

‘Population Prescriptions’:
State, Morality, and Population Politics in Contemporary Russia

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Anthropology at Brown University

Providence, Rhode Island

May 2013

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by the Department of Anthropology as satisfying the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Acknowledgments

Completing this work would not have been possible without the support, generosity, and guidance of many, many people – mentors, colleagues, friends, family, and institutions in three different countries. It is impossible to state all the ways that they contributed to my research and I cherish the opportunity to acknowledge at least a few of them.

I could not have done this project without the intellectual guidance of my dissertation committee. They helped me develop intellectual confidence and I am grateful for their dedicated mentorship. My outmost gratitude goes to Daniel Jordan Smith who directed this dissertation with extreme intellectual generosity and unfailing patience. I am immensely grateful for his professionalism, wisdom, thorough readings of my work, and comments that have challenged my thinking in ways that will continue to develop in years to come. Keith Brown played an invaluable role in the development of this project – his careful and insightful reading of drafts in many different stages, his writing advice, and our numerous long conversations helped me articulate my ideas with more clarity and theoretical precision. Cathy Lutz has been a true source of intellectual and personal inspiration to me and her always-insightful comments pushed me to think more imaginatively. I will always remember our explorations of the used cars' market in Rhode Island as an important moment in my development as a researcher. Michele Rivkin-Fish generously agreed to serve as an outside reader and her committed attention to my work since we first met several years ago has helped advance this project in numerous critical

directions. I am grateful for Michele's long-term support of this project, for providing me with many contacts in Russia, and for sharing her deep knowledge about Russian population politics with me.

My debt of gratitude goes to many people in Russia who shared their professional and personal lives and stories with me. I owe special thanks to all the social science researchers for generously allowing me to follow them around as they were going around their research and teaching routines. I am grateful to R.V. Nifantova, A.I. Kuzmin, and A.G. Shelomentsev, my loyal guides into the politics of Russian academia, for their many insights on the ins and outs of conducting demographic research in Russia. I am thankful to Olga Pavlenko who helped me settled during my first weeks of fieldwork and offered first insights into the state of Russian demography.

I am very thankful for the help and encouragement I received from the community of *rodologists* at the family club "Iunost" where I conducted a big bulk of my research. I thank Elena V. Nazipova, Olga N. Zvezdina, Larisa and Valery Dokuchaevs who took time out of their busy schedules and shared their experience and ideas about psychology, family, politics, and soul with me. I am indebted to many *Rodologia* goers. Without their hospitality and generosity I could not have conducted this research. Finally, I am thankful to Emilia A. Kalistratova for our long and insightful conversations about genealogy, family, and Russian history at the café "Teatral'noe."

I also received a warm welcome from the department of Sociology at the Ural State Pedagogical Institute in Yekaterinburg. I am especially grateful to Larisa (Lara) E. Petrova for offering me her intellectual support and friendship. I want to thank Lara for inviting me to participate in the departmental seminars and for providing me with

guidance in my research. Lara and her family also made my fieldwork experience merry and pleasurable. I will always recall very fondly our travels and our Saturday dinners – Lara’s husband Kostya Kuzmin, who cooked for us almost every weekend, her two wonderful children Sonya and Kolya, her sister, a talented artist, Natasha Petrova and Natasha’s son Stepa. And of course I will always remember our adventures at the international Balalaika festival. I am eternally grateful for their friendship.

My academic networks have been an important source of support throughout my coursework, research, and writing. At Brown, I am grateful to Matthew Gutmann, Nickolas Townsend, Stephen Houston, Kay Warren, and faculty members at the Department of Anthropology for sharing with me an appreciation for a healthy debate and a heated argument. I was lucky to have met many friends and colleagues in graduate school and I thank fellow anthropology students Yagmur Nuhurat, Sohini Kar, Katie Rhine, Andrea Flores, Susan Ellison, Stacey Vanderhurst, James Doyle, Laura Vares, Yana Stainova, Sarah Newman, Kristin Skrabut, Kendra Ferher, Jen Ashley, Harris Solomon, Kathleen Millar, Rebecca Peters, Andrea Mazzarino, Andrea Maldonado, Coleman Nye, and Lisa Koriouchkina for making this intellectual journey a socially significant experience and for offering insightful suggestions to the arguments made in this dissertation. Gabriela Sánchez-Soto, Trille Loft, Ben Onyango, Gayatri Singh, and Trina Vithayathil shared the PSTC space and so much more during my time at Brown. Krista Goff and Eli Feiman shared with me my passion for Russian history and language and offered friendship. Colin Johnson, Nazar Mammedov, and Aisalkyn Botoeva read iterations of chapters and offered important comments. Alexander Kunst provided feedback to the arguments made in Chapter Two and a lot of fashion and household

advice. I am especially grateful to Yagmur Nuhrat who shared the graduate school experience with me since day one and has become a true friend. I am indebted to Sohini Kar and Katie Rhine for their thoughtful suggestions, important feedback, and editing advice. Eoin Ryan and Rachel Gostenhofer helped immensely with the editing of this work.

My work has also benefited from the extended intellectual community and friendship I gained over the years. I would like to thank Bruce Grant, Doug Rogers, Alexei Yurchak, Kristen Ghodsee, Georgi Derluguian, and Sonja Luehrmann for their intellectual support and for sharing their work with me. I have received invaluable suggestions from audience members at the Soyuz Annual Conference, the ASN conventions, and the AAA annual meetings. I am especially grateful to Larisa Kurtovic, Alex Beliaev, Jessica Robbins, and Brian Horn for their support and feedback. Bianca Dahl provided detailed thoughtful comments on several presentations and drafts, offered much needed good humor, and helped move forward when I felt uncertain about my work. Naor Ben-Yehoyada, aside from being a dear friend contributed immensely to the development of this project. I am grateful to Nitsan Chorev for her friendship and for helping me carry on.

Several scholars in Russia offered me their intellectual friendship and I am thankful to Elena Trubina, Valery Elizarov, and Sergey Zakharov for their insightful feedback and for general support of my project. I thank Peter Meylakhs for his friendship and for offering important feedback. My journey into anthropology began at Tel Aviv University and I would like to thank Avi Cordova, Adriana Kemp, Dan Rabinowitz, Haim Hazan, Hanna Herzog, Yehouda Shenhav, Ronen Shamir, and Meirav Aharon-

Gutman for igniting my interest in social theory and for their warm support over the years. My work benefited from countless conversations with my Israeli friends and colleagues – Igal Halfin, Tama Halfin, Julia Lerner, and Galia Plotkin and I am grateful for their sustained support throughout. Ira Tachtarova R.I.P. was a dear friend, talented scholar, and a personal source of inspiration. I thank Iddo Tavory, Tom Pessah, and Lior Gelernter for our shared adventure with Mauss's Gift and for their friendship and encouragement over the years.

I am deeply grateful to Kathy Grimaldi, Matilde Andrade, and Marjorie Sugrue in the Department of Anthropology for myriad ways in which they made graduate school feel like home. Their compassion, kindness, and their superb professionalism make them the proverbial glue of the department. I will always remember Kathy's ritual of a "magic wand" as a unique embodiment of the discipline of anthropology.

My research and graduate studies were enabled by financial and institutional support. This research has not been possible with the generous support from the National Science Foundation's Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant for my dissertation fieldwork in 2009-2010. At Brown University, The Population Studies and Training Center's grant provided funds both for exploratory research in Yekaterinburg in 2008 and for the dissertation fieldwork in 2009-2010. I am deeply grateful to Kelley Smith and Tom Alarie at the PSTC for their support of my project. The Department of Anthropology and Graduate School provided research funds for preliminary research conducted in the summer of 2007. At Brown, I would also like to thank the staff of the Rockefeller library for many years of support. I thank the participants of the Mellon Graduate Workshop "Postsocialist Eurasia" at Brown University, where I received

important feedback on Chapter Two from the workshop participants. I am grateful to Ethan Pollock and Pauline Jones-Luong for serving as faculty sponsors and for helping me organize this workshop. Linda Cook provided important feedback and support for this project.

Last but certainly not least, I thank my family and friends who have supported me in this process. I am grateful to Sergey ‘Ginger’ Solovyev, his partner Michael Ustinov, Annuska Evseeva, Palina Hariton, Regina Dobkin, Oleg Evstafyev, Anna Ludensky, and Alina Abramov for our life-long friendship and for being there for me no matter what. I would like to thank Oded’s parents Amira and Dov Rabinovitch and his grandparents Dalia and Eli Hadar for supporting and encouraging me throughout my research. My cousin Ida and her family were the closest to me during my fieldwork and supported me in innumerable ways. The Medvedev family in Yekaterinburg provided support and helped navigating the everyday life in Russia. I thank my mother Zina, my brother Evgeny, my sister-in-law Irina and my amazing nephews Sonia, Sharon, and Ronen for their humility, compassion, unconditional love and support. My father Roman did not live to see this moment but I nevertheless thank him for his openness to others and for introducing me to the power of books early on. Finally, I thank my partner Oded for brightening my every day with his boundless love, for his generous spirit, and for things that elude my capacity for expression.

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INTRODUCTION

‘Population Prescriptions’: Demography, Morality, and Russia’s Crisis of Underpopulation

The Population Debate

“The demographic crisis” (*demograficheskii krizis*) is a popular and continuous topic of both mundane conversations and televised political debates in contemporary Russia. If you ask anyone in Russia, even a stranger will introduce you to the wide range of responses and emotional reactions to “the crisis,” its causes, and possible solutions. As I was conducting research in Yekaterinburg, Russia in 2009-2010, I was offered many different explanations of the problem in a variety of social situations, by people from different (if sometimes overlapping) social worlds – from my next door neighbor, to university professors who invited me to speak at their departmental seminar, to scholars whose research and everyday practices I studied, to public health professionals who introduced me to new forms of prenatal care, to public servants who sometimes spoke to me in their capacity of government officials, but sometimes were willing to take off their official hats.

If you look for even more information on the crisis you will find that newspapers report on the current demographic trends on a daily basis using bold titles such as “Birthrates are growing again in Russia,” “Does the Russian population continue to

disappear?,” “The Demographic situation in Russia is improving,” “Russia is not healthy and it is losing its viability.”¹ TV talk shows invite “experts” and “laypersons” who argue over possible causes and solutions to the problem and prominent businessmen, such as the CEO of Russian Railways, write essays and policy reports about “the demographic problem” (Yakunin et al 2007). If you type “the late twentieth century’s demographic crisis in Russia” on Yandex (the Russian web search engine), you will get two million entries, which include lively debates among people from different social groups, who express and communicate across the country, and often transnationally, ideas and anxieties about the “demographic” future of the country.

The Russian state’s efforts to increase its population growth became familiar to the world beyond the Russian Federation in 2007, when a flamboyant governor of the Ulyanovsk region (the birthplace of Vladimir Lenin) declared September 12 “A Family Contact Day” (*den’ semeinogo obschenia*). The essence of this holiday is that on September 12 of each year, couples are eligible to take a day off from work to procreate. For local citizens, the title “A Family Contact Day” seemed to be too euphemistic and they immediately renamed it. “A Family Contact Day” became known as “The Day of Conception” (*den’ zachatia*). The governor promised that parents with children born exactly nine months after September 12, 2007 would receive a new SUV called the UAZ-Patriot, produced by the local automobile company.² The governor announced his

¹ http://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-312262.html
http://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-316472-section_id-17.html
<http://news.mail.ru/politics/3713080/?state=90&>
<http://www.mk.ru/social/article/2010/08/19/524137-rossiya-nezdorova-i-teryayet-zhiznesposobnost.html>

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6990802.stm>

undertaking as part of a larger pedagogical program devoted to patriotism. The politicization of the demographic problem continues now with the Penza (another central Russian region) vice-governor proposing to create a “procreation plan” (*plan po zachatiu*) in his region (Safiullina and Abrosimova 2012).

In May 2006, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin made a passionate statement about the dire demographic situation and identified Russia’s decreasing population as a security threat and the most acute issue facing the country. Although in his speech Putin made a fair effort to address all three basic pillars of population dynamics – fertility, mortality, and migration – following this address in January 2007 the government launched a new, high-priority policy to address the “demographic problem,” which was built almost exclusively around fertility and falling birthrates. Called “Maternal Capital” (*materinskii kapital*) the policy was set to pay a one-time lump sum of money (approximately \$13,000 with a monthly inflation adjustment) to women who gave birth to a second child after December 31, 2006. The money is paid to a woman when her child turns three and it could be spent on three preset purposes stipulated by the state: the mortgage, the child’s education, and the mother’s retirement plan.³

This new policy measure prompted multiple public debates about the roots, consequences, and dangers of the general demographic situation and the proposed policy as well. These debates also gave rise to the production and circulation of expert and non-

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2007/aug/15/procreation-day-delivers-results/>
<http://kommersant.ru/doc/803440>

³ Following the 2008 financial crisis an abridged procedure to claim the incentive was introduced for a limited period of time. Several more amendments were made. For more information on amendments to the Maternal Capital program see Elizarov and Rotova 2010.

expert knowledge about the cultural significance of fertility, marriage, motherhood, and the role of the state in family life. The debates about Maternity Capital often revolve around the question of morality: is it moral to make a decision about child rearing based on a monetary incentive? Many of the people I spoke with rejected the idea of a monetary incentive as an effective tool in state efforts to foster population growth. The new pronatalist policy produced myriad new optimistic political statements about demographic trends fostered by the new incentives. Denying that a monetary incentive could produce positive population effects, others claim that people's reproductive choices should not be dictated by the state. Not surprisingly, when speaking about reproductive choices made independent of the state, my interlocutors often told me: "People have children because they want them, not because the state pays them for it."

Culture change, ruptures with "old" lifestyles, moral confusion, and psychological trauma of the last twenty years are categories through which the problem of population is often discussed and defined. Perceived antinatalist values and norms of a new consumerist society that skew people's moral compasses get blamed for low fertility rates. Focusing on the moral obligations of the members of Russian society rather than on their economic hardships, this interpretation supports state policies that aim to strengthen "family values" so as to increase fertility rates. This dominant view in the population debate relies on a normative understanding of family and it asserts that the destructive forces of modern society are responsible for both moral decay and low fertility⁴. Proponents of this view argue that reintroducing "the normative need for children" into women's reproductive strategies and rewarding women for fulfilling their moral and

⁴ This opinion also draws on a dominant thread in Russian social scientific writing. For an extensive review of this literature about family see Oushakine 2004.

social duties would strengthen the importance of family as a valuable social institution and would change population dynamics regardless of people's material conditions (Rivkin-Fish 2003, 2010).

These moralizing arguments compete with statements about impoverished childcare and health systems that make it hard for families to plan their future. In the 1990s, newly privatized industrial enterprises, in the possession of the social infrastructure that they inherited from their Soviet predecessors, prompted by an economistic disaggregated analysis hurried to get rid of the facilities that did not bring profits. In addition, a drastic drop in total fertility rates accompanied the decade of 1990-2000 – from 1.8 in the beginning of the 1990s to 1.2 in 2000 (Rosstat 2009). Declining numbers of children meant that the remaining kindergartens salvaged by local governments were working at half-capacity, which prompted municipal decisions to rent the buildings out for other purposes. Because some of the kindergartens were located in a relatively spacious buildings to accommodate children of different ages under the same roof, it is not uncommon in today's Russia to see a former kindergarten, haphazardly renovated, now operating as a bank or a gym, or even as a branch of a university.

Once the birthrate began rising again around 2008-2009, the shortage of kindergartens and other social facilities became a real obstacle for working parents and their children. With private preschools slow to develop because of both bureaucratic difficulties (preschool education is a highly regulated field of governance while new legislation does not keep up with the growing shortage of kindergartens) and a more general distrust of private institutions of childrearing, parents often have to rely on themselves or their extended families for at least three years before they can enroll their

children in a preschool. Because childrearing functions fall disproportionally to women, young mothers are often in danger of losing their employment because they may not know if they can enroll their child in a kindergarten until the last minute. Such impoverished social infrastructure is often cited as the main reason for people's reluctance to have more children and for the population decline.

My research shows that there is no one opinion about "the crisis." Opinions vary – while some speak of the gravity of the situation, others dismiss it as a minor predicament that will resolve itself in the near future. While many attribute the dropping birthrate to the effects of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, others assure the public that population decline has a much longer history and should be dated back to the 1960s, if not beforehand. The fear of underpopulation permeates discussions about other social problems. Thus, the debates about the nature of the Russian political system often revolve around the dangers of depopulation (*opasnost' depopulatzii*), as it is often called in Russia. Nationalist discourses describe depopulation as the ultimate goal of external forces (mostly liberals and Jews) working systematically to impede the organic development of the Russian nation and exterminate Russian people (Oushakine 2009, 2010). Only recently, a famous post-Soviet Russian author published an open letter in which he accused liberals (read Jews) of devising a deliberate plan of the eradication of the Russian nation (Prilepin 2012). In these debates, the crucial role of pronatalism and possible scenarios of what will happen to the vast territories of Russia when people will disappear are fueled by anti-migration sentiments common in the Russian political discourse. These openly xenophobic discourses are countered by less popular proposals to enhance migration waves into Russia in order to secure its territorial dominance and in

order to augment its workforce. Public health and reproductive health discourses have also made their way into the population debate, and the ‘health of the nation’ is referenced both literally and metaphorically. For example, during the highly publicized show trial of a feminist punk group Pussy Riot, in their closing statements, both the prosecutors and the accused used somatic metaphors in which the assault on the political system or the political system itself were represented as destructive to the nation’s health.⁵

However divergent the views are, the fear of underpopulation in Russia in the 21st century is palpable. The population problem preoccupies people and the lack of consensus only emphasizes this further. This fear circumscribes the debate and determines relations between different social actors, state agents, political authorities, cultural practices, and systems of values and norms. It impacts debates about other important social issues and it informs citizens’ lives in Russia. But it does more than that – it has further-reaching systematic effect on the population discourse and it offers citizens new means of both self-understanding and comprehension of their social reality.

Conceptual framework

Debate over the population crisis in Russia often entails the question: “Is it really a crisis?” Some claim that the word crisis cannot adequately describe the gravity of the situation and it therefore should be called a “catastrophe.” Others try to find less dramatic ways to depict the situation and therefore recommend calling it a recession. Nevertheless,

⁵ For more on this see: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2004683>

the essence of the debate remains the same: is it an actual crisis or is it a “crisis” with quotation marks?

The basic premise of this study is that Russia’s population decline is both real and socially constructed. Rather than following an “either/or” logic, this dissertation offers a different interpretation of the current national fascination with demographic trends. It reconstructs the political, social, and cultural contexts of the population debate and explores how post-Soviet Russia’s demographic reality came to be conceived of as a dramatic national problem and as an object of government intervention. By tracing links between seemingly unrelated processes occurring in the social sciences, politics, and the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, my objective is to analyze the “messiness” and the interrelatedness of the ideas and categories that constitute the population debate. The following chapters will examine how the social world of the demographic problem has been constituted considering: 1) what kind of expert knowledge is produced in this process and how this knowledge travels through its institutional sites of production and circulation, 2) how it gets reformulated and appropriated by different social actors making efforts to advance their interests and social goals, and 3) how this knowledge makes its way into cultural practices and informs the ways people in Russia relate to themselves and to others.

My research has pursued the following questions: How do interactions and exchanges between state agencies and policy experts shape the processes of production, circulation, and consumption of population-related knowledge? How are the networks and hierarchies between different state agents constituted and re-configured in this interactive process? How, in the context of Russia’s changing political climate, is the

process of making knowledge about population influenced by various competing interests and strategies aimed to advance these interests? What forms of expertise collaborate to determine the categories of the population debate? How are boundaries and differences produced within interactions between social actors participating in the debate? Finally, what cultural practices and categories of inclusion and exclusion are produced by this debate? Ultimately, my dissertation creates a social map of the perceived demographic crisis and demonstrates how the “problem” of population is entangled in larger social, cultural, and political transformations taking place in contemporary Russia.

In reconstructing the population debate during my ethnographic fieldwork in Russia, I identified and studied three visible communities of experts active in producing and advancing population-related knowledge and cultural narratives about “the demographic problem.” In particular, I focused on how knowledge about the population is produced and put forward by: 1) a local network of social scientists involved in the production and circulation of demographic knowledge related to the problem of underpopulation; 2) a group of obstetricians/public health professionals concerned with reproductive health and population growth; 3) and a community of experts in popular psychology and education who focus primarily on the psychological aspects of the population problem and who offer solutions to the problem drawing on a popular therapeutic discourse in Russia.⁶ Examining their interactions and exchanges with local

⁶ These three groups of experts by no means exhaust the variety of social actors active in the population debate. The Russian Orthodox Church and religious activists play an important role in shaping public opinion about reproductive rights and moral stances related to such rights. On this issue see Luehrmann 2011. Her ethnographic research focuses on anti-abortion activism in the post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church, where activists attempt to transform popular attitudes toward past and present reproductive decisions.

state agencies and other social actors, my study elucidates mechanisms through which cultural meanings of the crisis of underpopulation are established, articulated, and reconfigured.

Tracing science and policy in more intimate domains of social life, this study also examines how ordinary Russian citizens respond to the population debate and the subsequent policy in ways that simultaneously adopt, appropriate, reconfigure, and resist official expectations, reflecting changes in society not captured in state discourses and programs. Reflecting on therapeutic encounters observed in a local family club, this part of the dissertation offers an analysis of the population debate as it makes its way into people's everyday lives and as it informs their everyday concerns. Here I argue that therapeutic discourse offers means to my interlocutors to negotiate and try to reconcile the contradictions between the state discourses about normative demographic and reproductive behavior and their actual everyday experiences of their own families and particular kin relations. Thus, contributing to the population debate, people I worked with continue to reconfigure and assign new and unexpected meanings to the crisis of underpopulation.

My broader argument is that Russia's population debate metonymically stands for the moral dilemmas and quandaries that preoccupy Russian citizens caught up in the process of social change and political and economic transformation. Against the backdrop of political and social change, population-related knowledge as it circulates through sites of production and consumption participates in the outlining of a social imaginary concerning individual virtuous action and moral relationships with others. As the following pages will show, knowledge about population and low fertility is often

presented in the framework of *dukhovnost'* – a category that depicts appropriate and virtuous way to relate to oneself and to others. The literal translation of *dukhovnost'* is spirituality and although the concept of *dukhovnost'* has religious connotations and, the way it is often applied to the crisis of underpopulation is surprisingly secular. In these discussions, the category of *dukhovnost'* is intimately related to the question of family and childrearing. In this framing, family is represented as an ultimate marker of a virtuous and appropriate character, which can in turn become a possible remedy to the population crisis.

