliuizii po otnoshnenie na demografskata kriza" [No room for illusions concerning the demographic crisis], *Population*, No. 1 (1993), pp. 7–10; "Demografskata situatsiia v Bŭlgariia" [The demographic situation in Bulgaria], *Population*, No. 3–4 (1995), pp. 7–38; "Demografskata kriza v Bŭlgariia iziskva provezhdaneto na ratsionalna demografska politika" [The demographic crisis in Bulgaria demands the implementation of a rational demographic policy], *Population*, No. 1–2 (2005), pp. 34–55; Vetka Zhekova, "Mnogodetnata razhdaemost na fona na obshhtata brachna razhdaemost v Bŭlgariia (1906–1992)" [Reproductive needs and attitudes of many-children families in Bulgaria (1906–1992)], *Population*, No. 1–2 (1995), pp. 35–45; "Reproduktivni naglasi i motive za razhdane na detsa" [Reproduction attitudes and motivations for child-bearing], *Population*, No. 1–2 (2001), pp. 36–55; Galina Rizova, "Natsionalna politika za semeistvoto" [National family policy], *Population*, No. 2–3, (1996), pp. 61–74; Mariana Keremidchieva, "Politikata za semeistvoto—teoretichni aspekti i vizhdaniia" [Essence and aims of the family policy], *Population*, No. 1–2, (1997), pp. 77–90; Spas Tashev, "Demografski aspekti na sigurnostta" [Demographic aspects of security], *Population*, No. 1–2, (2004), pp. 45–52; Tatyana Kotzeva, Vetka Zhekova, Genoveva Mihova, and Marta Sougareva, "Ekspertna otsenka na demografskite protsesi v Bŭlgariia i nasoki za tŭrsene na effektivno regulirane na neblagopriatnite posleditsi"

tant scholarly work has commenced on the history of child-welfare, especially targeting the pre-1945 voluntary sector,¹¹ and some more general studies have been carried out related to social and welfare legislation before communism,¹² Bulgaria's past policy attitudes toward population issues and toward their quantitative and qualitative expression still awaits unearthing and thorough examination.

Hence, the present study intends to identify those early, state-implemented legislative measures which a few decades later would categorize socialist and post-1990 Bulgaria as a pronatalist, family-and-child-friendly country. Children, their numbers and their "quality," as measured by health and mortality indexes, present the major focus of interest. It is the purpose of this work to arrange the pieces of a bygone legislative jigsaw into a coherent, intelligible whole.

Furthermore, this work aims to reconstruct the atmosphere of budding population concerns at both governmental and popular levels, starting in the aftermath of the First World War and eventually leading to the materialization of Bulgaria's first pronatalist law in 1943. It seeks to explicate the ideological motivation behind the adopted legislation by setting the collection of bills and legal acts in the framework of their idiosyncratic socio-political, cultural and historical discourse. Last but not least, the study aspires to

[Expert evaluation of the demographic processes in Bulgaria and guidelines for effective regulation of the negative effects], *Population*, No. 1–2, (2005), pp. 55–73.

On media reactions to the plummeting birth rate, see the campaign of Radio "Vitosha": "More Bulgarian babies for Bulgaria" (*Poveche bŭlgarcheta za Bŭlgariia*), launched in 2006. For further details, see http://media.actualno.com/news_228319.html; last accessed on 28 March 2009.

¹¹ Kristina Popova, *Natsionalnoto Dete: Blagotvoritelnata i Prosvetna Deinost na Sŭiuza za Zakrila na Detsata v Bŭlgariia, 1925–1944* [The national child: Charity and educational activities of the Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria, 1924–1944] (Sofia: LIK, 1999); "Impure person has no success in life and that is why the one starves": The ideology of the Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria and the appearance of health-educating rhetoric about children in Bulgaria, 1930s–1940s" (Studies on South East Europe, II), in Slobodan Naumović and Miroslav Jovanović (eds.), *Childhood in South East Europe: Historical Perspectives on Growing up in the 19th and 20th Century* (Berlin–Hamburg–Muenster: LIT Verlag, 2004), pp. 149–162.