However, what constitutes family and moral behavior that might solve the problem of underpopulation remains unclear. One of the major categories with which family as an object of state intervention is discussed in Russia's population debate is the category of *blagopoluchnaia semia* – an adjective that describes what can be roughly translated as a “happy” or “proper” family. The population debate, as the following chapters demonstrate, produces and assigns new meanings to the category of “proper family.” The category of *blagopoluchnaia semia* plays an important role in state efforts to redefine what is normative and what is not. In this process of determining the normative and the acceptable, the category of *blagopoluchnaia semia* (proper family) indexes contradictions and changing ideas about family in the postsocialist context.

My study also demonstrates that the introduction of new cultural categories of *dukhovnost'* and *blagopoluchnaia semia* are mediated by the psychological discourse flourishing in post-Soviet Russia. In conversation with literature that documents the emergence of the “self-help” culture and the circulation of popular psychology in Russia (Matza 2009; Mazzarino 2010; Lerner 2011), my study shows how the introduction into

the population debate of this new psychological understanding of appropriate individual behavior creates new semantic combinations between existing categories with which the problem of population has been traditionally discussed (e.g., family) and new metaphors founded on the thriving self-help industry in contemporary Russia (e.g., happiness, self-reliance, self-regulation). The popularity of the categories of *blagopoluchnaia semiia* and *dukhovnost'*, I argue, emerges from what I call “the semantic amalgams” built from previously existing cultural categories and the newly introduced psychological metaphors.

Finally, resonating with recent anthropological scholarship on the postsocialist state (Rogers 2006; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003; Gal and Kligman 2000), this study argues that the population debate around the introduction of pronatalist policies provides citizens an opportunity to negotiate changing ideas about one’s virtuous relationship with the state. This study demonstrates that through complex discursive relationships and cultural practices that constitute the population debate, the new Russian state is culturally constructed as an entity independent of the rest of society *and* as the ultimate source of authority and normative ideologies. It also shows that the same discursive relationships that delineate the debate generate a capacity to challenge this power and to question the meanings of governance. In short, revealing ruptures and continuities with the socialist past, this study demonstrates how, in the context of Russia’s changing political conditions, population-related knowledge engenders new forms of self-fashioning and cultural categories with which people in contemporary Russia relate to themselves, to others, and to their state. It shows how people in Russia often understand new political

and social realities using their common socialist experiences and use new forms of knowledge emerging in the population debate to rearticulate their socialist past.

Social scientific accounts of postsocialist societies have drawn attention to the social and economic consequences of demographic changes on the everyday lives of people in the region (Rivkin-Fish 2005; Rotkirch et al 2007). They have also documented dominant national narratives about population through which the state realizes and executes its power (Kligman 1998; Gal and Kligman 2000; Rivkin-Fish 2003, 2010; Haney 2002). In response to larger political and economic shifts and their manifestations in the everyday lives of people, anthropologists have begun to explore how the circulation of liberal discourses and economic reforms in postsocialist societies coincide with or relate to the (re)emergence of pronatalist discourses. Scholars have identified pronatalism as a powerful ideology influencing selfhood both in socialist and postsocialist periods. Following Foucault's call to interrogate the science of population as an important form of a modern, and not uniquely socialist, governance in which population emerges as a political and economic problem of balancing population growth with resources (1978, 1991), anthropologists have demonstrated how these pronatalist discourses illuminate the role of the state and its capacity to shape (and constrain) life course trajectories (Greenhalgh 2003, 2008; Gal and Kligman 2000; Zhurzhenko 2004; Rivkin-Fish 2003, 2010; Kligman 1998).

By focusing on population interventions, scholars of socialism and postsocialism have gained new insights into the state and its governing practices and methods (Blum 2001, 2004, Blum and Mespoulet 2006; Hirsh 2005; Kertzer and Arel 2002). They have demonstrated how public discussions about human reproduction, sexuality, and childcare

have become sites where the negotiations between the state and its subjects are constituted and reconstituted (Gal and Kligman 2000; Verdery 1994; 1996: 39-57; Rivkin-Fish 2004, 2005, 2010). Scholars have also considered the intellectual origins and political effects of the ethnic framing of the demographic problem (Gal and Kligman 2000; Oushakine 2009). Against the backdrop of changing political symbols, naturalized differences between different ethnic groups, they argue, serve as a marker for making the nation's experience meaningful and comprehensible (Oushakine 2009: 79-129; Oushakine 2010).

While anthropologists have identified major “scare tactics” characteristic of pronatalist narratives (e.g., the death of the nation) (Gal and Kligman 2000), they rarely explain by what means these narratives gain legitimacy among countries' inhabitants and how these narratives get incorporated and inculcated into people's personal experiences of themselves and others. While invaluable in its contribution to the study of postsocialism and especially to the ethnographic inquiry of the state, this research tends to focus predominantly on ideological aspects of pronatalism (i.e., texts, narratives, and public statements). Rather than assuming the dominance of ideology over practices in the constitution of policies and political processes, my study employs a social actor-oriented perspective to understand the pre-existing and emerging social mechanisms through which a demographic reality gains legitimacy among the country's inhabitants as a pressing national issue and as specifically a problem that the state needs to fix.

My work is driven by a question that turns the state on its head. Following Foucault's call to cut the king's head off (Foucault 1980:121), it asks how certain forms of expert knowledge make state policies (e.g., pronatalism) possible and allow the state to

appear as an autonomous entity, from which power and authority emanate (Greenhalgh 2003, 2008; Jasanoff 1990; Hansen & Stepputat 2001; Sharma & Gupta 2006; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). Aside from asking how pronatalist ideologies affect people's lives, my study also asks who constructed the categories informing state ideologies (Bourdieu 1996) and how the everyday practices of policy experts and their interactions with state institutions create possibilities for political arrangements and new power mechanisms that make state discourses possible. By studying the everyday politics of the production and circulation of population-related knowledge in the context of postsocialist transformations, my study engages with and contributes to current debates in the anthropology of the state. By examining mechanisms of ideological misrecognition as state agents, social scientists, and medical professionals involved in the population debate in Russia present underpopulation as a problem of "culture," morality, and family values, I show how the discourses, policies, and the minutiae of the professional practices of the policy experts obfuscate the political nature of inequality and reproduce the state as a separate and transcendent entity.

The significance of my study is two-fold: following the relationships developed among state agents and knowledge experts, it demonstrates the continued centrality of state agencies and their expertise in population and reproduction management. At the same time, it troubles a static, reified notion of the state privileged by demographers and policy analysts and it demonstrates that in contemporary Russia as elsewhere, the state is far from being the only source of normative ideologies. It demonstrates that as the therapeutic language of psychology enters the realm of the population debate as a pedagogical technique that aims to influence people the state sees as its targets, that same

language allows people to challenge the state assumptions about its moral governance. In short, my work illuminates the politics – both successful and failed – of the postsocialist state. It contributes to the theory on political and social change in former socialist countries by demonstrating how population politics mold the formation of the new and shape the continuity of the old in postsocialist Russia. It also lays bare processes and problems that speak to some of the most pressing issues of xenophobia, nationalism, and inequality in Russia.

Ethnographic Context

Fieldsite



Figure 1: Yekaterinburg in the fall. Photo by author.

To situate Russia's population trends within cultural and political contexts, I conducted over 15 months of ethnographic research in Yekaterinburg (former Sverdlovsk), a large

city in the Urals with a declining population. Yekaterinburg, the fourth largest city in Russia (after Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Novosibirsk) has a vibrant cultural, political, and industrial history. Between 1924 and 1991, Yekaterinburg, a city then tightly closed to foreigners, carried a different name, Sverdlovsk, and was the center of the main industrial region of the Soviet Union. Today it is the capital of the Sverdlovsk region⁷ (*oblast*) and the Urals federal district. Located in the middle of Eurasian continent, the Sverdlovsk oblast has a population of 4.6 million, 1.39 million of whom live in Yekaterinburg itself. A large urban center, Yekaterinburg is surrounded by a belt of small industrial towns with a high concentration of defense research and development facilities, some of which are still closed to outside visitors. The region has large deposits of metals and minerals and a large percentage of Russia's steel and iron industry is located in the Sverdlovsk oblast (Barazgova 2007).

In the national historical imagination, the Urals in general and the region surrounding Yekaterinburg in particular signify the beginning of the 16th century gradual incursion of the Russian empire into the Eastern lands, previously unexplored by the Russian state, the expansion that eventually built grounds for the further colonization of Siberia (Ivanov 2010). During the reign of Peter the Great, after the first deposits of iron, copper, and many other metals and minerals were discovered in the Urals, the region became the site of a strategic industrial development for the Russian state. In the mid 18th century, Yekaterinburg emerged as the center of the mining industry with factories that

⁷ The name of the oblast has not corresponded to the name of its capital city since 1991, the year the city of Sverdlovsk regained its original name of Yekaterinburg. Sverdlovsk oblast with its current administrative boundaries was founded in 1938, long after Yekaterinburg became Sverdlovsk. The charter of the Sverdlovsk region stipulates that the name of the oblast should remain the same regardless of the name of its capital city.

supplied both Russian and European markets with the military and civil products of the smelting works. Since gold had been discovered in close proximity to Yekaterinburg in 1745, the region has also been known for one of the earliest episodes of the gold rush in world history (ibid).

During the Soviet era of industrialization, gigantic factories, such as “Uralsmash,” “Khimsmash,” and other metallurgic enterprises were erected. By the 1980s, the Sverdlovsk oblast was the largest industrial center in Russia with metallurgy, smelting factories, mechanical engineering, and timber industries dominating the sector (Barazgova 2007). The growing industrial power of the region was sustained by the developed system of professional and academic education. During the Soviet period, the State Polytechnic Institute (The Ural State Technical University), Boris Yeltsin’s alma mater, for example, had close ties with the local industry and was oriented towards educating engineering specialists needed by the local industry (ibid). The social scientific research institute where I conducted my research as well as other research institutes under the authority of the USSR Academy of Sciences worked closely with the industrial enterprises in the region and conducted research for the industrial sector. Thus, during the late Soviet period, one of the most important sociological projects conducted in the institute where I did my fieldwork was longitudinal research into the lives of the working class that constituted a significant percentage of the region’s population (Pavlov 1989).



Figure 2: Yekaterinburg in relation to Europe

changed its character but it remains one of the largest industrial centers of Russia, with an animated cultural and political life.



Figure 3: The Europe-Asia obelisk erected in the late nineteenth century

In the late 1980s, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the region had a vibrant political life, with Boris Yeltsin being only one yet very important example of the vanguard of the democratic changes in the Soviet Union that the city produced. Other political leaders who joined Yeltsin in the first post-Soviet government began their political careers in Sverdlovsk. After the privatization of the gigantic industrial sector of the region, the Urals

The city of Yekaterinburg is located on the border between Europe and Asia (see Figures 1 and 2). Aside from an obligatory visit to the church built on the place where the Romanov family was executed in 1918 by the Bolshevik government, tourists, often arriving in Yekaterinburg as part of their journey on the Trans-Siberian train, can be spotted visiting several obelisks that mark the line making Yekaterinburg along with Istanbul a

transcontinental city situated on a natural boundary between Europe and Asia. There is an old pre-Soviet obelisk (see Figure 3), then there is a new, post-Soviet column signifying the border (see Figure 4), and there are spontaneously erected posts, celebrating a recently invented tradition of couples visiting the site before their wedding ceremony (see Figure 5). In close proximity to the historical site, a gigantic IKEA store that inadvertently marks the overland boundary between Europe and Asia was recently erected (see Figure 6).



Figure 4: The new Europe-Asia obelisk erected in the twenty first century



Figure 5: An empty bottle of champagne making the border between Europe and Asia



Figure 6: Another inadvertent sign of the Europe-Asia border. All photos by author

In many ways, Yekaterinburg and its surrounding area bears resemblances to other post-Soviet regions. As Kotkin (2007) writes: “The Soviet phenomenon created a deeply unified material culture [...] Consider the children’s playgrounds in those places, erected over the same cracked concrete panel surfaces and with the same twisted metal piping—all made at the same factories, to uniform codes. This was also true of apartment

buildings (outside and inside), schools, indeed entire cities, even villages” (p. 520). This unified material reality continues to manifest itself in the post-Soviet context, with the industrial collapses that rendered standardized spaces all the more visible (Collier 2011). Indeed, the neighborhood and the apartment I lived in during fieldwork, the building (“outside and inside”) of the social science research where I spent most of my mornings and afternoons, the basement location of the family club where I spent most of my evenings, as well as houses and neighborhoods of my interlocutors are all, in a sense, manifestations of this “gigantic *tipovoi proekt* – a standardized, prefab civilization” (Kotkin 2007:520).

Yet, in the post-Soviet context, this material resemblance could be somewhat misleading. The last twenty years of vibrant political changes trembled the standardized image of the post-Soviet spaces. In 1990 Yeltsin famously said to the republics and regions that they should take “as much sovereignty as they can stomach” (*voz'mite suvereniteta stol'ko, skol'ko s'iedite*). Encouraged by this statements, the appointed in 1991 governor of Sverdlovsk region, Eduard Rossel⁸ began promoting a controversial

⁸ Eduard Rossell was first elected as the governor of the Sverdlovsk region by popular vote during the first years of Yeltsin’s rule. He was later reappointed by Putin for his third term as the governor of the Sverdlovsk region and remained in his post until 2009. Eduard Rossell, along with the former President of the republic of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev and Yuri Luzhkov, the mayor of Moscow, has long been considered a source of the potential legitimacy crisis for Putin’s government. A powerful regional leader with strong institutional connections to regional economic actors and enterprises, Rossell was well situated to increase his autonomy from the center (Sharafutdinova 2010). Rossell’s long-term political connections and local allegiances made it harder for the federal government to keep him on a tight leash and in 2009, during my fieldwork, a new governor was appointed by President Medvedev. In the 2000s, a new era of regional politics began. As a reaction to Yeltsin’s decentralized politics, in 2001 Putin began forming a new “vertical of power” (*vertikal vlasti*) aimed at strengthening the top-down power of the federal government (ibid). This once again changed the mechanism of

project of the Urals Republic with an independent government and the possibility of separate currency. The Urals Republic would practically eliminate the nationality principle of the federal structure (e.g., The Republic of Tatarstan within the Russian Federation is founded on the ethnic principle with Tatar people as the republic's sovereign) making the territorial principle the basis of regional politics. In 1993, threatened by the possibility of separatism, Yeltsin relieved the governor from his responsibilities and the Urals Republic project was abandoned (Denezhkina and Campbell 2009). Although the separatist ideas of the 1990s lost their popularity in the political discourse, in the local imagination, the idea of the separate Ural Republic was a defining moment in delineating the distinctive trajectory and character of the region. It set it aside from the rest of the country, making its remoteness a privileged sign of a unique historical trajectory.

As a result of changing political and economic contexts, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ways in which people in Russia articulated ideas about self have changed too. A literary scholar, Edith Clowes (2011) argues that while the Soviet ideas about personhood relied predominantly on the concepts of linear time and progress (i.e., historical trajectory of a socialist society that would eventually bring its citizens to a better future), in post-Soviet discourses about national belonging, the focus shifted to spatial metaphors and geographical images. These “include particular regions of Russia, conceptual oppositions of center and periphery, center and border, the geopolitical concept of heartland, and familiar geographical axes, juxtaposing east to west and north

redistribution of economic and political resources, allocating more power to the center and subordinating regional elites to the center.

to south, their traditional meanings now inscribed with fresh associations” (Clowes 2011:2-3).

As the image of periphery continues to play a crucial role in the post-Soviet discourse about national identity and belonging, the peripheral status of Yekaterinburg and its surrounding region contributes to the analysis of emerging ideas about self and other grounded in spatial metaphors. The relatively remote location of the city in relation to the more well-known and better-studied Russian urban centers of Moscow and Saint Petersburg has played an important role in both the design and the development of my research project. As economic, political, and cultural disparities between Moscow and Saint Petersburg and the rest of the country continue to grow, my ethnography joins a growing body of anthropological works that study the effects of the country’s political and economic shifts in areas outside the country’s center (Pesmen 2000; Humphrey 2002; Bernstein 2012; Rogers 2006, 2009, 2012; Collier 2011). Exploring people’s experiences of these changes and studying their broader implications in remote places offer insights into processes that are unfolding elsewhere in Russia.

In other words, it is this “remoteness” of the place that attracted me to Yekaterinburg as a research site. I borrow the concept of remoteness from British anthropologist Jeanette Edwards (2000) who analyzes remoteness not as a reflection of a geographical distance or as an attribute of a particular locality but rather as a cultural concept, which can be mobilized in different situations and for different reasons. A perpetual cultural exercise in inclusion and exclusion, its main function is to differentiate and it could be used by people from inside as well as by people from outside (Edwards 2000:19-21). Identifying distinguishing threads in the history of their region, people I met

during my fieldwork often use cultural ideas about remoteness and consequently about who is an insider and who is an outsider to create their distinct communities (Edwards 2000). The region's remoteness in relation to the European parts of Russia and its status as marking the most Eastern boundaries of Europe grant the region a unique place in the historical imagination of its inhabitants.

Thus, depending on the historical context and political situation, in which you choose to learn about Yekaterinburg and surrounding area, you might get two diametrically opposed answers. Sometimes the region is presented as a traditional “backbone” of Russia (*khrebet Rossii, opornii krai Rossii*) strategically located at the intersection of the country's European and Asian parts. In other situations, the area might be described as a “backyard” of the country (*zakholustie, podvorotnia*), whose potential has been underdeveloped by the state and whose cultural wealth has been thrown into the dustbin of history. When the city inhabitants recite the history of the city to their guests, they remind them of the important role the city, and the surrounding region, played in WWII. Aside from the industrial sector that provided military supply for the front, the city accommodated large numbers of evacuees and stored the collections evacuated to Sverdlovsk from the Leningrad Hermitage in 1941. The statewide Radio reports were transmitted from Sverdlovsk as well, since all the Moscow-based radio stations were destroyed by the military attacks. Renowned author Alexei Ivanov (2010) has recently published a book entitled *The Backbone of Russia (Khrebet Rossii)* devoted to the history to the Urals. A year later the book, in collaboration with famous TV reporter Leonid Parfenov, was adapted into a long TV exposé of more than 400 years of the historical trajectory of the Urals – from the first incursions to the East in the 16th century to the

gloomy history of the GULAG in the 20th century.

However, in other social situations, the metaphor of the fortress or of a backbone easily slips into the metaphor of a backyard. Thus, in the early 1980s, against the backdrop of the declining economic and social development in the Urals, Urals as the “backbone” transformed in people’s imaginations into the backyard that suffers from economic depression, ecological catastrophes, and social instability. Known as Russia’s rust belt, the region became associated by people inside and outside the region with the decay brought up by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The materiality of this decay and the cultural remoteness of the Urals are manifest in contemporary literature and popular culture. Thus, famous controversial playwright Vassily Sigarev from the small mining town of Verkhnyaya Salda in the Sverdlovsk oblast told to a New York Times reporter: “In Moscow it’s done more from the head, I mean drama is [...] Here there is more raw emotion. And generally speaking we are different. We are harder. Melodrama is not our genre” (Barry 2012).

Remoteness is not only appropriated as a literary device: during the early 1990s, the regional political movements mobilized remoteness in order to formulate regional distinctions and gain legitimacy among oblast’s inhabitants (Denezhkina and Campbell 2009). The memory of separatism is so strong in regional politics that every regional elections since the 1990s reference the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Ural character (Gerasimenko 2012). A tourist to Yekaterinburg, not unlike myself, might look for the “remoteness” of the region in order to find authenticity in her experience. A recent visitor to Yekaterinurg lamented in his blog that he was hoping to find “The Ural Matrix,” a term coined by Alexein Ivanov, author of *Khrebet Rossii*, when he visited

Yekaterinburg. Instead of finding the genius of the Urals culture, he explained, he found more of the Moscow experience in it – the same café chains, banners advertizing the same things, and the same traffic jams. Not finding the authenticity he was looking for, the author concluded that Moscow is everywhere: “it is closer than you would think” (Minarovsky 2012).

The authenticity of the Ural experience serves a variety of social goals. During my fieldwork, as I was conducting interviews and traveling from Yekaterinburg to surrounding small industrial cities and back, I had heard the dwellers of Yekaterinburg trying to differentiate themselves from the inhabitants of surrounding towns using the same category of remoteness. The small town dwellers, in turn, used this same cultural category situationally in order to promote the cultural uniqueness of their communities. People from inside and outside the region often mobilize the concept of The Urals’ remoteness and the invented uniqueness of its character in order to distance themselves from the corrupting forces of power. During my fieldwork, discussing the widespread corruption in Russia, a prominent journalist reflected on the moral decay of the political elites using as an example his recent trip to the Urals. Failing to find any rational explanation for the incidents involving police officers breaking the law and opening fire on civilians, he turned to the example of people he met in a small village in the Urals. The farther away from power, he concluded, the better. Elites, spoiled by power, lost their dignity, while people he met in the Ural village had their pride and solidarity, completely lost elsewhere (Loshak 2010).

Ethnographic Research Activities

Although this study is informed by two summers of fieldwork in Russia in 2007 (Yekaterinburg and Kurgan) and 2008 (Yekaterinburg and Moscow), it is primarily based on 12 months of field research that I conducted from September 2009 to September 2010. My interest in the topic of the crisis of underpopulation first arose when I visited Russia in the summer of 2007. The introduction of a new pronatalist policy substantially fueled the public discussions of the crisis and it seemed like demography was on everyone's minds. Even when I interviewed people asking them unrelated questions about their experiences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the topic of disappearing population in Russia came up in nearly every interview I conducted.

My choice of the geographic location was intentional as although the center-periphery relations constitute an important frame of reference for people living in Russia, anthropologists have been slow to study empirically how post-Soviet political and economic shifts unfold outside the country's central urban centers. My language proficiency in Russian made my access to a variety of social sites relatively easy, yet my foreign passport and status of émigré allowed me to assume the role of Simmel's "stranger," the one who operates according to the principle of "estrangement" and balances involvement with detachment, and sympathy with reflection (Simmel 2009).

During the twelve months of fieldwork, I became familiar with a variety of experts, bureaucrats, and others involved in the population debate in the region. I conducted interviews with a wide range of experts and laypersons involved in the population debate in Russia. In addition to scholars in Yekaterinburg, I interviewed several leading Moscow-based demographers who have been active in the population

debate both during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In Yekaterinburg, I spent most of my mornings and afternoons at a large social science research institute, where I joined a group of social scientists involved in the production and dissemination of policy-relevant population research. This became the focus of the first three chapters of the dissertation. Very early in the process of mapping the population debate, I began spending my evenings at a family club in one of the city neighborhoods, with a particular interest in popular genealogy and popular psychology, where I studied the creation and circulation of psychological expertise as it is related to the crisis of underpopulation. This field research formed the core of the last two chapters. In addition, I conducted participant observation and a series of interviews at one of the large maternity hospitals in the city where I participated in a three month long course in preparation for childbirth, organized by a group of OB/GYN/public health professionals. This part of my fieldwork became the foundation for Chapter IV that focuses on the biomedical expertise as it pertains to the crisis of underpopulation. Finally, I attended a variety of conferences, workshops, and roundtables dedicated to the population debate, where I established contacts and expended the range of experts interviewed for this project.

In the social science research institute, I specifically focused on scholars' intellectual and professional trajectories and their research interests. My major goal in observing these scholars' activities was to learn about the scientific categories, with which they operate and to explore competing explanations they offer for the nation's drastic population decline. As becomes clear from Chapter II, I both followed their working routines throughout the year of fieldwork and talked to them about their professional histories and about the institutional context, in which they have been

operating since the fall of the Soviet Union. To be able to follow these routines, I joined a group of social scientists working on preparing a policy-oriented report on the effectiveness of the new demographic policy in the Ural region.

My status in the institute oscillated between an apprentice who knows how to crunch numbers and collect questionnaires to a colleague from an American university researching the organization of demographic research in Russia. My main interlocutor, Borisov, often introduced me to his colleagues at the institute from other research departments as his student who came all the way from the US to study with him. To the government officials with whom Borisov was in contact to maintain his status as a policy expert, he often introduced me as a colleague from a foreign university. I was satisfied with both roles as they gave me access to different aspects of Borisov's and his colleagues' professional careers. As part of my participant observation in the institute, I followed and participated in preparing a policy-oriented report on the effectiveness of the new demographic policy in the Ural region launched in 2007. I was actively involved in preparing questionnaires, collecting data, and composing a final report for this project. This introduced me to the routine labor of a researcher at the institute, allowing me to grasp the intricacies of producing knowledge about population. As part of my attempt to follow both the production and circulation of knowledge about population, I paid close attention to the interactions between social scientists conducting population-related research and local and regional bureaucrats and public administrators. As Chapter III illustrates, I followed the institute demographers' pedagogical activities and participated in a series of the professional development seminars for the region's bureaucrats taught by Borisov.

Aside from demographic and biomedical forms of expertise, psychology and therapeutic discourse play an important role in the population debate both as an expert category and as a vernacular category that entered the lives of Russian citizens in its current form in the last twenty years. The psychological framing of the population problem is best represented by a turn of phrase often used to describe the origins of the population crisis: “Ruins in people’s heads and minds” (*v golove razrukha*). The population problem and especially the problem of low fertility as a psychological issue are ubiquitous and have manifestations in the language used both by state agents and ordinary citizens trying to make sense of the new population policies introduced by the state. Furthermore, as the following pages will reveal, the therapeutic framing of the problem provides both experts and ordinary citizens with an effective basis for communication.

The psychologization of social reality is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary Russia. To study the impact and effects of this phenomenon, I conducted participant observation in a family club (a municipal educational facility and a legacy of the Soviet extra-curricular education system) with particular interest in psychology of family and kinship. The club hosts a study center where people learn about their genealogies and familial histories. Based on a self-help culture flourishing in contemporary Russia, this studying center is inspired by the therapeutic discourse that deems kinship (*rod*) to be the core from which people develop their sense of self. Studying one’s familial histories and applying this knowledge to one’s problems in the present are considered to be a psychological remedy for behavioral patterns that people are not necessarily aware of but which are detrimental to their happiness. To understand

how kinship emerges in narratives of the self among the club participants, I both participated in the seminars and established a rapport with the participants with whom I later conducted recurring interviews about their family relations and the crisis of underpopulation. Fieldwork conducted in and around this family club became the foundation for Chapters V and VI that deal in detail with psychological expertise and its institutionalization in the population debate occurring in Russia.

Chapter Outline

While the dissertation as a whole is a study of the perceived crisis of underpopulation, each individual chapter is organized around a problem that can be illuminated by looking at the population debate and its broader social implications. The introductory chapter of the dissertation lays out the ethnographic and conceptual frameworks of the study and introduces the main argument around which it is organized: for Russian citizens, the population debate provides means for making meaningful their experiences in the context of political and economic transformations. The debate provides vehicle for the articulation of the moral dilemmas and quandaries that preoccupy Russian citizens caught up in the process of social change.

Chapter I situates the development of the categories that constitute the current population debate in historical terms and demonstrates their entanglements with the political, social, and cultural shifts of the last twenty years in Russia. The Soviet state had complicated relationships with population policies and their premises often clashed with the explicit Marxist-Leninist ideology. As this chapter demonstrates, these tensions express themselves in the uneven development of the discipline of demography in the

Soviet Union and Russia. The chapter reveals that the current population debate in fact bears the legacy of the Soviet concerns over population. It shows how demography has been utilized as an instrument of political legitimacy in different periods of Soviet history and how this legacy expresses itself in contemporary Russia. This chapter further demonstrates how the new pronatalist policy itself, introduced in 2007 and aimed at fostering the birthrate in Russia, simultaneously breaks with and continues previous policies introduced by the Soviet and post-Soviet governments.

Chapter II focuses on a local network of social scientists involved in the production and circulation of demographic knowledge related to the problem of underpopulation in contemporary Russia. Documenting strategies and tactics that these scholars use in their daily work routines, the chapter reveals mechanisms by which they enact their expertise and claim authority over the matters of population policies, while simultaneously striving to achieve the support of and autonomy from the state. Showing changes and continuities in the process of the production and circulation of scientific knowledge in contemporary Russia, the chapter suggests that scholars involved in demographic research attempt to establish and maintain their epistemic authority as population policy experts by engaging in multiple styles of boundary-work. Using the historical and institutional trajectory of demography as the discipline intimately related to the modern forms of government, these scholars employ a set of practices and rhetorical styles with the goal of drawing symbolic boundaries around their domain of expertise. Following Verdery (1991), my claim is that aside from theoretical arguments within the discipline itself, scholars participating in the population debate produce social meanings and new definitions of reality that give means to society members to think about themselves and

others.

Chapter III continues to follow a local network of scholars involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge related to Russia's perceived crisis of underpopulation. Drawing on the discourse analysis of the population debate, the chapter argues first, that the population problem metonymically stands for the problem of family values and virtuous behavior. Second, it argues that this dominant framing of the population problem is constructed and reconfigured in the interactive process, in which both knowledge experts and government bureaucrats participate. It suggests that the social and political meanings of the demographic problem are constructed through a series of communicative acts, in which scholars attempt to provide government bureaucrats with a set of assumptions with which to interpret social and demographic reality. This chapter further demonstrates how interactions between social scientists and bureaucrats become the foundation for the mechanism of what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) called "ideological misrecognition" by which underpopulation is constructed as the problem of family values, morality, and virtue in contemporary Russia.

Chapter IV extends the critical analysis of expertise through a focus on a different community of experts active in the population debate. It reveals how a group of health providers in one of the largest maternity hospitals in the city, borrowing from their Soviet past as the *de facto* experts on population health and growth, pragmatically use population policies and the discourses around them as opportunities to reaffirm their institutional identity vis-à-vis the state. It demonstrates challenges to this objective, which include the continuing privatization of the health system and dramatic transformations in state support to medical institutions. This chapter suggests that in

response to these challenges, physicians infuse biomedical way of thinking with concepts popular in the population debate, such as culture, emotions, and values. This chapter argues that they strategically deploy particular understandings of “culture” as a way to reproduce biomedical authority over the matters of reproduction and population dynamics.

Chapter V focuses on the growing market for psychological knowledge and its role in the population debate. More broadly, the chapter sheds light on the process of the psychologization of social experiences as it makes its way to the discourse on the crisis on underpopulation in which morality and family values metonymically stand for the problem of Russia’s population decline. The chapter analyzes the cultural forms through which people in Russia articulate, negotiate, and reconfigure their relationships with dominant ideologies and normative expectations related to family and morality. The crisis of population becomes an important reference, with which people try to reorganize their meaningful worlds in the wake of profound social and political transformations. The growth in popularity of therapeutic discourse in Russia, this chapter argues, mediates the reorganization of these meanings.

Drawing on and moving beyond the work of other anthropologists that document how people use familial idioms to domesticate the workings of politics (Herzfeld 1992, 1997, Verdery 1994, Borneman 1992, Smith 2007), Chapter VI continue to focus on the therapeutic discourse as it offers its followers an opportunity to articulate and negotiate contradictions between, on the one hand, emerging state ideologies and normative discourses about family – in which family and morality are conceived of as the locus of the population problem – and on the other hand, actual kinship dynamics and specific

experiences of relationships with particular kin (i.e., parents, children, and partners). While Chapter V focused on the cultural idioms around which this work of psychological explorations is organized, Chapter VI focuses on the institutional settings of “family clubs” and youth programs aimed at exploring the virtues of family life as they inform the process of the institutionalization of therapeutic language as an important part of the discourse about the crisis of underpopulation.

Finally, the conclusion revisits the major themes of the work, discussing how the population debate in contemporary Russia provides a fruitful site for reconsidering the analytics of expertise and some of the political and social processes occurring in Russia twenty years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It provides insights into the reconceptualization of the relationships between population knowledge and moral dilemmas that preoccupy citizens of contemporary Russia.

CHAPTER I

Political Arithmetic: Demography and the State in post-Soviet Russia

Prologue

Arriving in Yekaterinburg in 2009, on my way from the airport I struck up a conversation with the cab driver. Nikolai is a factory worker by day and a cab driver by night, using his private vehicle as a taxi to supplement his monthly income. After a predictable question about the purpose of my visit, we talked for the remainder of the journey about the demographic crisis in Russia. He seemed to be very passionate about the topic and raised his voice when he explained to me: “Yes, it is quite obvious. Russia is dying out slowly but surely. And let me tell you this, those in power are contributing to it. People do not have any incentives to get married or to have children. I personally think that in the situation we live in right now, if someone decides to have children, they should be given a medal.” During my research, and when I asked people about the crisis, I realized that Nikolai’s emotionally charged monologue was not an exception. Other people I met during my research had similar reflections on the problem of underpopulation. Thus, Nikolai’s impression about the gravity of the situation was not very different from that of a university professor I met later: “Russian people are dying (*Russkii narod vimiraet*). And it seems like the state is indifferent to it. The state should protect its people but instead it does nothing.”

There are several features that both Nikolai and the university professor seemed to attribute to the crisis. First, they both framed their concerns about the crisis of underpopulation in national terms. Underpopulation seemed to be a problem for national sovereignty that would be threatened by Russia's population decline. Second, both of them identified the state as the main subject of population intervention. In both cases, they attribute the failure to prevent population decline to the state, constructing it as the ultimate authority from which power emanates. Finally, the conversation about population decline seemed to provoke a genuine emotional response from both of them. They raised their voices trying to explain to me the severity of the problem, they became very serious the moment they started conveying their ideas, and both sighed deeply as they expressed their disappointment with the state.

It is exactly this passion about the question of population that initially brought me to this research and it is the aim of this study to explore the context that constitutes the cultural significance and the social and political aspects of this "emotional response." Yet, as I was progressing with my research, I came to realize that an ethnographic analysis of the current population debate, with its national framing and the emotional responses it invokes, is impossible without a solid historical understanding of the question of population management against the backdrop of the Soviet history. The main objective of this chapter is to achieve that understanding by historically situating the development of the categories that constitute the population debate, and by demonstrating their entanglements with the political, social, and cultural shifts of the last twenty or so years in Russia.

The central topic of this chapter, therefore, is how Soviet era population concerns and policy outcomes inspired the Post-Soviet population debate in Russia. The sources of population debate in Russia over the last twenty years can be identified in the complicated relationships that the Soviet state had with the question of population management. The idea of population policies as a state prerogative, as this chapter will show, was often taken to clash with the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Soviet period. Despite this, the Soviet state introduced a variety of population and pronatalist policies, managing to justify them with the very same Marxist language that should ultimately reject the necessity of population policies. These complex relations often expressed themselves in a checkered trajectory of the Soviet discipline of demography and the erratic history of statisticians and demographers as the state and new political transformations after the revolution forced them to change their analytical instruments and their professional goals as scientists (Blum 2004; Blum and Mespoulet 2006).

First, this chapter will demonstrate that population decline and current demographic trends, although seemingly the outcome of the political dissolution of the Soviet Union, in fact bear the legacy of the Soviet state's pronatalist policies introduced in the 1980s. Second, it will show that what seems like a novel way to speak about the crisis of underpopulation, in fact, descends from the history of the Soviet Union, in which the question of population had always been in tension with the Marxist-Leninist ideology. To this end, it will reveal how the discipline of demography has been utilized as an instrument of political legitimacy in different periods of the Soviet history and how this legacy expresses itself in the current population debate in Russia. The chapter will further demonstrate, simultaneously breaks with and continues previous policies introduced by

Soviet and post-Soviet governments. The chapter will demonstrate how this duality is present in the new pronatalist policy itself, introduced in 2007 and aimed at fostering birthrate in Russia. The logic used to justify the new pronatalist policy continues the previous social reasoning of the state and breaks with this logic, introducing new social and political considerations characteristic of the new economic order. More generally, the following pages will illustrate the deep entanglement of the demographic fluctuations in the Soviet Union in its political history before and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This chapter uses ethnographic materials I collected during my fieldwork to raise questions, which it then seeks to clarify by additional use of historical sources.

“Russian Cross:” The Visibility of the Crisis

Why is the crisis of underpopulation so visible in Russia and why does it provoke such strong emotional responses? Statistical data offer one answer. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, low fertility rates accompanied by high mortality rates have led to rapid negative population growth. In 2000, negative population growth was 6.6 per thousand

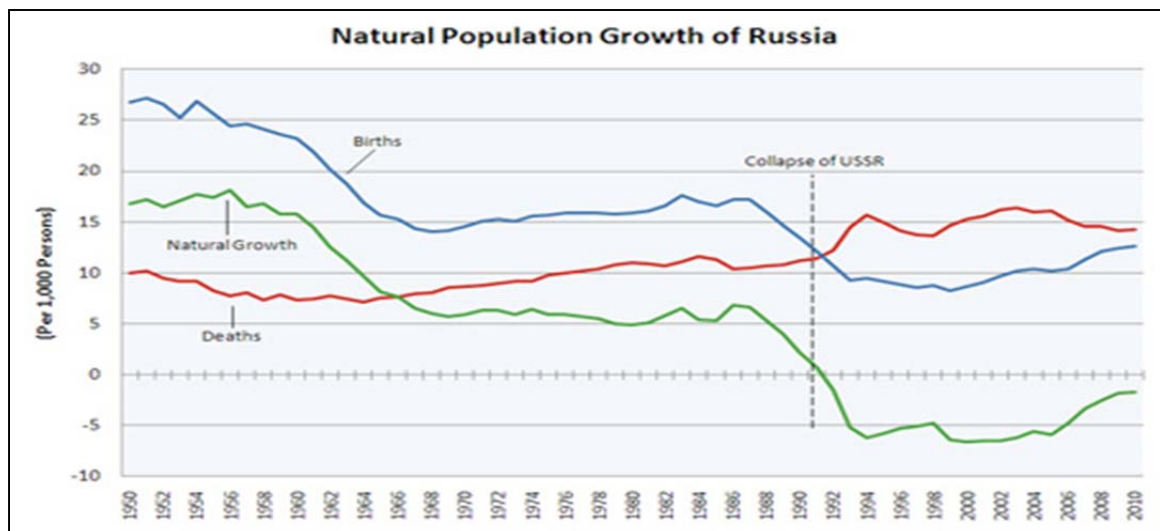


Figure 1.1: Natural Population Growth of Russia, 1960-2010

Source: Rosstat 2009

people (Rosstat 2011). Such rates of population decline, maintained over many years, validate the emotional reports from ordinary Russians that the population is declining and fast. Although the demographic trends have in fact been improving (-1.7 in 2010 is much better than the negative population growth of 6.6 in 2000), the number of deaths still exceeds the number of births (e.g., 12.5 births per 1,000 vs. 14.2 deaths per 1,000 in 2010) (Rosstat 2011) (See figure 1.1).

With total fertility rates ranging between 1.2 and 1.4 over the last decade (well below the replacement level of 2.1) and a rapidly aging population, Russia's demographic trends resemble demographic trends of other (both eastern and western) European countries. Unlike other European countries, however, Russia also has significantly high mortality rates and also a highly unbalanced life expectancy at birth for women and men. In these regards, Russian

statistics more closely resemble population trends in the developing world than in Europe. In 2009, life expectancy for men was estimated to be 62.8 years and for women

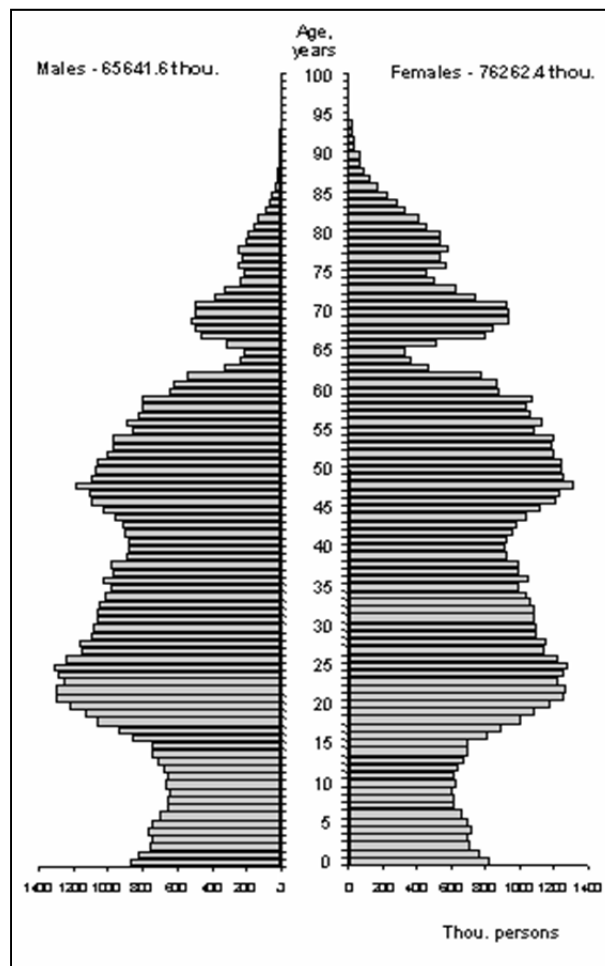


Figure 1.2: Age And Sex Structure of Russia's Population as of January 1, 2009.
Source: Rosstat 2010

74.7 (Rosstat 2011) (See figure 1.2). One of the implications of high mortality rates for men is that approximately 45% of males who reached their 15th birthday in 2009 will not survive to celebrate their 60th birthday. The immediate upshot of these trends is that in 2010 Russia's population has declined to 142.9 million from 148 million in 1990, a loss of 5.1 million people.⁹

But do numbers alone really answer the question of the prominence and emotional poignancy that the crisis holds in people's minds? After all, the demographic trends I described above are hardly new or exceptional. Russia's fertility rates have been declining steadily since the 1960s (Zakharov 2008) and they are comparable with similar trends in other industrialized countries. In fact, both Western and Russian historical demographers have documented the history of Russia and the Soviet history as a series of demographic fluctuations caused by political regimes, wars, famines, and social instabilities (Anderson and Silver 1985; Blum 2004; Tolts 2008; Avdeev and Monnier 1995; Andreev et al 1993, 1998; Poliakov and Zhiromskaia 2000; Zhiromskaia 2001; Haynes and Husan 2003). While some of these events do not necessarily trigger population changes as such, they do play an important role in accelerating demographic trends. Thus, although the Bolshevik revolution did not *cause* the twentieth century's gradual decline in fertility rate, it definitely accelerated this decline that began in the late 19th century (Blum 2004:94). In other words, these studies demonstrate that, although political turbulence does not necessarily bear direct and immediate causal relations to demographic changes, the dramatic events of the 20th century do, in the *longue durée*, deeply impact demographic facts and overall population trends.

⁹ For more up to day data see: http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b11_12/Main.htm

Why is there such a strong concern with these issues now? How do current political transformations occurring in Russia inform the population debate? How is this debate along with Russia's population trends implicated in the country's cultural and political contexts?



Figure 1.3: The cover of the book entitled *Russian Cross: The Factors, Mechanisms and Ways to Overcome the Demographic Crisis in Russia*. The low left corner has another subtitle and it reads: *How to stop Russia's extinction*.

In the public debate about the demographic future of the nation, Russia's demographic trends are often dramatically referred to as *Russkii Krest* (The Russian Cross) (see Figure 1.3). On the one hand, the cross quite literally depicts the moment in the history of Russia's demographic development when, coinciding with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, around 1991-1992, mortality rates first became equal to and then rose above the birthrate – the two trends crossed over each other. On the other hand, it is freighted with a great deal of symbolism that represents this demographic shift as tragic and as

entangled with a more general discourse of national suffering.

The Russian Cross is a powerful cultural metaphor. When mixed with scientific facts and politically conditioned statements, it leads to the politicization of both the demographic situation and the science of population in Russia. When presented as a graph, the demographic trends of fertility and mortality create a powerful image, which visually resembles a cross – a long-lived Christian icon, powerfully representing both suffering and endurance. The conflation of the religious with the demographic,

Oushakine (2010) writes, moves the discussion of social policies “towards the predictable fascination with the nation’s suffering” (p.159). The debates surrounding the Russian Cross are often followed by the questions of “How can we prevent depopulation?” and “Is it in our capacity to reverse these trends?” While the metaphor of the Russian Cross denotes seemingly objective demographic trends, it also indexes the uniqueness of the national course and the power of its character to overcome catastrophic trends. Invoking fear in the face of the disappearance of the nation, the cross signifies two contradictory things. While as part of the national suffering narrative it indexes a long chain of tragic events facing Russia in the last hundred years, it also has a meaning of perseverance and strength (e.g., despite all the tragedies, the nation is alive and well). As such, in a popular discourse about the population crisis, the Russian Cross also signifies the strength and unity of the nation during these events that overcame tragedies despite the gravity of the situation (e.g., the unlikely victory in WW II). The national component and hope that permeates this debate is hardly unnoticeable.¹⁰ Even when people disagree with the fatalism of the terms in which the debate is framed, they often address the uniqueness of the Russian situation and the resources, both material and ideological, that Russia possesses that would allow its citizens to overturn the trend and to reappear on the map as a powerful and abundant nation (Vizhutovich 2007).