¹² Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1983) (in particular, pp. 488–489); Roumen Daskalov, *Bŭlgarskoto Obshtestvo 1878–1939. Naselenie, Obshtestvo, Kultura* [Bulgarian society 1878–1939: Population, society, culture], 2 vols. (Sofia: Izdatelska kŭshata Gutenberg, 2005); Mikhail Andreev, *Istoriia na Bŭlgarskata Burzhoazna Dŭrzhava i Pravo, 1878–1917* [A history of the Bulgarian bourgeois state and legislation, 1878–1917] (Sofia: Sofi-P, 1993); Veselin Stoev and Veselin Tepavicharov, *Politicheskata Alternativa: Iuni 1923–4 Ianuari 1926* [The political alternative: June 1923 to 4 January 1926] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski", 1992); Krassimira Daskalova, "Bulgarian women in movement, laws, discourses (1840s–1940s)," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, No. 1–2 (1999), pp. 180–196; Nikola Konstantinov, *Sotsialnoto Osiguruvane v Bŭlgariia, 1888–1951* [Social insurance in Bulgaria, 1888–1951] (Sofia: Natsionalen Osiguritelni Institut, 2001).

lay down a well-grounded and documented foundation of early state interest towards demography and family issues in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe in general, in the hope to facilitate further cross-national and cross-regional comparisons of the manifestation of policies related to population, family and social welfare in the course of European history.

POPULATION AND POPULATION ANXIETIES FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Fear of population fluctuations, of rapid increase or decline, has been a recurrent concern with human civilization over space and time. For the last few centuries, alarm about “underpopulation” or “overpopulation” has periodically loomed up in European thought and governmental policies, linked to feelings of dread and anxiety about the nation’s economic performance or national strength as a whole.¹³ In the mercantilist period, concern at the likelihood of a future fall in numbers arose from the assumption of an inevitable link between population level, workforce supply and prosperity—a belief still prominent in the 1930s. As long as a numerous, young population was equated with an energetic, military force, a low rate of population growth provoked a feeling of angst of invasion and defeat in the event of war.¹⁴ A decline in the national birth trend was frequently paralleled to “depopulation” and perceived as national “degeneration”; hence, official initiatives were undertaken as early as the turn of the twentieth century to look into and confront this evil.¹⁵

¹³ For an excellent collection of original excerpts illustrating the links drawn between economics and demography from antiquity to the twentieth century, see Julian Lincoln Simons (ed.), *The Economics of Population* (New Brunswick—London: Transaction Publishers, 1998). For a broader collection of original essays from the mid-eighteenth century to the late twentieth century, drawing connections between population numbers, the economy, war, human progress and eugenics, colonial expansion, and migration, see Kathleen A. Tobin (ed.), *Politics and Population Control: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Maria Sophia Quine, *Population Politics in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London—New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1–10; M.S. Teitelbaum and Jay M. Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline* (Orlando—Florida—London: Academic Press Inc., 1985), pp. 1–2, 36–39.

¹⁵ The first country to establish a Commission on Depopulation was France in 1902, followed by Britain, with the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration. The Commission was meant to inquire into the high child mortality and low birth rate, both considered as a peril to national security. While their work was short-lived, numerous initiatives followed with a similar purpose. For further information, see the classic sourcebook: Joseph Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1938), pp. 127–128.

Whereas over space and time, authorities kept contemplating or instigating various measures to counteract demographic fluctuations, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recorded a pronounced sensitivity towards reining in, correcting, and reversing population slumps. The upheavals of the First World War, its high numbers of human casualties, and exceeding infant mortality rates put the population problem forcefully on the European social agenda. In addition, the large scale of economic recession and spreading unemployment and overall poverty led to appeals in the early 1930s for governments to intervene and bolster the welfare of families. Questions regarding the population's qualitative composition, as measured by health and mortality indexes, as well as its reproductive activity as revealed in numbers of births, frequently spread beyond the field of governmental concerns and became a multi-sided process of negotiation between public authorities, concerned citizens, family associations, and religious groups. Adherents of polar ideologies—socialists, fascists, democrats, and Catholics alike—manifested interest in population developments and promoted discussion of “strategic demography” even in the popular media field.¹⁶ Whereas at the turn of the century France was the leading European country to have openly embraced a pronatalist stance, fear of population decline became equally widespread among all European nations within the next decades. Anxious public outcries about falling numbers—commonly bordering on hysteria—enveloped France, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Britain—the latter with a longstanding tradition of Malthusian concerns.¹⁷