Symbols and connotations encoded in the Cross set the tone of the debate about a perceived population crisis in Russia. While highlighting certain aspects of the debate, by focusing exclusively on the moment of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the cultural

¹⁰ Oushakine (2010) argues that the debate surrounding the demographic situation in Russia is constructed in terms that try to reconstruct the past with no consideration of the future. This is where my analysis is different from his.

metaphor of the Russian Cross obscures the importance of historical continuities related to demographic patterns and their relations to political and economic changes. Thus, although skyrocketing mortality rates around the years highlighted by the Cross were a postponed effect of the end of an earlier (Soviet) anti-alcohol campaign, lifted in 1987, and falling birthrates were partly the effects of the Soviet pronatalist policies of the 1980s (Zakharov 2008), the Russian Cross is strongly associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is seen as a decisive moment in the process of the decline of Russia's population. Despite the commonly accepted association of population decline with the post-Soviet reality, this demographic trend can be traced back to the history of political and social transformations during the Soviet period. A series of social upheavals as well as Soviet political transformations altered Russia's demographic trends before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, producing both positive and negative effects. For instance, the huge casualties of WW II had major effects on the demographic development of the country, creating gender asymmetry and changes in marriage patterns¹¹ for generations born after WW II (Blum 2004:88). In other words, social upheavals that occurred some 60 years ago have affected demographic trends visible in today's Russia.

An example even more pertinent to this study is a series of population and public health policies introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The most comprehensive pronatalist policy, based on a wide range of welfare measures, was introduced in the Soviet Union in 1981-1982. It increased monthly child allowances and granted women

¹¹ The growing competition among women who tried to remarry after their husbands did not come back from the battlefield and women marrying for the first time led to the decreasing age of first marriage (Blum 2004:88; Nakachi 2008).

extended paid maternity leaves with job protection and some flexibility of working hours. This had a temporary positive effect that led to an increase in birthrates, with total fertility rates reaching 2.2 in 1987 (Avdeyeva 2011; Zakharov 2008). This same policy, however, had a negative effect later on and contributed significantly to a sharp birthrate decline after 1987, with total fertility rates plunging to 1.37 in 1993 (Zakharov 2008). The reason for this reversal in the policy's effects is that its measures did not ultimately affect family sizes (i.e., it did not increase the number of children that people were having) but instead, by granting women the possibility of taking one or two consecutive maternity leaves, the policy altered fertility timing (i.e., permitting families to have two children born much closer to each other than they would have been otherwise). Thus, by 1987, for many parents, all the children they desired were already born and the birthrate began declining again (ibid; Zakharov 2008; Avdeev and Monnier 1995).

In addition, an anti-alcohol campaign introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985-1987 led to a relatively rapid decline in mortality rates and a sharp increase in life expectancy especially for men (Shkolnikov and Nemtsov 1997; Leon et al 2009). Yet, oriented almost entirely towards the restriction of public access to alcohol, the campaign did not cause substantial changes in underlying drinking patterns, or their related mortality rates. It rather led to the temporary postponement of deaths that occurred once the anti-alcohol campaign ended in 1987. Male mortality rates skyrocketed after 1987, with alcohol abuse being one of the major causes of death, and in 1994 life expectancy for men reached its lowest point for 57 years (Shkolnikov and Nemtsov 1997). Life expectancy for men began to increase slightly after this point, only to drop again following the 1998 devaluation of the Russian ruble (Leon et al 2009).

Despite these various continuities, the power of the image of the “Russian Cross” plays an important role in obscuring the relevance of these processes, instead highlighting 1991, the year of the fall of the Soviet Union, as a discrete moment that marks very “sudden” changes in the demographic processes of the country. There is a clear continuity in Russia’s demographic history, having its roots in the political and social processes that affected people’s lives prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, but “The Russian Cross” creates an image of a graspable reality, a moment with clear-cut boundaries between two periods in the history of the country – the Soviet and the post-Soviet. For people who are trying to make sense of their history and of their personal experiences, evading the continuity of demographic processes that connect the Soviet with the post-Soviet makes it easier to assign responsibility for the crisis to a particular event or specific social actors. Likewise, for experts and policymakers, the inertia of demographic processes and their far-reaching effects make it harder to offer immediate, hands-on solutions to the demographic problems. But a binary distinction between ‘what was before’ and ‘what is now’ disguises this perplexity and creates a comprehensible picture of reality which makes it possible to imagine the population problem as a discrete predicament and as something that could be solved by means of the state’s political will.

Political Arithmetic: The Science of Population and the State

In the case of Russia’s population debate, numbers are used to both describe demographic reality and to establish this reality as true and real. In other words, the numbers do not simply represent an objective demographic reality; they also enunciate the debate, contributing to the formation of categories in which the debate is constructed.

My argument about the visibility of the crisis is founded on the social scientific scholarship that explored numerous ways in which numbers and statistical data can be a powerful act of representation and political intervention in social reality (Kreager 1986; Ipsen 1996; Desrosières 1998; Cole 2000; Szreter et al 2004; Rivkin-Fish 2003, 2010). Historians of statistics and demography have described many instances in the history of the Soviet Union and elsewhere, in which the categories of statistical analysis had been used to convey certain political messages. Italy's Benito Mussolini identified his demographic campaign as central to the fascist regime and announced that his goal was to increase the country's population by ten million (Ipsen 1996; Quine 1996). The late 19th century organization National Alliance in France produced scientific brochures aimed at alerting politicians and the general public to the dangers of depopulation (Quine 1996). In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, still recovering from famine and the atrocities of the collectivization, newspapers began using fertility and mortality rates in order to make comparisons with capitalist countries. In these comparisons, the new socialist society had of course higher birthrates and lower mortality rates than the other, capitalist, countries of Europe. In Western Europe, at the same time, the threat of the Soviet enemy was also framed in population terms, indicators of Soviet population growth being presented as an immediate danger to the integrity of Europe (Blum 2004:54). On both sides of the Iron Curtain in the aftermath of WW II, the language of numbers and statistics was used as a powerful tool in the ideological game of the West and the East.

Furthermore, in the Soviet Union, to accommodate the ideological apparatus of the Soviet state, categories of statistical analysis had gone through a transformation: in the early years of the Soviet state such statistics had been used to describe the social

differences and inequalities caused by the Tsarist regime, but after the census of 1926 they were supposed to begin tracking the reality of a new classless society. To achieve this, the census categories and their meanings had to be changed, minimizing questions about social distinctions in particular. In other words, instead of attempting an actual analysis of social reality with its empirical distinctions and differences, the new categories were constructed a priori to reflect social changes approved by the central party apparatus under Josef Stalin (Blum 2004).

In the current population debate, categories of analysis similarly play an important role in how the problem of population is framed and discussed. The choice of fertility as the core of the population problem rather than mortality or migration plays a crucial role in how the demographic reality is conceived. It dictates both the angle from which different social actors see this problem and the mechanisms they use to devise political solution for it. Thus, although the demographic indicators of mortality, especially mortality for men of working age, are highly unusual for an industrialized country such as the Russian Federation,¹² the core of the population debate, as it is currently framed in Russia, largely ignores this and is built instead almost exclusively around fertility and birth rates (see Figure 4).

Reproduction as the core of the population problem is characteristic of other postsocialist European societies that see rising fertility rates as a sign of national recuperation after the fall of Berlin Wall (Gal and Kligman 2000). Conversely, in such postsocialist societies, population decline represents the failure of the state and so

¹² Only recently (after 2006) has life expectancy for men risen above 60. With a retirement age of 60 for men in Russia and a life expectancy of 58.9 (in 2005), most men ought not expect to even live to enjoy their pensions (Rosstat 2011).

reproduction has become an important sign of the success of national politics. Although the end of socialism typically means the end of the state that takes certain costs of biological and social reproduction on itself, reproductive issues continues to play an important role postsocialist politics and are used by different social actors and state agencies as a moral currency in order to establish legitimacy for themselves (ibid). Ideas about reproduction, all the more so when legislated and enacted (as in the new pronatalist policy incentivizing women to have more children), create a constraining context and boundaries for the reproductive activities of the state's inhabitants (ibid) (see Figure 1.4).

Only recently has the new Russian state begun, albeit reluctantly, attending to the questions of the mortality and public health of Russia's population.¹³ New state programs to improve the health of Russia's population and to introduce "healthy lifestyles" (*zdorovii obraz zhizni*) are much less visible than the ones that are trying to affect fertility and reproductive behavior. Because the political dividends of such programs are less immediate than those aimed towards increasing fertility rates, public health reforms are simply less convenient and/or are harder to measure in absolute numbers. While a local head of the region can announce that the region has had 1,000 more babies born this year, it would be significantly harder for him to convince his constituency that he succeeded in saving 1,000 men from dying. Similarly, the immediacy of announcing the number of births compared to giving complicated actuarial calculations of the population's health renders the former a far more effective political tool.

¹³ <http://www.newsru.com/russia/20apr2010/reportdone.html>
http://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-316568-section_id-15.html
http://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-322684.html

The pronatalist policy introduced in 2007 gains just such political benefits, but the dividends from the birthrate reports are even higher because the policy's introduction coincided with the beginning of a natural rise in birthrate. This increase, however, is not an immediate effect of the policy – although this is how it is often presented – but rather



Figure 1.3 The banner advertizing a charity fund reads: Third child means wealth will be tripled in the third millennium. Photo by author

is an outcome of a previous Soviet pronatalist policy of 1981, which led to the temporary increase in birthrate and as a result created a larger reproductive cohort (of people in their 20s) responsible for the current temporary rise in

birthrates witnessed in Russia in the last few years (Zakharov 2008; Avdeev and Monnier 1995). Simply put, what politicians are reporting on, and boasting of, is not a genuine rise in population growth at all. The larger reproductive cohort creates an illusion of growth because of the temporary leap in birthrate caused by a larger number of women being of reproductive age in the same period of years. It does not mean, however, that these women give birth to larger number of children overall.

In Russia's population debate as in many other instances in the history of modern politics, numbers are often employed to give justification to particular political actions.

Nevertheless, “[d]emography has never been more politicized,” a demographer from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow told me. Similarly to other historical instances in which demography became central to political regimes (e.g., Mussolini’s Italy (Ipsen 1996; Quine 1996)), adoption of population policies is crucial to the establishment of political legitimacy and this legitimacy is fortified by the interactions between population policy experts with the state. Victor Elizarov, a demographer from the Moscow State University expressed it this way: “Any serious political party that orients itself to win a considerable number of seats in the parliament introduces demographic policy as one of its major political acts. Political parties borrow ideas about demography from each other and try to own both these ideas and the experts who have produced them” (Elizarov 2011). For instance, the populist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky, interested in creating a political alliance with Russia’s nationalist movements used the recently introduced population policy to advance his own political interests. He proposed to implement a differentiated policy which would only give incentives to women in regions with low fertility rates, excluding regions with relatively high birthrate, such as the Southern Caucasian regions belonging to Russia (e.g., Chechnya) (Kozlov 2011). Nationalist sentiments are implicit in Zhirinovsky’s statements and high and low fertility regions become euphemisms for Russian and non-Russian provinces. In short, the alarmist language of statistics used by a variety of policy experts, politicians, and media has been a form of a politically charged representation aimed at advancing different and at time contradictory interests of the social actors taking part in these interactions.

Historians and anthropologists alike have shown that knowledge produced by population science is an important form of modern governance (Greenhalgh 2008;

Desrosières 1998; Blum 2001; Kreager 2004). The science of population is intimately related to the construction of the modern state with its need to name and categorize and it combines both descriptive and prescriptive sets of expertise, with noticeable tension between description and management (Hacking 1986; Kreager 2004). The etymology of ‘state-istics’ reveals its original meaning of *political arithmetic*, offering modern governments the practical knowledge necessary to solve specific problems (e.g., mortality tables to support insurance systems in 18th-century France, annual numbers of birth and life expectancy to estimate the size of the population in 18th-century Holland) (Desrosières 1998:9,25).

Throughout the history of statistics, one of the major characteristics of knowledge produced by the science of population is its unstable position in regard to two different sets of norms: scientific norms with their own forms of validation, on one hand, and administrative rules in pursuit of efficiency of management, on the other (Desrosières 1998). In the framework of the tense relationships between two different forms of authority – scientific and administrative – political concepts are often depoliticized by demographic scientific reasoning (Kreager 2004; Greenhaulgh 2008). At the same time, as becomes clear from the Russian case, demographic reasoning is often politicized and used to promote different political agendas. Thus, in the recent population debate in Russia, using the idioms of demographic extinction and dramatic cultural idioms and concepts (Russian Cross) proved to be a successful strategy for political decision makers and was turned into a call for political action.

The introduction of a new population policy in 2007 was a historical moment in which the language of statistical description became the language of political

prescription. In Vladimir Putin's 2006 annual address to the nation, the message was clear – the demographic situation was causing problems to national security and the economy and therefore the problem required a political solution. Accordingly, following his address, the Russian government introduced a new pronatalist policy built around providing monetary incentives for women to have multiple children (see Figure 1.5). Unlike previous pronatalist policies of the Soviet Union that strove to establish a wide range of welfare measures to help women balance work and family (e.g., childcare facilities, extensive maternity leave, etc), this policy was almost exclusively built around a one-time monetary measure paid to any woman who gave birth to her second child.



The Figure 1.5: The Retirements Fund of Russia is in charge of the allocations of the Maternal Capital certificates. The banner advertizing the new national policy “Maternal Capital” reads: Maternal Capital is for your children’s education, for the improvement of living conditions, and for mother’s retirement plan. When your child turns three it is time to turn in a request! Photo by author.

A New Raison d'Être: The Past and The Present of Pronatalist Policies in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia

Both the introduction of Putin's Maternal Capital program and the attempts surrounding it by Russia's political brokers and bureaucrats to use the population debate in order to

seize political momentum and legitimacy have a long pre-history that extends before the collapse of the Soviet Union. I have stressed that the history of pronatalist policies with its ruptures and continuities represents an important background to the understanding of the current population debate and its consequences for people whom the state aims to influence.

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, the state and its agents had complicated relationships with pronatalist ideology. The following pages will describe the two most salient aspects of these complicated relationships that bear on the population debate in contemporary Russia. First, the history of the Soviet attitudes towards Malthusianism has an impact on how post-Soviet policy experts articulate the history of their discipline and represent the problem of underpopulation to the public. The ambiguity towards interventions into reproductive choices of the state inhabitants was characteristic of the Soviet perspectives on population and the traces of this ambivalence could be identified in the current population debate.¹⁴ Second, I will focus on the separate, though not unrelated issue of the place of the Soviet discipline of demography and its role in the population debate. The current population debate is fraught with the traces of the Soviet history of the science of population. As one of the Soviet demographers aptly put it: “demographic tragedies [in the Soviet Union] should be studied alongside the tragedy of demography as a discipline [in the same country]” (Tolts 1989). Demographic research along with the fate of the discipline following the cancelled census of 1937 and Stalin’s purges reflect quite accurately the tensions between Marxist-

¹⁴ As following chapters will demonstrate, this legacy of the Soviet policymaking becomes palpable in the current relationships that knowledge experts develop with the state.

Leninist ideology and the actuality of political decisions as well as larger political processes occurring in the Soviet Union (Blum 2004; Blum and Mespoulet 2006; Hirsch 2005; Holquist 2003, 2010).

Socialism and the Problem of Population

One of the most salient complexities of Soviet attitudes to pronatalism developed out of Soviet attitudes to Malthus and the canonical Marxist rejection of pronatalist interventions (Feshbach 1986; DiMaio 1981a; Dreijmanis 1972). The Malthusian doctrine attempts to explain changing demographic trends through socio-economic developments of regions. Malthus argued that the geometric rate of population growth exceeds that of the arithmetic rate of food production growth and will eventually lead to the doubling of population size every 25 years. Malthus's argument essentially leads to the conclusion that overpopulation inevitably causes and leads to poverty. His conceptual endeavor paired with the life table construction techniques developed by Graunt, Halley, Deparcieux, and their colleagues in the 17th and 18th centuries Europe became the backbone of the methods of modern states to describe and act on population (Desrosières 1998; Briggs 2004; Quine 1996). Marx turned the Malthusian universal law of population on its head and maintained that proliferation of the poor is not a universal law but rather a necessary feature of a capitalist regime. He argued that, because of its particular social and economic organization based on exploitation and expropriation, capitalism required a surplus population to assure a latent labor reserve (rural overpopulation in the 19th century Europe). In other words, what Malthus had called overpopulation was in actuality is a form of surplus labor necessary for the dominating class to continue extracting resources and accumulating wealth while assuring minimal wages for the proletariat (DiMiao 1981b; Perrot 1983).

This Marxist argument meant that the official ideology of the Soviet Union opposed any population interventions based on Malthusian assumptions. Specifically, the Soviet doctrine was that in the more adequate socioeconomic system of socialism (or communism), with the help of a planned economy, unemployment – which is to say overpopulation in Malthusian terms – would eventually disappear. During the early Soviet period it was Lenin himself who denounced Neo-Malthusianism – a late 19th-century social movement based on Malthusian ideology – and called it an individualist ideology that conceals the capitalist nature of exploitation (Perrot 1983). In the early days of the Soviet state, as part of the anti-Neo-Malthusian and anti-interventionist ideology, and backed up by ideas of the emancipation of women from their domestic yoke and realization of individual childbearing choices, Lenin legalized abortions (as early as 1920), canceled the institution of illegal children, and introduced complete freedom of divorce (DiMiao 1981a; Goldman 1993; Hoffmann 2003). These progressive moves were unprecedented for the early 20th century Europe, but they were the logical conclusion of a debate about population that Bolsheviks and liberals alike began prior to the revolution of 1917 (Avdeev et al 1995).

However, despite this “triumph of liberal ideas” (ibid: 42), already in the 1930s, Stalin, following the civil war and the famine of the early 1930s, began introducing pronatalist measures with the aim of fostering or maintaining population growth. In essence, the introduction of pronatalist policies (ban on abortion, awards for “women with many children,” etc) directly contradicts Marxist-Leninist ideology, according to which population problems are inseparable from the economic and social order of a particular society so that, therefore, population problems should resolve themselves in an

adequate economic order (e.g., socialism) without any interventions into people's reproductive choices. In 1936 Stalin banned abortions, made divorce more difficult, and raised the penalty for nonpayment of alimony to two years of imprisonment, all with the intention of facilitating population growth. In addition, the decree of the same year increased material assistance to mothers and women were granted a maternity leave of 112 days (Dreijmanis 1972: 20).

Several months after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, another decree, initiated by then Politburo member Nikita Khrushchev, levied a tax on single and married men between ages 25-50 and women between 20-45 without children (ibid, Nakachi 2008). Unlike the decree of 1926 that guaranteed rights to any form of a heterosexual civil union, Khrushchev's policy of 1944, normalized marriage even further denying rights to unregistered couples. Maternity leaves were extended, single mothers were given assistance, and medals and titles for mothers of large families were introduced (Nakachi 2008). Motherhood became one of the central values of the Soviet society and the return to pronatalist ideology led to the introduction of a new cultural hero – “mother heroine,” a woman with many children (Blum 2004:54). Things began changing after WW II and especially after the death of Stalin in 1953. Some of the draconian policies were amended – for example, abortions were re-legalized in 1955 and reductions in the tax on persons without children instituted (Dreijmanis 1972:22).

Pronatalist policies introduced by the Soviet state were often justified using the framework of industrial growth necessary to the development of the socialist society. An obligatory move for any Soviet spokesperson presenting a new population policy to the audiences inside and outside of the USSR was to state the difference between the neo-

Malthusian population control and social population policies that provide emancipation for women in a classless society (DiMaio 1981a). As one of the prominent demographers, Viktor Perevedentsev said: “We do not employ the term “population control.” [...] However, inasmuch as the number of children is by no means of indifference to society, it is necessary to influence the number of births by specific economic and social measures” (Perevedentsev 1971, cited in DiMaio 1981a:17)

The ambivalence of the Soviet state towards pronatalism expressed itself in what social scientists interested in the history of demography in the Soviet Union called “hesitant pronatalism” (DeMaio 1981a:31-32). An extensive pronatalist policy was unacceptable because it would intervene with other important commitments of the Soviet state, such as women’s equality on a labor market (even though in practice this commitment was something of a myth see Goldman 1993; Avdeyeva 2011). Even when, later in the history of the Soviet Union, demographers acknowledged the importance of pronatalist laws implemented by the state, the ideology maintained its anti-interventionist stance and claimed that it is the socialist mode of production (planned economy) that will ultimately determine the country’s demographic goals and prospects (Desfosses 1981). For the same reasons, Soviet demographers and the representatives of the Soviet state during world population conferences of 1954 and 1965 strongly opposed US attempts to intervene in population politics of the Third World countries and rejected the notion of population control as an imperialist strategy unthinkable in a socialist society. They further accused American demographers (e.g., Paul Ehrlich, the author of *the Population Bomb*) of erroneously viewing population growth as a determinant of social development,

independent of class system and particularity of the social and economic organization of a society (ibid).

Socialism and Demography

Following Stalin's purges, the discipline of demography as well as the apparatus of the Central Statistical Bureau found itself significantly undercut and injured. During Stalinism the majority of the discipline's scholars were killed or imprisoned and demographic institutes were shut down. After the results of the 1937 census did not live up to Stalin's expectations, access to statistical data became restricted (Blum 2004). The politically sensitive nature of the population statistics made them a state secret and the professional activities of Soviet demographers that survived the purges were significantly obstructed.¹⁵ Following WW II, the strong anti-Malthusian stance that there could be no population problems in socialist societies had been replaced with the argument that a socialist society, with its planned economy and egalitarian norms, presented more scientific and social opportunities to solve the problem of population (Dreijmanis 1972). Yet, ambiguity towards population policies remained and tensions between ideological stances of the socialist state and the realities of the demographic development of the country, especially after the tremendous losses of WW II persisted.

Although little is known about the evolution of demography as a discipline in the Soviet Union post WW II, historical studies demonstrate that demography as a science re-emerged or rather rose from "the ashes in which the purges of 1937 and 1939 had left it" in the late 1950s (Blum 2001: 286). Different historical accounts attribute this revival of demography as a science to different factors, yet many of them agree that it was a

¹⁵ I will continue discussing the effects of this incredibly important history on the demographic profession in Chapter II.

combination of the need to assess the demographic consequences of the war and changes in fertility, mortality and migration caused by it, and the need to take a stance on the debate surrounding Malthusian population politics in developing countries and especially to express opposition to the position of the United States regarding population control in the developing world (Blum 2001; Nakachi 2008; Feshbach 1986). Following these developments, several research centers or laboratories devoted to the study of population emerged. The emergence of new research centers in the late 1960s and population related conferences and publication led to an open debate about the definition and the scope of demography as a discipline.

The 1960s, following Khrushchev's "Thaw," brought about a new attempt to interpret Malthusianism and Marx's view of it. It was also a period when Soviet demographers began discussing pronatalism and the importance of population policies more openly. A public debate in a widely-read Soviet journal is a good example of the emergence of the voice of the discipline in a public arena. The debate in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the official journal of the USSR Writers' Union, focusing on population problems of developing countries, was built around various attempts to reinterpret Marxian positions on population (DiMaio 1981b). The journal had a large intellectual readership and its articles about demography or written by demographers soon attracted much attention (ibid). The timing of the debate coincided with a period when rapidly falling birthrates became apparent to Soviet demographers and social scientists. From November 1965 to June 1966, prominent demographers and economists contributed articles to the journal, which tried to reexamine Marxist approaches to population. Boris Uralis, a demographer from the Institute of Economics of the Soviet Academy of

Sciences, questioned an official stance of the Soviet delegation to the 1965 World Population Conference, a position that fundamentally rejected the importance of population policies in the developing countries. He urged a rethinking of their position that urbanization and industrialization would eventually solve the problem of overpopulation and warned against the danger of transferring the experience of economically developed countries to the situation of countries constrained by the history of colonialism and imperialism. More scholars joined Uralnis in this debate, some arguing against his argument while others used this opportunity to refine Uralnis's more moderate stance on population interventions (DiMaio 1981b:169-174).

Although the debate in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* focused predominantly on 'foreign' overpopulation, it was in a sense a call for action and an attempt to stir discussion about general domestic population issues. As a result, the debate led to a more or less open discussion of the dangers of falling population rates and its consequences for Soviet economic growth. Scholars participating in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* debate used a tactic familiar among Soviet scientists, that of debating a scientific issue in order to establish legitimacy for addressing another more politically sensitive topic (see Graham (1993) on Boris Hessen). One of the highly-publicized incidents during this debate occurred when Boris Uralnis from the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences openly attacked the position of the head of the census department of the Central Statistical Administration, Piotr Pod'yachikh, on population policies related to family planning. He and other who joined him argued that Pod'yachikh's position was a narrow economic determinism, which did not allow any discussion of the consequences of demographic trends beyond simple descriptive statements derived from population statistics (Feshbach

1986: 15-16). The *Literaturnaya Gazeta* debate opened a door to the discussion of a new population policy based on an adjusted interpretation of Marxist theory (Feshbach 1986). Carefully phrasing their statements in Marxist-Leninist ideological terminology, social scientists participating in this debate used pronatalist arguments to prove their points. Although devoted to the population problems in the Third World, the discussion in the journal turned to be a successful strategy by which Soviet demographers attracted attention to the domestic demographic problems and the role of demography in the Soviet Union.

More than simply a minor historical incident, for Russian demographers, the debate in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* captures the particular moment in history that trapped the demographers into a very particular view of themselves and of their scientific goals. In the historical imagination of the discipline today, the moment when Boris Ulanis, a demographer from the Soviet Academy of Sciences raised questions about basic assumptions behind Soviet demographic thinking and when Soviet demographers began openly discussing the importance of domestic population policies symbolizes the moment when the discipline, using terminology coined by a sociologist of professions Andrew Abbott (1988), successfully laid claims to jurisdiction over demographic expertise and policy prescriptions. When demographers I worked with speak of their professional history, they index this period in the history of the Soviet Union as a defining moment in the construction of their discipline and their identities as policy experts in population matters. Regardless of differences in scientific approaches and often very antagonistic relationships between different schools of thoughts in contemporary Russian demography, many demographers identify the origins of a new history of demography as

a powerful discipline in the debate in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. Boris Urlanis who triggered the debate has a particularly special place in this history and regardless of their scientific approaches, all different schools of thought claim him to be a formative figure in the re-establishment of demography after WW II.

The period in mid-1960s, following the debate, also signifies the beginning of long-term relationships that demographers had developed with the Soviet leadership. As the next two chapters will demonstrate, the history of these relationships inform the ways through which post-Soviet social scientists interested in population problems fashion themselves as policy experts. In the collective memory of the profession, their exclusive although always partial access to statistical data,¹⁶ which was not open to the public, combined with the public acknowledgment that they acquired following the debate in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* contributed to their special status of experts well versed in the matters of population policy. It was around the same decade that the medical profession under the auspices of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences entered the population arena and expanded it by introducing biomedical issues, establishing medical indicators as a legitimate object of demographic research. In the next decade, merging certain aspects of social hygiene with the study of reproductive health, medical demography established itself as a powerful population science with special focus of reproduction (see chapter IV).

The next twenty years produced extensive collaborations between Soviet demographers and the country's leadership. Demographers complained about the lack of specialists in demography in regional ministries and demanded access to a more

¹⁶ All statistical data had a confidential status under the rubric of “restricted” (*dlia sluzhebnogo pol'zovania*). The use of some of it was also restricted for research.

sufficient statistical data in planning agencies (such as city planning, for example). Pronatalism had made its way into the propaganda of the Soviet state, which targeted single-child families in its campaigns. Thus, for example, newspaper articles and books claimed that such children are predisposed to antisocial behavior and were unable to develop well-rounded personalities because they were lacking contacts with other children in their family contexts (Desfosses 1981:107-108). In 1973, the director of the Center for the Study of Population Problems at Moscow State University, D. Valentei, recommended installing a new attitude in young people, which would teach them that “large families are happy families” and that women could be socially useful only through a combination of work and motherhood (ibid: 115). This focus on family of a particular shape as the main focus of state interventions was inherited by post-Soviet demographers and made its way to the center of the contemporary population debate.

The tensions between, on the one hand, Marxist ideology that population problems could be solved only through the social organization of economy and, on the other, the demographic reality in which population forecasts showed significant threats to Soviet labor resources were still apparent in the ways the Soviet state dealt with its population decline. This ambiguity is perhaps the reason why the Soviet Union was so late in adopting comprehensive pronatalist policies such as those introduced by other countries of the Eastern Bloc. Already in 1973, Hungary had offered women a three-year maternity leave after the birth of a child with a monthly payment that constituted a significant proportion of a woman’s wage (Heer 1981:134). At the same time, Bulgaria also introduced very generous maternity leave policies (Ghodsee in press; n.d.). Boris Urlanis often cited these policies as an example of effective demographic policies. The

importance of pronatalist measures were often justified using the unlikely authority of Dr. Benjamin Spock, who was at that time very popular in the Soviet Union. Thus, Urlanis claimed, in line with ideas expressed by Spock that no preschool facilities could solve the problem of low birthrate and that maternal care during the first period of the child's life should be a first priority of the Soviet fertility policy (Heer 1981). Gradually but steadily, family and fertility had become the core of population problem and the main object of the state interventions.

During the same period, demographers also began playing with the idea of differentiated population policies, which had been practically non-existent and even taboo until then. Given the fact of increases in birthrates in Central Asian and the Caucasian republics compared to falling birthrates in European parts of the Soviet Union, several demographers recommended introducing pronatalist policies only in the areas with low fertility rates. Boris Urlanis, for instance, expressed doubts about actively facilitating birthrates in Central Asia: "Soviet demographic policy should be differentiated (local, regional, zonal). This approach is dictated by the great differences in the birth rate in the various republics and nations of the Soviet Union. In some regions it is high enough and needs no stimulation, in others the case is reversed" (Urlanis 1974:14 cited in Heer 1981:143). The ideas of differentiated pronatalist policies reverberate in the current population debate. One of my interlocutors, a demographer-economist, critiquing the universality of the new policy introduced in 2007 told me: "It is as if the new post-Soviet state is more socialist than its Soviet predecessor. Even Urlanis was talking about differentiated policies in the 1980s, so why we cannot do it now?" Although the idea of differentiated policy was never implemented by the Soviet state, post-Soviet

demographers often refer to the history of this idea in their proposals for policies aimed at improving the demographic situation in the country.

Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in the late-socialist period of the 1980s, demographers developed a long-term collaboration with the Soviet leadership, from whom they received funding to conduct comprehensive research on the development of a sustained and effective demographic policy. This sense of accomplishment intensified when the collaborations with the Soviet leadership produced concrete results in a form of the comprehensive pronatalist policy of 1981. Toward the 26th Party Congress in Moscow in 1981, where the new pronatalist policy was introduced for the first time, the idea of strengthening the Soviet family as the main force for improving population trends became the cornerstone of every discussion pertaining to population reforms and more and more funding went into family studies (Feshbach 1986:45-47).

The policy, announced by the General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, increased material assistance for young couples and families with children (child allowances for second and third child constituted 30-60% of the average monthly wage in the Soviet Union at that time), widened possibilities for part-time employment, and introduced a year-long maternity leave for all working women with an option to prolong it for six additional months with no pay but with full employment protection (Avdeyeva 2011:368-369; Avdeev and Monnier 1995; Zakharov 2008). The policy had an immediate effect of a “baby boom” of a sort, and birthrate indeed rose with the peak of 2.2 in 1987 (Avdeev and Monnier 1995). However, as I explained earlier, the policy had merely affected fertility timing, while reproductive patterns remained untouched. Parity between children

declined and by 1987 people exhausted their reproductive needs and all the children that they wanted were already born (Avdeyeva 2011). Notwithstanding the difference between its intended and actual consequences, the 1981 policy was the most comprehensive population policy in the history of the Soviet Union and long after it was introduced it continued to have effects both on policy experts and on people targeted by the state as a model for how to make population interventions.

Postsocialism and the Problem of Population

Taking a cue from its Soviet predecessor, the Russian government has authorized several proposals in the years since the fall of the Soviet Union, outlining policies and programs aimed at intervening in population trends and especially at increasing Russia's birthrate. In November 1991, the report entitled "Family Policies in the USSR in the 1990s: The Future Government Program" was published by the collective of demographers under the supervision of the prominent Soviet and Russian demographer Anatoly Vishnevsky (Elizarov 2001). Given the timing of its publication, right before the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, this project had never been ratified by the government. Similarly to its Soviet predecessors, rather than being a proposal for an independent population policy, the document represented pronatalist measures that were supposed to join other welfare programs and reforms.

In 1996, in an attempt, mediated by the scientific community of demographers, to update an older version of the state family policy, former President Yeltsin signed a document entitled: "Main Trajectories for the State Family Policies" (*osnovnie napravleniya gosudarstvennoi semeinoi politiki*), it was still formulated in the language of child allowances, maternity leaves and other welfare measures (Elizarov 2001). This

program also incorporated demographic concerns, such as decreasing fertility rates and rapidly increasing mortality rates, into the legacy of the Soviet family and welfare policies. In my ethnographic interviews, both Valery Elizarov and Vladimir Archangelsky, two Moscow based demographers who have taken an important part in developing recommendations related to demographic and family policies since the early 1990s, indicated that the 1996 program mostly consisted of the same basic diagnosis and recommendations already published in the 1991 report.

During this period, differentiated policies, which had previously only been vaguely considered, became a significant part of any discussion regarding the problem of underpopulation. After the fall of the Soviet Union and after it became clear that the population growth of the USSR had been primarily sustained by the Asian and Caucasian republics, the dangers of underpopulation became more often associated with the Slavic population of Russia. The nationalistic expressions of the crisis permeated both intellectual and popular media discussions of the crisis and created panic around the complete disappearance of Russian people from earth (Blum 2004; Oushakine 2010). In the popular narratives about the disappearance of Russian people, Slavic Russians have become ‘real’ Russians, as the Asian/Caucasian Russians did not count towards ameliorating the national panic around the population crisis.

Despite the clear continuity that connects current population policies with their Soviet predecessors, however, – and despite similar policies in other, not necessarily socialist countries – there are certain differences in the political reasoning that set the new pronatalist policies apart from their Soviet antecedents. For instance, the pronatalist policies of the Soviet Union constituted part of a larger net of welfare programs aimed at

maintaining socialist ideals of gender equity in the labor market and a non-interventionist approach to reproductive choices of the country inhabitants. By contrast, the new post-Soviet state, although borrowing from its predecessor, has divorced itself from the welfare logic of the Soviet population policies and offers instead a new, monetized approach to population incentivization.

Following Vladimir Putin's ascent to power in 2000, the scope of the population problem and potential ways to overcome it have been reconsidered in line with current political and economic concerns and demands. Specifically, in both the 2001 report, "The Conception of Demographic Development for the Russian Federation through 2015" and in its renewed version, "The Conception of Demographic Policy for the Russian Federation through 2025" issued by policymakers in 2007, underpopulation has been framed as a discrete problem that requires a departure from the legacy of the welfare state. Putin's initiative of 2006 and the new pronatalist policy implemented in 2007 represent an important change in the Russian state's approach to social problems. Although the new pronatalist policy includes various forms of benefits, the central measure of this policy is a one-time monetary payment to women to have a second child. While the majority of Soviet efforts to improve country's demographic trends were embedded in a wide range of welfare policies, in the 2007 policy this *raison d'être* changed. This monetary-oriented policy diverges from the solutions advanced by Boris Yeltsin and his Soviet predecessors, who used population concerns to justify the expansion of state-sponsored welfare programs.

This departure from the Soviet legacy of family and welfare policies did not take place in a social vacuum. It coincided with the liberalization shift in other social policies

that took place in the 2000s as the Russian state under Putin made an effort to centralize its power in both domestic and international arenas. Anthropologists of postsocialism have demonstrated how this shift in the nature of social policies in the former Soviet Union and other former socialist countries coincides with “the overall trend of the personalization of social problems” in which long-term investments in social infrastructure (e.g., child-care system) are replaced with temporary and individual payouts (e.g., maternal capital) (Philips 2008:16; Zhurzhenko 2004).

This trend reveals a newly formed fracture between two realms of social activity, which were experienced in Soviet Russia as interconnected and mutually constitutive: a monetary domain and a domain of moral and social values (Oushakine 2009: 22-27; Haney 2002). This disruption of former assumptions in turn marginalized social contexts, in which monetary exchanges always had been visible, yet also intertwined with moral and social values (Pine 2002; Humphrey 2002: 83; Lemon 1998; Verdery 1996; Dunn 2004). The new demographic policy is just one example, but a remarkable one, of the overarching changes in state approaches toward social policies and the monetization of the social sphere.

Conclusion

The style of political reasoning with which the post-Soviet state thinks about the problem of underpopulation bears the legacy of the Soviet population policymaking in several ways. First, fluctuations characteristic of the demographic reality in contemporary Russia are in many ways far-reaching and often unanticipated effects of the previous population policies introduced by the Soviet state. Thus, the drastic decline in birthrate that occurred at the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union was in fact an unexpected consequence of the

pronatalist policy of 1981, which altered fertility timing for women who gave birth in the several years following the introduction of the policy (Zakharov 2008). The same policy is responsible for another postponed demographic effect: because of the changed fertility timing following the 1981 policy, cohorts of newborns were significantly larger than similar cohorts before 1981 and after 1987. This, in turn, meant that a larger cohort of women entered their reproductive age in the second half of the 2000s. Thus, the rising birthrates detected by demographers around the introduction of the new “Maternity Capital” policy in 2007 most likely indicate the effects of the 1981 policy rather than the effectiveness of the new monetary pronatalist policy (Ribakovsky et al 2009).

Yet, the inertia of demographic processes and their longitudinal effects make demography an uneasy topic for political purposes. While the *longue durée* of population processes does not bring immediate political dividends, creating a picture of reality with the illusion of direct causal relationships between particular political/social reality and demographic trends makes population processes a responsive object of the state intervention. This is perhaps why politicians as well as policy experts themselves prefer the clear-cut boundaries of the “Russian Cross,” marking the dissolution of the Soviet Union a clear historical moment responsible for Russia’s population decline. In this form of demographic nationalism (Krause 2005), politicians and policy experts alike draw unambiguous boundaries between two historical periods and political context. For knowledge experts, this binary picture allows them to offer political solutions that seem as if they might have immediate effects and so they can cement their position as policy experts vis-à-vis the state.

Second, the legacy of the Soviet ambiguity regarding pronatalism and population policies more generally plays an important role in the ways the post-Soviet state thinks about the problem of underpopulation. The fear of depopulation and the beginning of an open discussion about the dangers of falling fertility rates began long before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In fact, this discussion that started as early as 1965 marks a particularly important moment in the history of the discipline of demography around which professional identities of the population policy experts are built. The ambiguity with which the Soviet state approached pronatalism as a separate policy issue has been part of this professional identity and made its mark of the policies introduced by the post-Soviet state. Yet, as this chapter demonstrated, while in the first decade of its existence, the post-Soviet state continued to develop population programs that were embedded in a larger framework of the welfare state, during the 2000s, this logic gave way to new political and economic considerations, following a larger shift in the liberalization and privatization of the social sphere.

Finally, the emotional poignancy with which the problem of underpopulation is discussed and debated in contemporary Russia is conditioned more by the current context of political and economic transformations than by the “real” gravity of the demographic situation. Demographic trends when understood through the prism of these political transformations tend to be presented in dramatic terms and through a variety of metaphors. These metaphors – and the “Russian Cross” is the case in point here – politicize demographic indicators, making them powerful instruments in the representation of reality and in the attempts to intervene in it.

CHAPTER II

“Demography is my destiny:” Boundary-Work, Epistemic Contests, and Demographic Expertise

Prelude: Boundary-Work and Expertise in the Postsocialist Context

Despite the checkered historical trajectory of their discipline explored in the previous chapter, demographers have been important social actors in the Soviet population debate. When narrating their professional histories to me, social scientists I worked with would often recall a particular moment in the Soviet history, around the mid-1960s. During this time, demographers, concerned with plunging birthrates, started ringing the warning bell, urging the Soviet state to take more definite steps towards maintaining positive population growth. The campaign culminated in extensive collaborations with state agencies leading to the development of new demographic research projects and the enactment of a comprehensive pronatalist policy in 1981. Many of these social scientists I met during fieldwork began their careers during and not long after this defining moment in the history of their discipline. One of my interlocutors, who was part of the research institute that belonged to the Central Statistical Administration of the Soviet Union, described to me the importance of this moment to his professional trajectory: “The demographic destiny of the country became my destiny. Demography is my destiny.” As the post-Soviet state once again made the population problem its priority, demographers not only constituted themselves as public servants but also enacted their professional

legacy as an instrument in “authenticating themselves as experts” (Carr 2010:21) in the matters of population policies.

This chapter elaborates on the interrelatedness of these two destinies, that of the demography as a discipline and that of the demographic development of the country, both set against the backdrop of the history of the political transformations taking place in post-Soviet Russia. Based on the year-long fieldwork in the social science research institute in Yekaterinburg, this chapter focuses on a local network of social scientists involved in the production and circulation of demographic knowledge related to the problem of underpopulation in contemporary Russia. It zooms in and out on the actual practices observed in the Institute as it examines these scholars’ daily routines and practices in the context of changing institutional conditions under which this knowledge is produced. At the same time it reconstructs the larger context of radically shifting political conditions under which it is produced. Documenting strategies and tactics that these scholars use in their daily work routine, the chapter elucidates mechanisms by which they enact their expertise and claim authority over matters of population policy, while striving to achieve simultaneously the support of, and autonomy from, the state.

Demonstrating changes and continuities in the process of the production and circulation of scientific knowledge in contemporary Russia, the chapter suggests that scholars involved in demographic research attempt to establish and maintain their epistemic authority as population policy experts by engaging in multiple styles of boundary-work. Following Lamont and Molnar (2002), boundary-crossing, flexible boundaries, the institutionalization and shifting of boundaries are important social processes, through which people try to define and contest the institutionalized forms of

social differences, such as class, gender, race, professional hierarchies, moral distinctions, etc. Symbolic boundaries are important resources in the attempts of social institutions and scientific disciplines to enact their expertise as they compete with other social agents for material resources, social status, and political capital (see also Carr 2010; Bowker and Star 1999). As Lamont and Molnar (2002) write, “Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (p.168). Studying cultural mechanisms for the production and dissolution of boundaries and distinction can shed light on the processes by which certain meanings of social reality are imposed as legitimate (Bourdieu 1984). The cultural practices of converting symbolic distinctions and cultural distance, as Bourdieu (1984) observes in *Distinction*, have serious social effects and shape dispositions and class boundaries of social actors. The focus on boundary-work (Gieryn 1983) is powerful in this regard precisely because it captures the social process by which symbolic boundaries turn into more institutionalized social boundaries (distinction made by Lamont and Molnar 2002:168) that dictate unequal access to resources and determine social hierarchies.

The historical development of demography makes for interesting particularities: as a discipline most intimately related to modern government, demographers need to maintain their boundaries open to the government, yet, at the same time they need to work harder to maintain their distance from the government in order to preserve their scientific autonomy and epistemic authority. Thus, navigating the historical and institutional trajectory of demography as the essential discipline of modern forms of government, the scholars in the Institute employ a set of practices and rhetorical styles with the goal of drawing symbolic boundaries around their domain of expertise.

The concept of “boundary-work” I use to examine the process of contesting authorities over population matters and maintaining the distinction of the demographic expertise in the context of shifting political conditions derives from Thomas F. Gieryn (1983). Boundary-work refers to various representational practices used by scientists to promote their professional goals and interests: “The attribution of selected characteristics to the institution of science (i.e., to its practitioners, methods, stock of knowledge, values and work organization) for the purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activity as non-science” (Gieryn 1983:782). This chapter draws on extensive literature that has depicted science as a social institution, whose inner logic alone cannot explain its powerful existence. Its scientific principles cannot demarcate science from non-science as starkly or as simply as attempts such as Karl Popper’s falsification principle has once attempted. Social scientists have demonstrated that science is a unique social institution and that the demarcating project of creating boundaries around what is science and what is not is an inherently social process, always affected by cultural practices, science’s social institutions, and beliefs independent of scientific data (Evans 2005; Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Collins and Evans 2002; Fuller 1991; Gieryn 1983,1999).