Population numbers were interpreted differently at different times and in different cultures, and their reading was legitimated by the national per-

¹⁶ Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Fathers, Families, and the State in France, 1914–1945* (Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 184, 191; Paul Weindling, “Fascism and population in comparative European perspective,” in M.S. Teitelbaum and Jay M. Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions* (New York: The Population Council, *Population and Development Review*, a supplement to Vol. 14, 1988), pp. 102–121; Jay Winter, “Socialism, social democracy, and population questions in western Europe: 1870–1959,” in Teitelbaum and Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions*, pp. 122–146; Marie-Monique Huss, “Pronatalism and the popular ideology of the child in war-time France: The evidence of the picture postcard,” in Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918*, II ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 329–368.

¹⁷ Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birth Rate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 1–8; Idem, “Eugenics and pronatalism in wartime Britain,” in Wall and Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War*, pp. 369–388.

ception of the country's international position.¹⁸ Fragile European security served as a generator for nervous comparisons of demographic tendencies, either within the nation's social fabric, or between nations and larger geographic regions. Germany's flourishing birth rate and young recruitment pool provoked feverish deliberations in both Britain and France. At the end of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century military worries and imperial weakness—interpreted as “decay”—became common topics for mass panic on both sides of the Channel.¹⁹ At the level of foreign affairs, Germany's intentionally overestimated population numbers were used in the 1930s as a necessary precondition to have the political issue of overpopulation raised on the international arena. Demography became a tool for imperial demands for territorial expansion and the redistribution of colonies. The aspiration to secure and sustain a proper “living-space” (*Lebensraum*), benignly interpreted as the “claim for an equal share of the world's area, or of the world's wealth,” or less comfortably, as the inevitability of “a Great Power to dominate lesser Powers,” permeated the international atmosphere in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰

The “specter of Communism” launched by the Russian Revolution of 1917 likewise unleashed a wave of frenzy, warning of the menace of spreading Bolshevism.²¹ The higher population numbers of alien cultures were seen as a peril, and within a historical frame they revived “memories” of the birth “failure” and the consequent collapse of ancient Rome. The supposed “risk of another Great Invasion westward by the peoples of the East”²² caused marked disquiet in the outlook of the “West,” both from an ideological and “civilization” perspective.

At the same time, population policies were rarely independently justified, as in practice they commonly went along with measures characteristic of welfare reformism. Occasionally, it was merely an explicitly stated population objective which would distinguish “pure” social policy from demo-

¹⁸ McIntosh, *Population Policy in Western Europe*, pp. 43–80.

¹⁹ Teitelbaum and Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline*, pp. 18–35.

²⁰ R.R. Kuczynski, “Living-Space” and Population Problems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 2–5. For a similar attempt to “export” population masses and imperialistic “grandeur” to the colonies of Franco's Spain, see Mary Nash, “Pronatalism and motherhood in Franco's Spain,” in Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160–178, 160, 163.

²¹ Teitelbaum and Winter, *The Fear of Population Decline*, pp. 40–43.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

graphic aspirations.²³ Medical care for mothers and children, financial help to families through housing or economic support (in cash or in kind), tax exemptions and rebates, reduced travel fares, and special school privileges to parents with large progeny served social welfare and demographic purposes alike. Simultaneously, population and welfare schemes could be manipulated for diverse economic, political and ideological goals.²⁴ The early family allowance schemes, augmented by French employers in the period between 1870 and 1914, hoped to curb demands for further increases in male employees' wages and stifle potential unrest amongst workers.²⁵ Similarly, the introduction of marriage loans in Germany in 1933 served manifold economic, racial, demographic, and gender purposes and, by enforcing an ideology of gendered domesticity, was instrumental in stimulating the birth numbers of "pure Aryans," reducing the unemployment rate, and withdrawing young, married women from the labor market.²⁶

Besides the positive, welfare side it exhibited, population policy could easily trespass into murky areas, especially if linked to rigid population planning policies and race engineering. The burgeoning popularity of the idea of race improvement (eugenics) at the turn of the twentieth century fuelled the merger of population anxieties with class and race considerations on the domestic front. As used initially, the term "race" was synonymous with nation, though it could also describe a population of a distinct type or skin color.²⁷ However, by the early 1920s, its German equivalent, *Rassenhygiene* [race hygiene], was in common use, even if its exact translation remained in dispute. The ambiguity revolved around whether "race hygiene" applied to one race or mankind in general and whether it assumed a differential order within the human species, with all the political connotations that came with this.²⁸

²³ Anne Helene Gauthier, *The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1, 4.