To establish their credibility in different social situations, scientists employ rhetorical strategies that do not necessarily emerge from the scientific nature of the knowledge they produce. Gieryn (1999) identified three different genres of such boundary-work. The distinctions among them are analytically very useful but in reality, as will become clear from this chapter, these different strategies frequently overlap. Thus, for instance, to sustain legitimacy vis-à-vis other authorities who might also wish to claim

to be scientific, scientists, accepted as such, might employ the boundary-work of *expulsion*. In this process of demarcating the symbolic boundaries around their object of expertise, scientists, socially accepted as such, might try to distinguish their expertise by presenting others as posers, or as pseudo- or amateur scientists. For scientists, it serves as a means of social control, by pointing out that they might break the legitimate rules of conduct if they transgress the demarcated boundaries (Gieryn 1999:16). For Russian demographers, *expulsion* is a particularly important and complex form of boundary-work. Because of the peculiarity of the historical trajectory of the Soviet discipline of demography as a sub-discipline of economics, in their daily routine demographers in the social scientific institute often employ expulsion to claim their authority in the scientific matters of population vis-à-vis economists who also try to make claims for epistemic expertise in these matters. As will become clear below, this form of boundary-work enables demographers to not only expand their claims for epistemic authority but also to demand a greater access to material and often to political resources. This particular genre of boundary-work is often accompanied by “funding wars” between different types of scholars within the same academic institution. These “funding wars,” as this chapter will suggest, further lead to the formation of new social types in Russian academia, a type I call “scientific brokers.” “Scientific brokers” mediate between academic institutions and the shifting political demands of the new Russian state and blur the symbolic boundaries between science and politics in new and unexpected ways.

Expansion is another form of boundary-work, used when scientists are trying to claim sole jurisdiction over a particular scientific domain when epistemic authorities from other fields are also trying to monopolize the same domain. The conflict between

different epistemic authorities in this boundary-work presents as one over who can represent reality better and more accurately. For scientists, the interpretive goal here is to distinguish themselves as more reliable and more relevant in the representation of natural reality. This boundary-work can be seen often in demographers' interactions with other social agents claiming to have expert knowledge in the matters of population policies. Contests with representatives of the Church, other religious activists, and experts in psychology often play a crucial role in the scientists' attempts to claim epistemic authority in the matters of population. Social scientists often challenge psychologists' or religious activists' right to truthfully represent the population problem. This is because the population debate is constructed around the questions of morality, virtue, and the semantically confusing concept of *dukhovnost*' (which, as described above, literally means 'spirituality' but also has secular connotations), for demographers, creating symbolic boundaries around population dynamics as an object of scientific study rather than a matter of saving souls becomes an urgent task in the scientists' attempts to claim jurisdiction over issues of population policy. In short, in this kind of boundary-work demographers or social scientists involved in demographic research and population policy expertise seek to claim an exclusive epistemic authority over the matter at hand.

Finally, scientists might engage in the boundary-work of *protecting their autonomy* vis-à-vis powers outside of the scientific field (e.g., policymakers, administrators etc.). Through these strategies and rhetorical practices scientists fortify their cultural authority and sustain their social characteristics and goals. Scientists might erect symbolic boundaries in order to protect their professional autonomy regarding the selection of their research problems. They can also distinguish between knowledge that they produce and

consequences stemming from this knowledge (or its uses), in order to escape responsibility and demands for greater accountability (Gieryn 1999:17-18). The last part of this chapter is devoted to this genre of boundary-work. To achieve such autonomy from the state, yet also at the same time to demand its support, scholars in the Institute, this section of the chapter argues, engage in this boundary-work, but with the goal to maintain a certain flexibility between the boundaries of “pure” and “applied” scientific knowledge. Maintaining the flexibility of the boundaries between these “pure” and “applied” forms of social scientific knowledge constitutes these scholars’ positions as cultural authorities and expert communicators in the matters of population policy and the perceived crisis of underpopulation. As these social scientists continue to both protect and transcend the boundaries of their epistemic authority, they gain access to new material, organizational, and conceptual resources, and they redefine themselves as experts who have ever-greater authority over population as the object of their knowledge and over more and more applied applications of this knowledge.

This chapter draws on three interrelated threads of scholarship, each one of them adding a different dimension to the complex picture of the production and circulation of demographic knowledge in the context of political transformations. First, symbolic boundaries and boundary-work constitute one general theme. In the case of social scientists in contemporary Russia, focusing on boundaries is particularly analytically pertinent. Massive political transformations and extensive reforms in the field of scientific research overall in Russia demand a social analysis of science there that focuses on the historical and political contexts in which the practices of demarcating science occurs. Multiple styles of boundary-work in which social scientists in the institute are

involved are both the products of the peculiar Soviet history of demography as a discipline, its ambiguous relationship to the Soviet state and the outcome of the larger institutional and political transformations taking place in post-Soviet Russia. Therefore, the historical conjuncture, where knowledge about population becomes valuable and the ambiguous historical trajectory of demography both as an “ally” of the state and a constant “troublemaker” is reconsidered, can shed light on how social agents maintain their distinctive status and make their strategies recognizable in the eyes and ears of their “audience.”

The second thread of the chapter is expertise and its enactment. In the recent years, social scientific research has made a gradual transition from the well-developed study of professions as bounded social entities (Abbott 1988) to the study of expertise as constituted by networks (Eyal and Buchholz 2010). Yet Abbott (1988), whose sociological model of professions is built on the premises of bounded communities, has an analytical flexibility that can account for new forms of expertise built as channels through which ideas circulate from society to government and from one country to another. Although Abbott spent a considerable amount of time thinking of professions as bounded entities, later in his intellectual career, he began focusing on boundaries as *preceding* social entities: “social entities come into existence when social actors tie social boundaries together in certain ways. Boundaries come first, then entities” (Abbott 1995:860). For instance, he explains the emergence of social work as a profession similarly to how contemporary sociologists and anthropologists of expertise would describe the emergence of a new epistemic community as a network of social actors: “That is, social work emerged when actors began to hook up the women from psychiatric

work with the scientifically trained workers from the kindergartens with the non-church group in friendly visiting and the child workers in probation. All those people were placed “within” social work, and the others ruled outside it (Abbott 1995:869).

Following Abbott (1995), in my analysis of how social scientists participating in the population debate enact their expertise, I have chosen to focus on boundaries rather than on already existing and bounded social entities (e.g., professions or scientific disciplines). Because boundary-work always takes into account historical, cultural, and political contexts in which scientists operate and conduct their intellectual activities, focusing on boundaries allows me to follow the practices and strategies that constitute the emergence and enactment of expertise. Yet, unlike other studies of epistemic communities, which focus on expertise “as a distributed property, a property not of individuals or even of groups, but of a whole network that needs to be put in motion for a statement to hold up, circulate, and produce effects” (Eyal and Buchholz 2010), I am interested in people enacting expertise and in discourses and practices that generate these as such. Following anthropological studies of expertise and producers of knowledge, my study focuses not on a bounded entity of experts but on a structural position of an expert in a society undergoing social and political changes (Bourdieu 1988; Verdery 1991). Studying the mechanisms of maintaining and blurring boundaries employed by social scientists involved in population research enables both the mechanisms by which they set themselves apart from the rest of the society to be seen, and the symbolic resources (e.g., interpretive strategies, conceptual distinctions) employed by scientists towards receptive audiences to be revealed (Fuller 1991).

Finally, and related to the enactment of expertise, is the third theoretical thread of

this chapter: the historical role of intellectuals and producers of knowledge in socialist and postsocialist societies. As mediators between power and knowledge, intellectuals play an important role in “forming and transmitting discourses, [and] in constituting thereby the means through which society is ‘thought’ by its members, and in forming human subjectivities” (Verdery 1991:17). Aside from the large volume of literature on intellectuals and their political allegiances in Western societies (Chomsky 1969; Lemert 1991; Gouldner 1985), there is an abundance of literature on the role of “intelligentsia” as a particular form of non-western intellectual cadres in both the creation of the Soviet project and in its dissolution (Konrad & Szel’enyi 1979; Bauman 1987; Eyal 2003; Eyal et al 1998; Verdery 1991). In socialist societies, intellectuals played an important role as mediators between knowledge and power. Theoretical knowledge produced by intellectuals was intimately related to the institutions of power, by either confirming their legitimacy or by providing critiques or reflections on them (Bradatan and Oushakine 2010). Verdery (1991), for instance, argues that Romanian intellectuals – even those who claimed to be in opposition to the party – in fact buttressed its power by reproducing a national ideology that was embedded in the Romanian communist party rule (p. 309).

At the same time, intellectuals played a crucial role in the process of political and economic transformations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In Central European countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, independent intelligentsia (think Vaclav Havel) blocked the party nomenclature and began acting as a cultural bourgeoisie in charge of building capitalist institutions. As a result, Central Europe saw the emergence of what scholars described as ‘capitalism without capitalists’ – a social order with developed capitalist markets and stock exchanges administrated by

intelligentsia with a small and weak proprietary class that has few ownership rights (Eyal 2000, 2003; Eyal et al 1998). In the Russian context, the intelligentsia – although an active and prominent part of the Soviet society – lost its prominence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and its role in the national politics has been diminished (Oushakine 2010). Yet, in the new context of ethnic politics in the former Soviet Union, scholars and intellectuals are coming again to play an important role in providing guidance for political action for both Russian ultra-nationalists and non-Russian population of the federation (Shnirelman 1998; Oushakine 2010; Derlugian 2005). Thus, for example, through the rewriting of Russia's past, the intelligentsia participates in the construction of ethnocentric narratives about the national history (Oushakine 2010).

My study contributes to this literature the claims that knowledge produced by intellectuals, such as the knowledge that constitutes the population debate, has its origins in the theoretical and ideological debates characteristic of the socialist period (Bradatan and Oushakine 2010; Oushakine 2010; Eyal 2000). Both the current population debate and theoretical debates in the discipline of demography have their roots in the socialist period. Following Verdery (1991), my claim is that aside from theoretical arguments, scholars participating in the population debate produce social meanings and new definitions of reality that give means to society members to think about themselves and others. These ideological debates have their roots in the Soviet history of demography and its complicated relationships with the state. Therefore, to trace the genealogy of the population debate, it is imperative to follow the historical trajectory of the discipline of demography, its scholars, and their relationships with the state.

Introducing the Field

The social scientific institute where I conducted my research was founded in 1971 in Yekaterinburg (then Sverdlovsk) under the authority of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The Institute is located at the intersection of two main streets of the downtown area of the city and occupies a monumental building that exemplifies the architectural style associated with the Stalinist period of the Soviet history – a form of neoclassicism also known as ‘Stalin’s Empire Style’. The building belongs to the Russian Academy of Sciences, which in turn makes it the property of the state, but the administration of the Institute has been renting out large parts of its real estate so that research centers of the Institute share spaces with a private medical clinic, a tourism firm, and an insurance company.¹⁷

The Institute is the largest research center for the study of social and economic dimensions of the social and industrial life in the Ural region, almost entirely devoted to research, with a certain degree of graduate training. Although economics as a discipline and economy as an object of study dominate the Institute’s research departments, its official mission is to promote interdisciplinary approaches to a variety of economic and social issues specific to the Urals region and to Russia more broadly. Interdisciplinarity has been widely discussed in Western academia, particularly in the context of new modes of investigation emerging from a new knowledge economy with its new organizational principles (Strathern 2000, 2003; Barnett 1999; Power 1999). Thus, in this context,

¹⁷Several months after I left the field, the district attorney ordered a thorough legal examination of the real estate operations done by the Institute and found serious violations of laws regarding the use of state property. The arbitration of the problem is still underway. <http://www.nr2.ru/ekb/308622.html>

interdisciplinarity is often associated with classic liberal economics, where different equal parties exchange goods and services and benefit from each other's respective expertise or knowledge (Hoffman 2011). The increasing interest in interdisciplinary knowledge is also related to the growing demands of centralization and standardization that the higher education system is undergoing in Western Europe and North America. This leads to institutional monitoring and the rise of academic audit, both shaping the processes of knowledge production in contemporary Western academia (Brenneis 2009; Strathern 2000).

Yet, in the institute where I conducted my research, interdisciplinarity is old news. Historians, sociologists, economists, and demographers have been working together in the institute since Soviet times when, according to Marxist doctrine, economic research was considered inseparable from other dimensions of social life. The new mode of investigation in post-Soviet Russia, it seems, is rather leaning toward a larger conservation of the division of labor between disciplines than towards greater interdisciplinarity. Thus, today in the Institute, economists and strictly macro-economic research dominate all four major research departments and there is only one truly interdisciplinary research team, which I joined at the commencement of my fieldwork. The head of the research team that I joined in the institute, an economist himself, reflected on this growing division of labor quite clearly: "Disciplines are segmenting. Just within economics we have over twenty sub-disciplines and they rarely overlap. The result is that while it offers an opportunity to train experts, social reality as such ceases to be a legitimate object of study. Instead, it is all about abstract theoretical and methodological research and this is what the Academy of Sciences promotes right now."

Despite multiple changes that the Russian scientific field has undergone during the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is certainly continuity between the old and the new structures of the Institute and the structure of science more generally. First, the Institute – and its current structuring – is a direct descendant of the corresponding Soviet research institute. Shortly after the revolution in 1917, the Soviet state began developing an independent network of specialized research institutes devoted to the training of a scientific vanguard of the ‘new’ country. These research centers were often directly related to the creation and development of industrial complexes by the newly established state. Because of these close ties to industry, the practical aspects and the applicability of research produced by institutes had an especially important place in managing their reputation. In fact, even today, one of the formal requirements¹⁸ for graduate students when they defend their dissertations is to provide the committee with a proof that their study has a practical significance for either a particular industry or policy and that practitioners in this field approved the applicability of their research.

The result of the Soviet system was an almost dual system of universities on the one hand, and specialized research centers with no educational duties on the other hand. Both in terms of state support and in terms of their public imagination, research centers and researchers working there were situated higher on the social ladder (Vucinich 1984: 72-91; 144-146).¹⁹ Post-Soviet Russia inherited this dual system on all its social effects.

¹⁸ Although it is largely only a formality.

¹⁹ This situation is different from other countries where the institutionalization of professional researchers within the scientific field happened in the second half of the 20th century and was “a break with the most specific characteristic of the university model – the conflation of the activities of teaching and research – with the result that pedagogical debates and concerns are very often the true motive for publications with scholarly

In recent years, however, this hierarchical system has been coming under attack. For instance, under the auspices of President Medvedev's modernization reforms, the government has devised a new vertical hierarchy within the higher education system between federal and regional institutions, the aim of which is to reunite research and university education in Russia.²⁰ The funding opportunities behind the reform prompted different institute departments to create collaborative ties with regional universities.

Therefore, the continuity is structural rather than aspirational. When, shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a large fraction of academicians wanted to transform the new Academy of Sciences into a learned society of the North American or Western European kind, moving Russia towards a university-based research culture rather than an institute-based one, the leadership of the new Russian Academy of Sciences voted to remain a large, Soviet-style bureaucratic organization, with control over a vast network of laboratories and institutes doing fundamental research (Graham and Dezhina 2008).

The Institute's transformation from a Soviet to a Russian research body did, however, entail a series of economic changes and administrative reforms while its structure remained mostly intact. When the Soviet Union was breaking apart, and as the new Russian Academy of Sciences emerged, the Old Soviet Academy was in a precarious position, finding itself discredited by its leadership's siding with the army generals who attempted to reverse Gorbachev's reforms in 1991 (Graham and Dezhina 2008:15). This was a period of historical upheavals, and it was also a moment when radical reforms in science were proposed. Yet only a few of them were ultimately implemented by the state.

pretensions, and that the most 'personal' research can so often provide material for the classes preparing pupils for academic entrance examinations" (Bourdieu 1988: 123).

²⁰ <http://www.expert-ural.com/1-461-9462/>

During Gorbachev's rule, intellectuals from the Soviet Academy were given an unprecedented degree of independence. In 1990, Gorbachev even issued a decree granting the Soviet Academy of Sciences full ownership over its property and real estate, while still being fully funded by the state. Yeltsin later reversed the decree, while granting the Academy the right to "operative management and economic authority over federal property" (Allakhverdov 1996:424). It is this law that enabled the leadership of the institute to rent out parts of the institute space to various commercial enterprises.²¹

During the 1990s, research institutes funded by the state through the Academy of Sciences were in deep crisis. In fact, the practice of renting out institute space to commercial enterprises in order to increase revenues was born out of the financial crisis that the Academy of Sciences had undergone in the decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Graham and Dezhina 2008:29). During this decade and then even more so in the decade following the transition from Yeltsin's government to Putin's rule, scientific research institutes began moving towards a new form of external, non-governmental funding, with which few of the scholars had previously been familiar. In the Soviet Union, research projects were centrally funded by the state. This direct form of funding was complemented by contracts with specific industrial enterprises and ministries interested in research and development (Graham 1993; Ninetto 2005). Financial support from the state, along with contracts with local industrial enterprises and ministries (e.g., a long-term contract with the ministry of natural resources for the institute where I conducted research) still constitutes a considerable percentage of the institute funding. Yet, as part of a larger set of market-oriented policies and the process of

²¹ And in turn to the opportunities for possible corruption I mentioned above.

the reorganization of the field of scientific research in Russia, scholars have been encouraged to solicit funding from non-governmental granting agencies, a practice largely unfamiliar to scholars and scientists educated in the Soviet Union and accustomed to the state funding their research (Ninetto 2005).

Furthermore, although the government investments into science have increased since the early 2000, the institute suffered a gradual budget cut since the general state budget for science and research has been gradually decreasing (Graham & Dezhina 2008). The financial crisis of 2008 wounded this budget even further and at the time of my fieldwork, in 2009 and 2010, the budget of the Institute had been further cut by 20%. Deciding how to deal with the crisis without laying-off people, the institute director in collaboration with the union offered researches who reached retirement age (55 for women and 60 for men) part-time employment opportunities (70-80% of the full employment). This, in turn, caused much turmoil in the corridors of the Institute and intensified already existing anxieties about the future of the institute budget and the effects of the ongoing reforms in the field of scientific research.

The Institute where I conducted my research was formed under Soviet scientific structures and many of its researchers were educated in Soviet times. The residual public image of the Institute as the scientific vanguard of the country is also a legacy of the Soviet period. Yet, the relationships between the Institute researchers and the state as well as its more general public image are in flux because of new relations to the government in general, and because of specific reconceptualizations of how the state should structure education and research. These restructurings of the scientific field also occurs in the context of a new market liberalism in which researchers learn to fight

against a variety new external factors and considerations.

Why is Demography Popular?

I arrived in the Institute at what appeared to be a very busy time for the majority of researchers. The administration of the Institute was trying to find ways to redistribute a significantly reduced budget, mostly in order to secure salaries. Using other resources such as renting out parts of the building owned by the institute or more precisely by the Russian Academy of Sciences, to commercial enterprises, the administration claimed to fund ongoing research projects and purchase necessary equipment and materials. Scholars, largely skeptical of the administration's level of concern for their wellbeing, were busy applying for competitive grants from international, federal, and regional agencies.

As I was getting used to my brand new desk in the office I shared with Dr. Borisov,²² a leading demographer at the Institute, and as I introduced myself to other researchers, I quickly learned that many of the researchers were preoccupied with approaching deadlines for federal and regional grant applications. "The demographic problem," in one way or another, seemed to be a popular topic in the majority of the scholars' grant applications. Their proposal titles ranged from "The Demographic Security of Russia and the Ural Region," to "The Demographic Modernization of Russia," from "The Role of Business in Improving Russia's Population Growth," to "The

²² The names of the researchers in this chapter are pseudonyms. I have changed certain aspects of Borisov's (my main interlocutor) professional and personal identities. To this end, I introduced to his character certain biographical aspects of other several social scientists with whom I worked in the field. I did this both to protect the identities of my interlocutors and to convey the importance of the interrelatedness of their particular trajectories to the history of the discipline of demography as well as the political history of the Soviet Union and Russia more generally.

Study of the Social Effects of the New Demographic Policies in the Sverdlovsk region.” The abundance of “demographic” titles, however, did not correlate either with the number of researchers trained in demography or with the number of researchers who would self-identify as demographers.

For researchers in the institute, demographers or not, “demographic” titles serve multiple purposes. My main interlocutor, Dr. Borisov, one of the few demographers employed by the institute since the Soviet period, explained to me the shift in the scholars’ interests: “Yes, this is new. Even if there are no demographers around, people use demography in their titles. They put “demographic” in their titles to show that they are doing relevant and important research.” To illustrate his point about the political nature of scientific topics, Borisov gave me an example from his Soviet past: “It is like when we were writing our dissertations back then. It was important when you defended your dissertation before or after the Party Congress, because sometimes you do it before but after the congress the party changes its program and then your work becomes irrelevant. If you do it after, you have time to adjust your work to any new decree that they had issued.”

Borisov further explained to me that this, as he called it, reductionist and utilitarian approach to demography is one of the reasons for what he called “the demographic illiteracy” in the country (*demographicheskaiia bezgramotnost’*). “Demographic illiteracy,” Borisov explained was an outcome of the very poor understanding on the part of policymakers in charge of the new population policies of what population is and what to do with it: “In demography, we used to have a good concept – population politics (*politika narodonaseleniia*). It encompasses different aspects of social reality – health,

economics, education, employment, personhood (*lichnost'*) etc. But see what we have today in the new policy, 'have more babies and don't die, (*bol'she detei i ne mrite*)', but without any consideration of other aspects of social life." This illiteracy, Borisov told me, leads directly to the very problematic demographic policies the country has had since the early 1990s. Population problems have been narrowly defined by the state and mechanically approached with no consideration of the changing social conditions. Identifying himself as an expert in population matters, with skills necessary to affect the policymaking process, Borisov continued: "I want to eradicate this demographic illiteracy (*I khochu im ustroit' demograficheskii likbez*)." As part of his mission to eradicate demographic illiteracy, Borisov teaches demography at the Academy of Public Administration because as he put it: "We need demographic cadres, we need bureaucrats who understand demography."