²⁴ Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State*, pp. 245–246.

²⁵ John Macnicol, "Welfare, wages and the family: Child endowment in comparative perspective, 1900–1950," in Roger Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child: Health and Wealth, 1880–1940* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 244–275, esp. 246–251.

²⁶ Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 17.

²⁷ Graham Loren, *Between Science and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 224.

²⁸ Loren, *Between Science and Values*, p. 224; Christian Promitzer, "'Betwixt and Between': Physical anthropology in Bulgaria and Serbia until the end of the First World War," in Reinhard Johler, Chr. Marchetti and Monique Scheer (eds.), *Doing Anthropology in Wartime and War Zones* (Proceedings of the conference in Tübingen, 7–9 December 2006) (forthcoming).

While in the 1920s, eugenics still enjoyed popularity in cultures and societies as diverse as Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union, their ideological framework added to an accumulative divergence in how the concept was interpreted. Hierarchical, discriminatory translations became more pronounced in Germany, kindled by the increasing power of right-wing forces. In contrast, by the 1930s, Marxism's egalitarian ideology downgraded the role of eugenics from engineering human genetics to its utilization in agriculture.²⁹

The credibility of selective eugenics was reinforced by fear of differential fertility among social classes and ethnic groups and its perceived negative impact on the nation's future.³⁰ As it was "discovered" that the "under-class" of the poor, asocial, and antisocial reproduced at pronouncedly higher rates than the intellectuals and better-off, the fertility of the "less abled" was felt to endanger the power of the nation. Measures designed to curb undesired fertility, such as medical examination before marriage, marriage prohibition, enforced abortion or sterilization were deemed suitable measures to restrict the "unrestrained breeding" of the unfit in both Nazi Germany and in the liberal democracy of the United States. In Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain the strong authority of the Catholic Church and a series of papal encyclicals against the fusion of biology and ethics rendered negative eugenic provisions unpopular.³¹ In the field of population and family policy, this brought Catholic countries closer to the egalitarian and universal family policies adopted by the Soviet Union in the pre-Second World War period.³²

How, then, did a small country with a distinctly agricultural economy and a traditional, universal marriage pattern react to the declining numbers of its population in the turbulent context of the interwar period? What social strategies and population considerations did it adopt to ensure the common, national good? Moreover, what pattern of policy legacy did it

²⁹ Loren, *Between Science and Values*, pp. 225–226, 240–246.

³⁰ Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, pp. 11–16.

³¹ Antoine Prost, "Catholic conservatives, population, and the family in twentieth century France," in M.S. Teitelbaum and Jay M. Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions*, pp. 147–164; Nash, "Pronatalism and motherhood in Franco's Spain," pp. 169–170.

³² David L. Hoffman, "Mothers in the motherland: Stalinist pronatalism in its pan-European context," *Journal of Social History*, XXXIV, No. 1 (2000), pp. 35–54.

leave to the future generations of policy-makers? This is the story which the present work sets out to unfold and tell.

2. Methodology

APPROACHES: THE “REGENERATED” NARRATIVE

The largely unknown documentary background to Bulgarian history raises certain methodological doubts: should evidence on Bulgarian interwar legislation on population and social policy be analyzed within the extant historiography framework (i.e., of other countries); should it be approached and inspected from a gender perspective;³³ or should it be allowed to unfold and tell its own story first? The present research has adopted the last, narrative attitude, where “narrative” is defined along the lines of the “new perspectives on historical writing” developed since the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁴ In contrast to the mere “antiquarian” reproduction of “what actually happened,” the “regenerated”³⁵ narrative focuses on the construction of a coherent story around a “pregnant principle,” with a

³³ It is because of the very novelty of the topic in Bulgarian historiography that the present research has opted for a methodologically broader approach and interpretation. Yet, it should be underlined that the gender perspective adopted in historical analysis has resulted in many of the most fruitful and enlightening discoveries in the field of welfare and population regulation in European history. Most of the cited secondary bibliographical items in English in this book (in particular, Gisela Bock and Pat Thane’s collection on gendered welfare approaches in early twentieth-century Europe, S. Pedersen’s monograph on the gender different nature of the British and French family allowance systems, as well as Lisa Pine’s research on Nazi population policy) bear useful comments on women’s public position and inequalities as enshrined in legislation by a corresponding state vision of “proper” gender roles. Other classic investigations in the frame of social policy and reproduction control written from a women’s history point of view are—to mention just a few—Kurt W. Back, *Family Planning and Population Control* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1989); Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Renate Bridenthal, Marion Kaplan, and Atina Grossman, *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

³⁴ The phrase has been borrowed from Peter Burke. Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). In general, it denotes the rise of the “new”, social history in the late 1970s, embracing interdisciplinary areas of historical research, such as microhistory, the history of the body, history of events, history from below, the history of reading, oral history, the history of images, political history and overseas history, and more recently, environmental history.

³⁵ Peter Burke, “History of events and the revival of the narrative”, in Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, pp. 233–248. The term “regeneration” of the narrative was proposed by Peter Burke in 1991 to replace the less accurate term “revival” of the narrative. For further details, see Peter Burke, “History of events and the revival of the narrative”, in Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, p. 246.

theme, an argument and possible subplots of its own.³⁶ The “new” narrative does not comprise an uninterrupted chronological sequence of circumstances and events. Instead, it reduces the scale of research to a single topic of significance, around which subordinated layers of “thick description”³⁷ are built up to illustrate and examine the interplay between the subject of study and the culture within which it occurs.

Most importantly, the utilization of “regenerated history” facilitates the reconstruction, so far as this is possible, of the mental processes of the historical agents themselves. It recovers “the concepts they possessed, the distinctions they drew and the chains of reasoning they followed in their attempts to make sense of their world.”³⁸ Hence, it also illuminates and explains the decisions they took and the laws they made. The “regenerated” historical narrative helps the modern reader understand the style of reasoning which the historical actors followed—even if, in the words of the philosopher of science, Ian Hacking, their reasoning does not necessarily translate into one familiar to us.³⁹

In the context of the methodology adopted by the present work, the subject of population and social policy has been narrowed down to the narration and the examination of the path which the Bulgarian state assumed in its legislative activities toward children and the family, and which eventually led to the emergence of Bulgaria’s first pronatalist law in 1943–1944. The nucleus of interest is children, as representing the quality and quantity of the nation in general. Policies toward diverging cases of physically and mentally handicapped, socially deviant, or politically disadvantaged children, such as refugees, are left outside the scope of the present research.

The descriptive and chronologically organized documentary material falls into two parts. Part One examines the emergence and development of

³⁶ Lawrence Stone, “The revival of the narrative: Reflections on a new old history,” *Past and Present*, No. 85 (Nov. 1979), 3–24, p. 4.

³⁷ “Thick description” is a micro-scale approach to obscure cultures based on interpretive analysis. It was developed by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz and was best illustrated in his two articles “‘Thick description’: Towards an interpretive theory of culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and “Blurred genres’: The refiguration of social thought,” *American Scholar* (1980), pp. 165–179. There Geertz argues that “culture is context,” i.e., it has to be grasped from a native’s point of view and that the researcher’s “formulation of other people’s symbol systems must be actor-oriented.”

³⁸ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), I, p. 47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the first state-generated child and maternity healthcare measures, legislation on childcare and family assistance. Part Two presents the culmination of the story, focusing on the legislative variants preceding the eventual Law for Large Bulgarian Families.

AGENTS OF RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A distinctive feature of the “new” narrative is a rekindled interest in the experience of the individual in history, ranging from the description of the micro-cosmos of the “ordinary” person to the life experience of a social and/or political elite. In the current work, the major agent of study is the state itself, as represented by its civil legislative and executive bodies, i.e., by its National Assembly (Parliament), the cabinets in power and the corresponding governmental sub-institutions. The institution of the monarchy, endowed by the 1879 Tŭrnovo Constitution with legislative, executive, and judiciary power alongside the Parliament and the government,⁴⁰ has been left out of consideration. Despite its undoubtedly important role in shaping legislation in the second half of the 1930s and in the early 1940s, no adequate sources could be identified as a basis to study it.