By choosing to explain his mission through the concept of the eradication of illiteracy (*likbez*), Borisov indexed a particular moment in the Soviet history, when following the Bolshevik revolution the Soviet government launched a widespread literacy campaign aimed at the total eradication of illiteracy in the country. It is a powerful metaphor, one that puts Borisov at the position of someone who can initiate a kind of a civilizing project, on the scale that the eradication of illiteracy (*likbez*) was. Inspired by the idea of the eradication of illiteracy, Borisov and his colleagues from Yekaterinburg and Moscow organized a series of training seminars for civil servants and high rank bureaucrats. He proposed several times (always quite unsuccessfully) to open a new research institute under the auspices of the regional government that would be devoted entirely to the monitoring and forecasting the demographic trends in the region. In his

letter to the governor Rossel he wrote: “The scope of depopulation processes is such that it requires the work of a group of well-trained demographers who could diagnose and offer solutions to the population problems.” Borisov offered the resources of his research center in the institute as the foundation for such a center.²³

The intended goal of Borisov’s educational activities is to teach bureaucrats to speak a specialist language of demography through the interactions with experts, like Borisov himself for instance. On the one hand, Borisov wants these bureaucrats to become experts with whom he can use a shared language. Yet, as the next chapter will demonstrate, Borisov’s interactions with bureaucrats are built in such a way that they require from the bureaucrats a perpetual refreshment of the language that they try to master. This refreshment, in turn, requires cyclical contacts with Borisov who is ultimately in charge of the language that bureaucrats are trying to learn (Collins and Evans 2007). At one of the regional conferences that he and his colleagues organized under the authority of the local parliament, as Borisov and I were listening to the first official speaker of the plenary panel (the governor of the Sverdlovsk oblast), he whispered in my ear: “I feel as if I created a demographic theatre (*demograficheskii teatr*) here. No one else can say such a thing.” Bureaucrats and government officials are the main social actors vis-à-vis whom Borisov and his colleagues try to establish themselves as experts in population policies with a clear epistemic authority over the domain of demography. I will come back to the demographers’ interactions with the state later in

²³ As the next chapter will demonstrate, the eradication of demographic illiteracy also requires professional development courses taught by Borisov and his colleagues at the Ural Academy of Public Administration and a series of conferences, which they envision as a space where policy experts and their allies in the government would meet and create alliances and partnerships.

this chapter.

Historical Interlude: Being a Demographer in the Soviet Union (and Afterwards)

Ivan Alexandrovich Borisov was born, as he once told me in “that cold summer of 1953,” referring to the havoc the death of Stalin wreaked on the country. He grew up in the family of a college teacher and a high-ranking civil servant and came of age in the late socialist period. When, after graduating from high school it was time to enroll in a university, Borisov first chose to study in the department of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, a trajectory that should have trained him to become a party nomenclature, the main ruling layer of the Soviet Union. When relating his personal narrative to me, Borisov stressed several times that although he indeed studied Marxism Leninism at the university, in his junior year, he and his classmates grew tired of and became disappointed by the concept of “developed socialism” (*k tret’emu kursu my uzhe ne liubili razvitoi sotsializm*).

The Ural State University was an influential place in Borisov’s life trajectory. He joined the lively political scene of Sverdlovsk, becoming friends with some of the people (e.g., Gennady Burbulis) who would eventually constitute the first post-Soviet Russian government under Boris Yeltsin. After graduating, Borisov went to work as a research assistant in the department of Marxist Leninist Philosophy at the Geological Institute where he was also the leader of the Youth Communist Organization (Komsomol). Demography was not something that a student in a large provincial university would study then: “We did not study demography. I don’t think anyone did. Maybe a few people in Moscow did. For us it was out of the question. The Soviet state was not

interested in demography because demographic research opens to view new and unnoticed facets of society that political regimes are not always eager to see.”

In the late 1970 he began his graduate training in Marxist-Leninist economics (*aspirantura*) at the Institute of Economics. Borisov’s advisor was a former high-ranking bureaucrat from the ministry of health (*oblastnoi otdel zdavookhraneniia*) of one of the autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics. According to Borisov, his advisor had been “expelled” from his ministerial position and sent to the Institute to do medical statistics: “He was working with vital statistics a lot but he was not a demographer.” When Borisov’s time to defend his dissertation about the economic history of family in the Ural region approached he took a train to Moscow where he met with demographers working in the USSR Academy of Sciences. After receiving a very harsh critique from his Moscow colleagues, Borisov realized that he was not doing real demographic research: “I realized that whatever people were doing here [in Sverdlovsk] and whatever I thought I was doing was not demography, it was mere population counting (*uchet naseleniia*). All the people I was working with were accountants, they were not demographers.” This realization made him postpone his defense for three years during which he educated himself in demography and also established contacts with colleagues from the Department of Economics in the Moscow State University (MGU), especially with the students of Prof D. I. Valentey, one of the most prominent Soviet demographers to have emerged in the post WW II period. This training also brought Borisov to a realization of the power of demography, embedded in its importance as a governing tool and as a tool that can bring about social change.

Borisov’s relation to demography is emblematic of a larger history of demography

in the Soviet Union. As Chapter I demonstrated, the history of Soviet demography is a turbulent one. Pre-Soviet demography has epistemological roots in the modern forms of power, and in many ways and until the early 20th century, resembles the way the discipline of demography developed in the West (Blum 2001, Holquist 2010). The majority of the founders of Soviet demography and statisticians began conducting their research long before the Bolshevik revolution. Statisticians from the parochial statistical authorities of the Russian empire (*zemstva*) brought their expertise and knowledge to the newly established Central Statistical Administration (TsSU) of the Soviet Union and demographic institutes in the country (Blum 2001; Blum & Mespoulet 2003; Holquist 2003, 2010). Very much like their Western counterparts they saw statistical sciences of population as crucial in the apparatus of a scientific government – a concept born out of modernizing projects of the 19th century (Blum 2001). They envisioned demography to be independent of politics and yet they saw it as the best instrument to govern their new modern society.

The majority of demographers and statisticians, however, were purged and the two major demographic institutes were closed down during the worst years of Stalin's terror after the second Soviet census of 1937 did not live up to Stalin's expectations (Blum & Mespoulet 2003; Feshbach 1986). It does not mean that statistics were abolished altogether. To the contrary: "The facility with which the Soviet government classified, isolated, and determined many of its policies was certainly to some extent a consequence of this new statistical view of government" (Blum 2001: 293). The immediate result of the new approach to statistics and demography was that the numbers produced by statisticians and social reality construed by demographic research was largely suppressed

and the number of people with access to these numbers became extremely limited (Blum & Mespoulet 2003; Blum 2001, 2004).

Thus, the institute where Borisov and several other demographers worked during the late Soviet period was still as closed a structure as the city itself,²⁴ and their research and their access to classified data was even more so. To work with the confidential and classified data, they had to have a special permit from the KGB department in charge of the political surveillance in the Institute (also known as the KGB's First Department (*pervii otдел*)). They worked under very strict surveillance while researching in state archives or copying data into their notebooks. They were not allowed to carry any materials or notes outside the archives or libraries. Only when provided with an official request from the Institute, these places would send the researchers the data with a special courier to their workplace.

Borisov's older colleague in the institute, Dr. Raisova, once, over a glass of wine, told me a story about what it meant for her to do demographic research in the Soviet Union. In the late 1970s, Raisova spent time at the library in Moscow meticulously copying numbers into her notebook (and computing them laboriously in the evenings) when a librarian who had been greeting her every morning for several weeks, and was the only person on duty there that day, asked her permission to go out and leave her alone in the library. The librarian explained: "there is a sale at the GUM [a large department store in Moscow], they have boots today (*sapogi daiut*), and I really need a pair." The 'sale' she would have been referring to was somewhat different from what an average person living in a capitalist society might have in mind on hearing the word. Here, the notion of

²⁴ Until 1991, Yekaterinburg (then Sverdlovsk) was a city tightly closed to foreigners because of the high concentration of defense research and development facilities.

a ‘sale’ is an index to a different social reality, in which everyone had to have their finger on the pulse of the map of distribution of goods and services to know, not when goods were ‘on sale,’ but rather when they were simply ‘for sale’. The shortage economy, in which both Raisova and the librarian were living, required a degree of social skills and connections to “get” things (Ledeneva 1998). This was clearly an opportunity the librarian could not miss and it was something Raisova herself would easily have identified with.

The librarian continued: “Can I leave you here alone? But then I’ll have to lock you inside [so she can’t take the materials out].” Raisova did not object but after four hours of waiting she was in a dire need to go to a restroom. When it became unbearable, the only thing she could find to substitute for a toilet was a plant pot, which she then took away with her on her way out in order not to embarrass the librarian who came back only six hours later – the line was very long, she explained.

Raisova’s story encompasses the multi-layered social fabric of the Soviet Union. It is a story about the effects of Soviet economic and security regimes on people’s everyday lives – the Soviet economy of shortage made the librarian to wait in line for six hours to buy a pair of shoes and in Raisova’s case, both of the regimes interfered with her most basic human needs. It is also about a shared understanding and compassion of two people living in the same context – Raisova instead of being angry six hours later was concerned with the other’s embarrassment. Finally, it is about the state mismanagement in which along with the strict security protocols, Raisova now had an unrestrained access to the library for six hours. At first glance, in the overdetermined reality of Raisova’s story demography does not play any special role as Raisova could have been studying

anything, except of course for the irony that it was the Soviet state's attitude to demographic statistics and the special restricted access to statistical data that caused all these problems.

Not long after Borisov defended his *kandidatskaia* (postgraduate degree) in 1984, things began changing rapidly in the Soviet Union. He became interested in a political career and he soon joined the vibrant political scene of Yekaterinburg, then still Sverdlovsk, and the hometown of Boris Yeltsin, Russia's first president. Actively participating in the political life of the country and the region in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Borisov became the member of the newly established liberal political party and even ran for the local parliament, an episode he does not feel comfortable talking about. At this time he left the Institute where he had worked since defending his *kandidatskaia* to devote himself to municipal politics. Similarly to many well-known descriptions of the early 1990s, Borisov recalls this period in his life as "an era of political naivety (*politicheskii naivniak*) and democratic schizophrenia (*dem shiza*). We had no idea what we were doing and we did not know how to go about what we wanted to do." Such transitions into politics were not unusual for intellectuals and people with academic backgrounds who were active in the political life of the Soviet Union during the perestroika era and shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, universities and research institutes welcome these people back willingly because they bring with them political connections and personal contacts that they can activate in order to secure funding and the financial support of the state.

After he became disillusioned with politics in the mid 1990s, Borisov turned his back on his political career and returned to academia. He defended his doctoral

dissertation (*doktorskaia*) under the supervision of a Moscow-based professor of sociology, Anatoly Antonov, on the ethno-demographic development of the Urals in the 19th-20th centuries. Since then he has held a research position in the institute and has close ties with the Ural Academy of Public Administration²⁵ where he teaches demography to civil servants and public administrators enrolled in professional development courses. Borisov's understanding of demography as an important administrative instrument is part of his project towards the eradication of demographic illiteracy, which he announced to me as his professional and personal duty.

Throughout the history of Soviet demography, researchers' knowledge and access to statistical data often concealed from others made them both allies and "troublemakers" in the eyes of the state. Some fifteen or more years of practical non-existence in the interwar period and relatively late re-emergence as a sub-area of the discipline of economics left the boundaries of the discipline of demography flexible, to say the least, if not even blurred and undefined. Precisely because of this flexibility and contrary to a more totalitarian understanding of Soviet science, the discipline of demography in the Soviet Union had a degree of autonomy, which, in turn, led to the publications and debates that clearly contradicted the official positions of the Soviet state. An inheritor of the turbulent history of demography in the Soviet Union, Borisov sees himself as an expert with the ability to systematize chaotic social processes using statistical and

²⁵ The Ural Academy of Public Administration is a current reincarnation of the Sverdlovsk High Party School (*Vysshaia Partiinaia Shkola [VPSH]*) where a party member could receive a degree in four years (compared to the regular five). In 1991, VPSH was transformed into the Ural Center for the Government Cadres (*Ural'skii Kadrovyy Tsentri*), that trained experts in market economy and offered courses for government and municipal bureaucrats. In 1995, the Center finally was transformed into the Ural Academy of Public Administration.

demographic knowledge. In his interpretation of his structural position, this is what makes him a valuable asset in the state's attempt to bring about social change.

Scientific Brokers: Expulsion, Expansion, and “Funding Wars”

Because of the particularity of the historical development of the discipline of demography in the Soviet Union that found its home in the departments of economics rather than sociology, there is a rival authority, in interaction with which, Borisov and his colleagues deploy one or more forms of boundary-work in order to claim and maintain their expert status. When demography reappeared on the Soviet social scientific field in 1960s and 1970s, having been *de-facto* destroyed by Stalin some 30 years earlier (see Chapter I), it became formally a sub-discipline of economics.²⁶ Demographers themselves, when reflecting on the history of their discipline, recall the 1970s as the period when the discipline flourished anew (especially the work of Dmitry I. Valentey at the Moscow State University, and Andrei G. Volkov and Aron Y. Boyarskii at the research institute of the Central Statistical Administration of the USSR) and when the level of state control imposed over the knowledge they produced was bearable. Mark Tolts, whose career in demography began during this period, interpreted the relative freedom of demography thus: “In economics, there were a lot of things that the party inspectors were interested in controlling. However, things that were of interest to demography – abortions, death and other exotic things – were beyond their purview. It is pure luck that in the 1970s,

²⁶ Notably, during the 1954 World Population Conference, Soviet representatives refused to participate in the discussions about the UN backed policies that might reduce population rate in order to increase the standard of living in developing countries with the claim that “demography was a subfield of statistics, and as such, should not involve discussions of such policy-related concepts as ‘optimum population’” (Desfosses 1981:189).

demography became the least controlled discipline among all other social sciences” (Tolts 2006). This also explains the dual status of demography in late socialism, as an ally that supplied the state with data about population necessary for managing it, on the one hand, and as a troublemaker that used its marginal position in social sciences to openly critique the state and its approaches to population (see Chapter I).

Because of this particular development of the discipline of demography, Borisov has been working with economists since he defended his dissertation in 1984. For him, economics is an interpretive framework against which he sees and analyses social reality. The discipline of economics dominates the Institute in its current structure and the majority of grant applications that have “demography” in their titles are submitted by macro and micro-economists. About his position in the Institute and about working with economists, Borisov told me that he constantly feels like he is ‘at home among strangers and a stranger at home’ (*svoi sredi chuzhikh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh*): “I understand them, they understand me, but we are strangers. They [economists] don’t see demographic trends as a legitimate object of study. Because economists dominate this place, they can only see the very basic causal relationships between demographic variables. This is different from how demographers think about social reality.”

A debate that took place at one of the dissertation defenses I observed at the Institute illustrates the constant tension between economists and demographers. With a few minor differences, I often encountered this type of interaction in the institute. The dissertation study by a young economist was devoted to “the social and demographic security of the Russian Federation,” and it formed part of a larger corpus of works with “demographic titles,” conducted by economists. After a long formal presentation,

comments, and the graduate student's responses to twelve (!) examiners, there was a time for a free discussion. Borisov raised his hand and turning to the graduate student's advisor said in his usual theatrical manner: "Professor, mathematics is your evil genius. You put too much trust in mathematical calculations. You enter all the data into your models and you think it does all the work for you. It already happened once to demography in this country. It was completely destroyed by mathematics." Borisov then turned to the graduate student herself: "You use indicators, call them demographic but they are not. Here," he pointed to the brochure we had all received at the beginning of the defense, "income is not a demographic variable, it is an economic one. Demographic variables should explain how generations reproduce themselves, how they are replaced. I have asked you before whether you use TFR [total fertility rate] in your work but you could not answer this question. But now I see on page 144 that you do," he pointed to page 144 in the same brochure and showed it to the audience. "Now, I will vote for you."

The director of the institute, an economist himself, who was a moderator of the defense, replied to Borisov. Before he proceeded to praising the dissertation, he interpreted the nature of Borisov's response: "Ivan Alexandrovitch is a demographer and he likes to remind us about it. He always has special requirements for us. But let's not forget, this is a study at the intersection of economics, economic security, and demography and it has to respond to the requirements of the discipline of economics too. And should be evaluated as such."

As this debate illustrates, Borisov clearly engages in a boundary-work of expulsion and expansion, contesting with his colleagues who are economists the domain of their epistemic authority. Both he and his economist colleagues do an interpretive

work of drawing boundaries around their expertise and presenting their claims about social (in this case, demographic) reality as scientifically credible. To expand the domain of their expertise, both seek to present their interpretations of social reality as the only scientifically legitimate way to speak about it. By drawing boundaries around demography as the domain of his expertise, Borisov challenged the economists' privilege to occupy this space and to be credible judges of the population problem. Pointing out that the student, as well as her advisor, lack the necessary scientific instruments to interpret reality, was a means for Borisov to draw a boundary of legitimacy and to show who has a monopoly over his domain of expertise (Gieryn 1999).

The boundary-work of expulsion and expansion vis-à-vis economists was in particularly abundant around the period of grant application fever. I was in Borisov's office reading his grant application for the regional funding agency. As part of his "eradication of demographic illiteracy" project, he proposed to study civil servants' attitudes towards the crisis of underpopulation and the new high priority national demographic policy. Without knocking, another researcher entered. It was Dr. Dolov, an economist and the head of another research center in the Institute. Pausing only briefly to exchange pleasantries, Dr. Dolov quickly moved on to his real topic, and told us that his center was busy applying for a large federal grant. Their proposed research dealt, he explained, with the social and demographic security of Russia and the Ural region. After I asked him what he meant by that, Dr. Dolov told me that they were going to study social and demographic processes in the region using mathematical models. He added, "we have a team of very talented mathematicians who create these models but we need a demographer to apply for this grant." Dolov then turned to Dr. Borisov and asked: "Do

you want to be on our team? Can I put your name in? I will give you the title of leading demographer on the team. I will pay you 15,000 RUB (~\$500). I am not a sociologist or a demographer and frankly I am very skeptical about these disciplines but we need a more holistic team, we need a demographer.”

Borisov had a disconcerted expression on his face, while barely looking at Dolov, he immediately rejected his proposal: “I have my own grants to apply for. I have two applications that are due soon and I don’t even have time to think about anything else.” After Dolov left, Borisov appeared furious about Dolov’s attempt to lure him to work for another team. I must have seemed rather perplexed by their conversation, for, before I even had time to phrase my own questions, Borisov explained:

Every research team in the Institute has to apply for grants – this is our new form of funding. Even when I apply for a research grant, the money goes to the team.²⁷ Teams compete with each other. Some teams apply for grants even if they don’t have people to do the work, like what you saw here. After Dolov receives this grant he’ll pay someone to do this part of the research for him. And many people would do this because it is a good opportunity to get paid and to publish in a legitimate monograph or a scholarly journal.

I asked Borisov, “but what about demography? Given the title of his proposed research ‘demographic security,’ doesn’t he have to have someone on his staff who does demographic research?” Frantically pacing back and forth in the room, Borisov replied:

He does ‘demographic research’ without knowing demography. He puts demography in the title because this is what brings him money. Because it is popular, I guess. But if you ask him, he can’t tell the difference between fertility, mortality, and migration. They [Dolov’s team] can’t tell the difference between total fertility rates and net reproduction rates.

²⁷ Technically, the law states that scholars can apply for research grants on an individual basis without gaining permission from their institute (Allakhverdov 1996). Yet, the majority of grants are submitted in the name of an institute or at least in the name of a particular research team. The researchers told me that the chances of an independent scholar receiving an external research grant are very slim.

Further highlighting an abundance of power struggles in the institute, Borisov emphasized a distinction between his credentials as a demographer and other pseudo-experts who use demographic variables without doing demographic research. The importance of this kind of boundary-work lies in the very applicability of demographic research and its popularity as an object of study in the current political context. In this scenario, it is not that the value of demography as a producer of knowledge is downplayed or ignored. Rather it is both acknowledged and deployed – by too many. Thus, this applicability and popularity of demographic research threatens Borisov's autonomy as an expert (Carr 2010). To preserve it, he relies on his intimate knowledge of the research routine and his close engagement with the object of his study. The skill of knowing when to trust and when not to trust statistical data distinguish Borisov's status as an expert in possession of valuable demographic knowledge from other "pseudo-experts" such as Dolov and his team (Knorr-Cetina 1999). "He does not know what he is talking about" can describe Borisov's interpretation of Dolov's pseudo-authority. This not knowing the language implies the impossibility of embedding him in the social group of experts in demography (Collins and Evans 2007:7).

It further appeared that Borisov was disconcerted with the fact that both he and Dolov are most likely applying for the same grants and using very similar tactics to attract funds:

It is all about money after all. He offered me 10% of his grant money to do the demographic part for him. His goal as the director of a research center is to find money, get it through successful grant applications, do research as quickly as possible and then flee in different directions. He has to put "demographic" in everything he does because it brings federal money. He is like a manager and not a researcher.

This new social type of what I call a “scientific broker,” – an intellectual who is also a successful manager and a bureaucrat – constitutes new modes of production, circulation and expression of scientific knowledge. This social role could be also described as what Bourdieu calls “a new kind of cultural producer, whose presence in the academic field (in the enlarged sense which is increasingly tending to become the norm) constitutes a decisive break with the fundamental principles of academic autonomy, and with the values of disinterestedness, magnanimity and indifference to the sanctions and demands of practice” (Bourdieu 1988: 124). Although Borisov can see Dolov operating as a broker, it is clear that Borisov himself is also engaged in the same broking process. Many of the scientific brokers I met while conducting research had a trajectory similar to that of Borisov – leaving academia for politics and then coming back to academia with secured political connections and a better understanding of the complex bureaucratic machine of the state. Scientific brokers have their finger on the pulse of new funding opportunities and new possibilities for R&D contracts.

In addition to being successful bureaucrats, “scientific brokers” take over existing business practices to secure funding for their research teams. The results of the interactions between business and academic practices are often complex. The situation gains an extra complication in the present Russian context where existing business practices are not always well regulated or even legal. Thus, given the semi-illegal status of these practices, I will describe the following scheme without using specific names or titles. According to the federal law number 94 of the Russian Federation, any government agency, be it a federal ministry or a municipal department in a small town, must put a request to carry out any work for them out to an open tender. Contracts are supposedly

awarded on the basis of the combination of the best economic value and quality of work that will be done (Duma 2005). This is not how things always proceed. For example, Ministry X might put out a request to tender for demographic or sociological research on a relevant social issue. Before Ministry X publicly advertizes the tender and so before the competition is open to all bidders, an official from this government agency alerts their contact at a research institute Y. Research institute Y then magically wins the bid and receives a small grant of 150,000 RUB to conduct the desired research. Research institute Y then kicks back 30,000RUB to its Ministry's "man's" personal account, so that 20% of this grant is, what is in this Russian parlor game, called "paid under the table."

Scientific brokers often establish commercial organizations, such as "research institute Y," which in reality exist only on paper, to create legitimate routes of mediation between researchers ready to use their scientific skills and bureaucrats from the government agencies responsible for the R&D budgets of the ministry. After research institute Y wins the bid, a scientific broker needs to find researchers ready to collect and interpret data for 20-30% (30,000-50,000 RUB) of the grant money research institute Y received from the government. The rest of the money (50-60% of the grant) goes directly to the scientific broker who mediated between the state structure and the researchers and who most likely also puts it into his personal account. Besides being obviously questionable from the legal point of view, anthropologically speaking this fragmentation and restructuring of the "scientific market" (*nauchnyi rynok*), as some of my interlocutors call it, constitutes new forms of identities and new social roles scientists and researchers have to embark on (also see Ninetto 2005). Many of them leave research for good. Borisov once lamented a talented young researcher, a graduate student of his for several

years, who had left the institute and was working in the private sector. More often, though, researchers try to combine their work in the Institute with other complementary jobs, some of them include doing research (e.g., surveys, market research) “on the side,” or as they say “crunching numbers for money.”²⁸ However problematic, in the context of drastic budget cuts many researchers cherish such opportunities to earn extra money and often actively seek these opportunities. One of them told me once: “I need to finish this research as soon as possible because I have a lot of private clients waiting for me to do their work.”