Where necessary and possible, the agents have been further individualized by introducing the politicians and public figures behind the corresponding institution, including their political, educational, and professional background, and occasionally, their social affiliation. As it was only recently that the names of a number of high-rank ministers and officials from the interwar period have been identified in Bulgarian historiography,⁴¹ a short record of their lives and, especially, of their education has been seen as useful to include in order to shed light on the possible origins of their legislative ideas. Recent studies on Bulgaria’s pre-Second World War ministers (in the entire period of 1878–1944) reveal that, due to the late emergence of the modern Bulgarian state and because of the youthfulness of Sofia University, most Bulgarian ministers were graduates of or had com-

⁴⁰ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, p. 52.

⁴¹ For further details, see Tasho Tashev’s introduction to his work, *Ministrite na Bŭlgaria, 1879–1999* [The ministers of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Marin Drinov,” 1999), and especially p. 19, where he provides the motives behind his reference book.

pleted specialized studies in universities in pre-1917 Russia, Romania, Austria–Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, etc.⁴² Ninety-two out of the two hundred and forty-seven ministers between 1878 and 1944 had studied law and had pursued a legal career before assuming their governmental positions.⁴³ These statistics raise the question as to what extent the agents of this narrative might have been influenced by their educational background in the choice and enforcement of a particular law, and how they reconciled diverse European legislative traditions with the local customs of Bulgaria to create an independent, Bulgarian law. The present work does not concentrate on the issue of legal transplants, which would require another study, nor again does it attempt to provide a comparison of Bulgaria’s population and family legislation with corresponding European laws, which would necessitate yet another comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, short biographic references to relevant politicians and public figures are included in the footnotes as an elementary (and inevitably incomplete) prosopography, in order to present a more informed outline of the narrative and to facilitate further research.

As the emphasis falls on the activities of the state and its representative agents, this monograph does not include a systematic survey of the operations of private activists and pre-1934 non-state organizations. Where the opinions of experts, public figures and some pressure groups, such as the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents,⁴⁴ are included within the narrative research, this reflects the peculiarities of Bulgaria’s political system (especially after 19 May 1934). Centralization of power and authoritarian practices in Bulgaria did not exclusively obliterate differences in public opinion but channeled “pluralistic” attitudes into the ideological framework proposed or approved by the state. Historians have already acknowledged that the viewpoints of intellectuals in the non-state sector often coincided

⁴² Tashev, *The Ministers of Bulgaria*, p. 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ So far, the Bulgarian term *mnogodetni* has been rendered into English in various ways. In his latest monograph, *Bulgaria* (2007), Prof. R. Crampton opted for the translation “large families,” whereas Dr Ch. Promitzer preferred the literal translation “with many children” (“Taking care of the national body,” 2007). My first (PhD, 2005) and final choice has been for “*mnogodetni*, child-rich parents,” employing the term jointly and/or interchangeably with “parents of numerous children” and “large families”—other close and descriptive terms. I hope that this combined translation will best convey the general idea of pronatalism applied to large families in Western historiography, while preserving its local, Bulgarian flavor, too.

with or explicitly supported officially launched state legislative initiatives.⁴⁵ The reasons behind this apparent compliance might be found either in the overlapping of private and state interests or, as in the case of the League of *Mnogodetni*, Child-Rich Parents studied here, in their desire to escape political or social outlawing. In this case, the independent legislative initiatives which the League promoted from outside the state eventually resulted in the state's intervention and the takeover of the League and its leadership.

INSTRUMENTS OF RESEARCH

The instruments which are the focus of our exploration of Bulgaria's state-generated population and family policy are laws, administrative directives, family allowances, and tax, cash, and land benefits designed to provide relief to families or to encourage pronatalist tendencies in their development. The major emphasis is on explicit policy outputs, i.e., on policies intentionally designed to achieve specific objectives regarding individuals in their family roles or the family unit as a whole.⁴⁶ Policy inputs, i.e., factors which might have influenced the policy-making process and the adoption of specific policies, are considered in terms voiced by the agents themselves and expressed in their motives, as presented to the attention of the Parliament in their debates in the National Assembly or in their presentations in the mass media. The validity of the "way they saw it" has been left unchallenged.

GENERAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As interesting as their evolution is, there is no space here to cover also the bills and debates surrounding the attempted changes in matrimony, divorce, and gender legislation, which touch implicitly rather than explicitly upon social policy toward population quality and numbers. Suffice to mention,

⁴⁵ Nikolai Poppetrov, "Opiti za dirizhirane na kulturata v Bŭlgariia (1934–1944)" [Attempts to channel culture in Bulgaria (1934–1944)], in Iskra Baeva (ed.), *Moderna Bŭlgariia: Sbornik Istoricheski Izsledvania v Chest na 65-godishninata na Profesor Dr Velichko Georgiev i Akademik Ilcho Dimitrov* [Modern Bulgaria: A collection of historical studies in honor of the sixty-fifth anniversary of Professor Dr Velichko Georgiev and Academician Ilcho Dimitrov] (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv Kliment Ohridski," 1999), pp. 182–202, here p. 188.

⁴⁶ Anne Helene Gauthier, *The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 3–5.

however, that the introduction of civil marriage and divorce in the immediate post-1944 aftermath had its roots and origins in the 1920s–1930s and the early 1940s, respectively.

SOURCES

The body of primary sources for the study has been gathered from the National Library “Sv., Sv. Cyril and Methodius” in Sofia, from Sofia University Library, from the Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as from the Central State Archives in Sofia. According to their nature, they fall into five categories:

Parliamentary minutes and parliamentary appendices

The parliamentary minutes and parliamentary appendices include the records of all parliamentary sessions and debates ever since the Bulgarian Parliament came into being in 1879, including bills and their preambles, as well as the text of the final laws. The minutes give a meticulous account of each word of dispute (or absence of such) in Parliament, which would lead to the acceptance or rejection of a law, provide the name and the political affiliation (until 1934) of the speaker, and, occasionally, give an insight into the personalities of the politicians and their private affairs.

According to the Tŭrnovo Constitution of 1878, Bulgaria was proclaimed a hereditary constitutional monarchy, where the legislative power was placed in the hands of an Ordinary and of a Grand, single-chambered, National Assembly. The Ordinary National Assembly (ONA) was to be elected for a three-year period by universal suffrage of males over the age of twenty-one, and all literate males over the age of thirty were eligible for election.⁴⁷ The primary responsibility of the deputies was to debate and approve legislative bills, to discuss and vote the state budget, state loans and taxes, and so on.⁴⁸ In contrast, the Grand National Assembly was to have twice as many elected deputies, including prominent members of the Bulgarian Orthodox State Church, the judiciary and local government. It was to be called to elect regents, to choose the head of state, and to sanction

⁴⁷ Richard Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 90.

⁴⁸ Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, pp. 53–54.

changes in the state's boundaries or changes in the constitution.⁴⁹ It is the dealings of the Ordinary National Assembly which are of relevance in the present context and which have been taken into account in the research.

According to the Tŭrnovo Constitution, legislative power was held jointly by the monarch and by Parliament. In practice, this meant that in order to become law a bill had to be presented by the minister in charge as an order of the monarch to the attention of the National Assembly for approval. After being voted by the Parliament, the law had to be finally sanctioned by the monarch in order to appear in the *State Gazette* and thus to come into force. Whereas until 1934 a legislative bill was subjected to three hearings, when the National Assembly resumed its activities in 1938 votes were reduced to two parliamentary meetings. In cases of emergency, however, a bill could be put to the vote twice within the same parliamentary meeting.

Within periods perceived as endangering the internal and external security of the state, and when in practice there was no opportunity to summon the National Assembly, the Tŭrnovo Constitution delegated to the Council of Ministers (the supreme executive state body alongside the monarch) the right to pass decrees with the status of laws, i.e., so-called decree-laws.⁵⁰ Their final codification, however, had to be sanctioned by the first National Assembly to follow. As the National Assembly was dissolved after the military coup on 19 May 1934 and was reopened only four years later, the constitutional provisions were exploited both by the organizers of the military coup and by several succeeding governments.⁵¹

Archival units

The Tŭrnovo Constitution envisaged the formation of six ministries: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of People's Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of War. The formation of any new ministry required a complicated intrusion into and change of the constitution. This, for its part, was considered as much a legal as well as an unwanted political affair, and by 1944, in all

⁴⁹ Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, p. 90; Andreev, *A History of the Bulgarian Bourgeois State and Legislation*, pp. 54–55; Aleksandŭr Girginov, *Dŭrzhavno Ustroistvo na Bŭlgariia* [State constitution of Bulgaria] (Sofia: Izdanie na "Bŭlgarski pečat," 1921), pp. 155–167.

⁵⁰ *Naredba-zakon*.