The growing importance of demographic research that the funding agencies are interested in further intensifies the interpretive work invested in the boundary-work between economists and demographers in the institute. Borisov and his colleagues explicitly and carefully address the purity of their craft vis-à-vis research conducted by economists who also make claims for the same epistemic domain. The stakes are high as both parties are competing for the same limited range of grants and they are forced to package their science to be legible to the funding agencies and the state, and to present their status as scientific experts having an epistemic monopoly over demography and possessing better skills in reading demographic reality.

Boundary-Work: Autonomy from and Protection of the State

Although the importance of independent funding agencies has been growing, the state and its different agents remain important actors in this regard, sources of support whom

²⁸ Supplementary jobs do not always consist of doing research for others. A woman from another research department told me that she and her husband own a little retail kiosk on the side of a road which helps them supplement their family income.

demographers in the institute seek to attract as potential collaborators and sponsors. As elsewhere, the relationships between science and the state are fraught with contradictions and tensions. Jasanoff (1990), when describing the development of science and technology advisory boards in the US, writes, “the oscillation between deference and skepticism toward experts can be observed at almost every stage in the rise of the modern administrative state” (p.9). In the case of the post-Soviet state, for both scientists and state agents, the ambiguity of the boundaries between science and policy is a particularly powerful resource in the case of demography’s boundary-work. As a discipline intimately related to modern forms of government, it requires its practitioners to pragmatically establish sharp or blurred boundaries between themselves and the state. By drawing seemingly sharp boundaries, demographers seek autonomy from the state and prevent others from challenging their scientific claims and their scientific authority (Jasanoff 1990). At the same time, to become a successful broker between science and the state, Borisov and his colleagues have been investing a lot of social energy in keeping the flexibility of these boundaries. Under different circumstances and depending on different social contexts and goals, the scholars I worked with, would emphasize or hold back one or another aspect of their work in order to keep these boundaries adaptable and adapted to their needs.

Borisov and his colleagues both strive to maintain rigid boundaries between themselves as the producers of knowledge, and others, mere consumers of this knowledge. They work equally hard to uphold their structural position as population policy experts with skills enabling them not only to describe social reality but also to give prescriptions for interventions into this reality. As this last section illustrates, they do so

by maintaining boundaries between “pure” and “applied” aspects of their research that are very flexible.

Consider one of the meetings periodically held with junior researchers on the team, where Borisov and Dr. Shuvalov, another senior researcher were presenting their proposal for a new comparative interdisciplinary research project. Briefly, the project would explore the relationships between the economic development of the Russian rust-belt’s town-companies and their demographic trends. Ten to fifteen different municipal centers with similar social and economic characteristics would be chosen for the study (it was later reduced to four). These municipal centers belong to what in the professional jargon is the category of mono-towns or also, latterly, “depressed territories” (*depressivnye territorii*) – former Soviet industrial towns that were built around one industrial enterprise and fell into decline following the privatization of their major industrial sites that effectively shut down the existing material infrastructure of these cities and led to a general economic and social decline (Collier 2011). The idea behind the project, Shuvalov said, would be to identify and diagnose the major social and economic problems in these towns. The project would involve the majority of young researchers at the Institute and would be based on their various expertise as sociologists, economists, and demographers.

After introductory remarks about the rationale of the project, one of the researchers present raised concerns about the way research questions had been constructed and presented to them. His major concern was that the task of exploring the relationships between economic development and demographic trends is an extremely sophisticated theoretical question and that it might potentially impede the progress of their research.

Borisov's response surprised me: "I hope you all know that you didn't come here [to the Institute] to do fundamental scientific research. Our goal here is to do applied science [*prikladnaia nauka*]. We've been doing it well for many years now and we will continue doing it. We already have existing models so we don't need to reinvent the wheel." I would have anticipated Borisov's response to this type of question to focus on the role of scientists in exploring fundamental and sophisticated scientific questions. Yet his response very clearly contradicted my expectations. Instead, he insisted on the importance of applied aspects of his research.

The conversation went on. Shuvalov turned to the young scholar who previously raised his concerns about the project,

You're thinking like a scientist (*uchenyi*) but we need to think more about how to attract government officials and bureaucrats (*chinovniki*), how to make them interested in this project. This kind of research project is what we need. But what do they [government officials] need? They lose people in these towns [because of the drastic population decline and migration patterns] and they need to attract them back because they need people to keep going to work.

I heard Borisov laughing before he responded,

No, that is not true. They [bureaucrats] don't care about people. That's laughable. But they can always use the word "demography" in this project as an investment card (*investitsionnyi kozyr*) to attract federal funding. So, if we want to talk about underpopulation then we need to talk about the causes and outcomes of the demographic crisis or something like that.

Another young sociologist, Aminov, who was working closely with Borisov on a variety of ongoing projects, added:

Because the main goal is to lure bureaucrats (*zamanit' chinovnikov*) we need to phrase it in a way that shows that applied [*prikladnye*] aspects of this research are more important. They might even benefit from depopulation as such – fewer people means fewer people to feed, plus you don't need to take care of the elderly.

A few people in the room seemed to be taken aback by his explicit cynicism. Perhaps he had pushed the boundaries too far, so Borisov was prompted to say that the problem of depopulation and its relation to economics is indeed a complicated question and that he suggests that we continue thinking about it and discussing it further.

Shuvalov, Borisov's senior colleague then recommended everyone to think about this project as a socially-inspired form of voluntarism (*obshestvenno-polezny trud*). After a few jokes, initiated mostly by Borisov but appreciated by all the team members, about how compulsory voluntarism actually was in the Soviet days, Shuvalov continued his line of thinking:

Voluntary with a twist however – the twist of potentially attracting investments from interested parties in the regional government. This project is not going to be funded by the Institute budget. We can either go and help children in orphanages or do this research. We should go to local politicians or government officials in these company towns, present this project as voluntarism *obshestvenno-polezny trud*. We help them solve the problem of their decline. If they get interested they can even bring investment from the federal government.

Aminov, who had worked on a similar project a few years previously with Borisov and other members of the team, supported this decision: “We already did something like this in the town X where we correlated between its potential economic development and different demographic variables. Remember,” – he turned to Borisov –

how they were bragging in the municipal government about the forecast that we did for them. For them it was clearly the way to attract regional or federal funds because they could show that by restructuring that old power plant they could attract that much population plus the natural population growth etc. And we got paid!

Borisov agreed with his colleague and concluded the meeting,

This is clearly the uniqueness of our times that these towns are encouraged to attract regional funds, and regions are trying to attract federal funds. And demography is playing an incredibly important role in this. It is our trump

card. Town X is again a good example. We also did it a few years ago when we compared different social characteristics of industrial sectors of the region – heavy metal industry, coalmines etc. Our final resolution is that we should do simple diagnostics of these places – what are their labor market situation, migration patterns, social issues etc. In short, why the situation is getting worse and what is the role of demographic trends in this.

I was intrigued by the openly cynical atmosphere of the meeting and shared my confusion with Borisov.

He explained in his usual somewhat world-weary tone:

In this country high-rank civil servants (*vysokopostavlennye chinovniki*) play a special role. They create myths. Political myths. For example, Basargin from the Ministry of Regional Development created a myth of the so-called “mono-cities,” cities that depend entirely on one industrial enterprise [company-towns]. Because the state acknowledges the problem and is officially ready to invest in it, this myth of “mono-cities” (company-towns) is supposed to attract investors and bring resources from the federal government. Before that there was a different myth, a myth of natural resources in the Northern Urals, which required investing in railroads. After they did it, it became a common knowledge that there are no natural resources there so they changed the story and told everyone that they couldn’t know before they built the railroads. They had to build them first in order to start searching for natural resources. You see, now they created a new myth about demography in order to have another plate to eat from (*kormushka*). The salaries are not good enough so they create these *kormushki* as independent sources of income.

After a few additional examples of how corrupt regional and city-based government officials create independent forms of income, he concluded by saying that as long as they (bureaucrats) create political myths, he and his colleagues can get creative with these same myths in order to get some work done. Instead of giving a specific example of how he and his colleagues can benefit directly from these political myths, Borisov silently pulled out a letter he crafted for the regional branch of Putin’s political party “United Russia” (*Yedinaia Rossiia*). The letter stated the objective of research on “depressed territories” as “creating an innovative project of improving the quality of life for people

in mono-cities and reviving the rich social and cultural traditions of the Ural region.” The letter then asked the local branch of the party to sponsor this project of “the social and cultural healing of the territories.” The letter was signed by the director of the Institute, whose status as an Academician, Borisov told me, lent the signature more weight than his own. Borisov let me read the letter and then asked: “Do you understand now? (*Poniala*). I thought I did. I then asked Borisov how he would reconcile the scientific goals and objectives of his research with the government officials’ interests in investing in this research.

He replied:

Do you mean if I would massage data? Never. We won’t hide anything from the government. We’ll show them our results. Our scientific interests always come first. Of course, there are going to be a lot of officials who won’t be willing to help, which is fine. If someone doesn’t want us there, then no one is going to twist his arm. This already happened to us in the past. Sometimes they don’t want us to do research because then they need to share it with people and they don’t want people to know the real dimensions of the problem. Sometimes they know that if people knew what the real situation was they would run away and never come back. So, we’ll work only with those who will be willing to help us with our research, who will give us a hand in organizing meetings, conducting surveys, interviews etc. Plus, we need to present it as if they initiated this project themselves. They need to know why they need it. One way to do it for example, is to organize a roundtable here in the Institute and let bureaucrats themselves talk. They would do anything for a little bit of public relations.

This monologue illustrates – and its length emphasizes – that Borisov and his colleagues are always in the process of highlighting some and downplaying other aspects of their scientific work. I suggest that these different instances in which scientists themselves interpret their intellectual activities in varying and often contradictory terms function to justify scientists’ claims to authority, autonomy, support of the state, or claim on resources. Depending on a particular goal they are pursuing inside and outside of their

research institute, their scientific work gets “purified” or “impurified” (Gieryn 1999; Latour 1987:145-176). Thus, when speaking about his and his colleagues’ cultural authority as scholars and scientists, Borisov emphasized the purity of his scientific work vis-à-vis its consumers, namely the bureaucrats and government officials. By doing so, he established clear-cut boundaries between what is pure and what is applied and highlighted the fact that it was he and his colleagues who make real contribution to the scientific development of the country. In the era of a larger educational reform, permanent restructuring of the scientific sphere and the uncertainty of state support to scientific institutes, this insistence on maintaining boundaries between two aspects of the same intellectual activity serves the social goal of regaining control over professional authority and justifying claims for state and public support. On the other hand, when faced with new political conditions, which required identifying new ways to secure research funding, Borisov and his colleagues purposefully blurred the boundaries between the pure and applied aspects of their research, focusing more on “the practical benefits of pure science.” (Gieryn 1983: 791).

Furthermore, there is a temporal component in the process of maintaining flexible boundaries that allows Borisov and research team to appear as valuable experts. The research team can only maintain the purity of their scientific process by suggesting that the state, as audience, enters in only *after* their real scientific work is done: “we do the research and then tell them what to do with it.” The very applicability of demography as a discipline related to government threatens the sense that their work is autonomous from the audience who appreciates and desires it (the state). Thus, to preserve objectivity as the main attribute of their expertise, their labor must be temporally organized so that the

experts' engagements with the objects of their expertise appear to precede their engagement with audiences.

To meet this measure, objectivity and autonomy must go hand in hand. More importantly, the experts need to demonstrate that this relationship between objectivity and autonomy would be marred were alien interests allowed any purchase at all, hence Borisov's immediate insistence that he would never doctor data. The research teammates I worked with pursue both objectives. On the one hand, they strive to remain autonomous in order to preserve their cultural authority as a vanguard in the matters of social representation of demographic reality in the country. On the other hand, to secure the support of the state, they highlight other possible applications of their research at the risk of appearing non objective and non scientific. The result is that boundaries between these two aspects of their work remain flexible and purposefully vague.

Coda: How to Do Things with Demography

This chapter suggested that studying the ways in which distinct forms of knowledge take on particular local meanings and are appropriated for (and against) political purposes offers a vantage point from which scholars interested in postsocialist economic and political order can explore the emergence of novel relations of power. For instance, the increasing privatization of research – bringing it more in line with the market-driven priorities and practices of the postsocialist state – would suggest that the Russian state is becoming less important to research trajectories. Yet, as this chapter makes clear, government-dictated priorities (such as population growth) are in fact ascending in significance – making 'the state' even more powerful through the construction of

ideological discourses and institutional practices that constitute the new postsocialist state.

I built this chapter around Dr. Borisov's personal and professional history, which I see as a prime example of how knowledge can travel across different institutional and political contexts and of how one becomes an expert (Carr 2010). Borisov's story launches an important ongoing point in my argument, namely that the flexibility of boundaries between different styles of knowledge production are the outcomes of both the history of the discipline of demography, with its ambiguous relationship to the Soviet state, and the products of contemporary political transformations in which policy-oriented knowledge is produced and disseminated. Thus, similarly to Bourdieu's (1988) argument in *Homo Academicus* that political stances of French intellectuals in the wake of 1968 were shaped by their positions within their academic field, rather than the other way around, I have suggested understanding the role played by demographers in the current population debate via the intellectual history of their discipline and their academic affiliation.

Finally, the different styles of boundary-work that these scholars are engaged in and the interpretive work that it does simultaneously protect their structural position as experts in population matters and offers them opportunities to seek support of the state and its agents interested in population knowledge. Thus, by effectively posting "keep out" signs to other epistemic authorities, such as economists for instance, around their domain of expertise, demographers represent their epistemic rivals as pseudo-experts who engage with the object of study without the requisite skills and language necessary to enact expertise in population matters. To emphasize their privileged position as

experts, they do the interpretive work of convincing their audience that their representation of social reality is the correct one, while others only pretend to know the demographic reality and are in fact mistaken when they still seek to represent it.

To secure the support of the state, while simultaneously protecting their autonomy, the scholars purposefully sustain the boundaries between two different aspects of their scientific work – pure and applied research – but they also make sure to keep these boundaries both flexible and vague. To maintain an aura of objectivity crucial to their structural status of experts, they devise a special temporal regime of representing their expertise, in which these scholars' engagement with research always precedes their engagement with the audience that desires it. In other words, they refuse to represent their research as being determined by the state interests and wishes. Rather, they represent their knowledge and their skills as what should dictate and direct the state's inclinations and aims.

CHAPTER III

Eradicating Demographic Illiteracy: Interactive Expertise in the Context of the Crisis of Underpopulation in the New Russian State

Introduction

This chapter continues to follow a local network of scholars involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge related to Russia's perceived crisis of underpopulation. The following pages are organized around the argument that the dominant framing of the problem, whereby population decline metonymically stands for the problem of family values and virtuous being, is constructed and reconfigured in an interactive process in which both knowledge experts and government bureaucrats participate. I suggest that the social and political meanings of the demographic problem are constructed through a series of communicative acts, in which scholars attempt to provide government bureaucrats with a set of assumptions with which to interpret social and demographic reality.

My argument proceeds in two parts. First, the chapter demonstrates how the interactions between social scientists and bureaucrats become the foundation for the mechanism of popular ideological misrecognition by which underpopulation is constructed as the problem of family values, morality, and virtue in contemporary Russia. It shows how bureaucrats learn the craft of identifying particular social developments while ignoring others in the series of learning interactions with the scholars. In this

learning process, scholars provide bureaucrats with the means to identify the population problem as one of family and morality. As part of the meaning constructed in this interactive process and advanced by teachers, the state is represented as a powerful singular entity capable of managing and correcting people's demographic and reproductive behavior.

Second, the chapter shows how in order to reassure their status as ultimate experts in matters of population management, the scholars evoke the concept of "scientific management" (*nauchnaia organizatsia upravleniia*) and strive to position their knowledge as the scientific foundation for the population management apparatus of the state. Ultimately, this knowledge can and should provide the state with the scientifically justified basis for what it needs to do in order for society to continue to grow and develop. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the scholars frame their interactions with the bureaucrats as the process of "eradicating demographic illiteracy" (*demograficheskii likbez*). The stated goal of this learning enterprise is the formation of a knowledgeable group of civil servants in charge of the state population programs. Yet, as this chapter reveals, the scholars create the impossibility of accomplishing the project of eradicating demographic illiteracy by maintaining bureaucrats' lack of knowledge and "ignorance" that they ultimately seek to eradicate, in order to preserve their own status as the main theorists of the state interventions in demographic reality.

Ethnographically, the chapter focuses on a series of interactions between social scientists from the institute (see Chapter II) and bureaucrats (*chinovniki*) predominantly from the regional and municipal governments of Yekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk oblast. It is built around two types of interactions: one revolves around the scholars' status as

expert advisors to the state and its agencies, and it involves their interactions with elected officials in the local government. The second type is built around these scholars' teaching responsibilities and revolves around professional development seminars for public administrators and bureaucrats that they teach at the Ural Academy of Public Administration. In these professionalization seminars, bureaucrats learn to interpret and frame the demographic problem and to identify patterns in demographic reality and links between social trends that might have seen coincidental otherwise. By discussing social problems, debating theoretical approaches to population problems, both scholars and bureaucrats participate in a political process. In particular, they frame the problem of underpopulation as centered on family and morality, which are ultimately taken as objects of the state intervention.

“This is not our theory:” The Science-State nexus in the context of the perceived crisis of underpopulation

Year after year, as part of their agenda to “eradicate demographic illiteracy,” (see Chapter II) Borisov and his colleagues from the institute organize a regional scientific-practical (*nauchno-prakticheskaia*) conference in which scholars present their research and policy proposals to the regional government officials, and dedicated to the demographic development of the Sverdlovsk region and the country. As with many other conferences devoted to the population problem (see Chapter IV), the basic logic that underlies them is to bring together scholars and practitioners, whose joint effort might help alter the demographic trends of the country by improving the policy measures introduced by the state. For Borisov, these conferences provide an additional opportunity to demonstrate the importance of demographic knowledge to population management and thus to

promote his project of organizing a demographic institute in charge of research and development of population policies in the region. The conferences are sponsored by the political fraction of “United Russia” (*Yedinaia Rossia*) of the regional parliament (the leading political party of Russia) and often several guests from both the federal government and the parliament (*Duma*) attend. During my yearlong fieldwork I followed Borisov as he took an active role in organizing one of these conferences, inviting guests, and structuring panels. The summer following my fieldwork, I attended another conference that replicated the first one almost entirely, including the guests from the federal parliament.

In 2010, the year of my fieldwork, the conference was generically entitled: “Population Policies in the Region: Problems and Perspectives.” An ethnographic moment that occurred during this conference stressed the extent to which the interactions between scientists and government officials are fraught with conflicts and contradictions. It illuminated the evaluative nature of these interactions through which the social meaning of the crisis and the role of the state in it are negotiated and framed. During the first plenary panel, after the governor and a representative of the federal parliament officially opened the conference and spoke for at least forty minutes, it was the social scientists’ turn to speak to the public. Three Moscow-based social scientists, one after another, presented their research on the perspectives and problems of the population policies in Russia. The last to speak was Alexei Sheviakov, a senior economist from Moscow who passed away a year after this conference. Unlike the previous two speakers who focused on plummeting birthrates and discussed the implications of the population policies introduced by the state, Sheviakov introduced an economic dimension of the

demographic problem, which was almost entirely absent from other speakers' presentations. Sheviakov began his talk by making a distinction between the problem of simple economic growth and the problem of distribution of wealth and resources:

We often believe in the myth that social and demographic problems will be resolved once the country experiences a steady economic growth. This is a myth. As our research and evidence from other parts of the globe show, social problems do not disappear automatically when there is an economic growth. What really matters is how this wealth is distributed among people, how resources are allocated.

His argument, in certain ways, resonated with the position of the Soviet demographers during the World Population Conferences in the 1960s and 1970 that argued against Neo-Malthusian policies in the developing world. Their stances on neo-Malthusianism were justified by the Marxist theory that argued that population problems cannot be understood independently of the redistribution of economic resources (see Chapter I). Yet, in this case, the problem of population under consideration was different in character. While in the 1960-70s, the discussed problem was that of *overpopulation* on the global scale, in 2009, in Russia, Sheviakov was debating the problem of *underpopulation* on the national scale. Sheviakov continued developing his argument by demonstrating charts and numbers that indicated unequal redistribution of resources in contemporary Russia:

In Russia today, 30% of all income is distributed among only 0.7% of the population. How can we talk about people wanting to have two or more children when practically every family with a second child becomes poor [...] Over 60% of our population are below the line that allows them to realize their social and demographic potential.

As the presentation continued, the governor of the Sverdlovsk region who opened the plenary panel began showing signs of discomfort and irritation. He was shaking his head in disagreement, trying to find support of his dissatisfaction in his colleagues from the government and the parliament seating next to him on the panel.

After Sheviakov concluded his talk with the warnings about growing rates of poverty that might preclude the realization of the state social and demographic policies, the moderator opened the floor for the special Q&A session, in which, she said, the governor will answer the public's questions. At this point, the governor interrupted the moderator and said that despite a clear lack of time he first wanted to comment on the last presentation. Turning to Sheviakov, he said: "I categorically disagree with what you did. It is wrong to correlate birth rates with the income levels of our citizens. This is of the gravest mistakes one can make when it comes to demography." People choose smaller family size in the context of economic growth, the governor explained. As he continued his somewhat lengthy response to Sheviakov's presentation, he started speaking louder and louder as if scolding his opponent: "This is a wrong theory and it is not our theory, it is not a Russian theory! This theory is responsible for our demographic problem in the first place. We were duped for 80 years to think in these terms and it led to the problem of depopulation." It is hard to know what the governor really meant by "not our theory." I can only imagine that he was referencing a critique raised during the most productive years of the Soviet demography in the 1970s (again) that questioned the then dominant framework of economic determinism that underestimated the power of demographic processes as governed by a set of autonomous rules that can be hardly explained with economic variables.

The public remained silent following the governor's monologue. Sheviakov made an attempt to intervene. He told the governor that he probably misunderstood him and that he did not try to correlate birth rates with income and that he just wanted to stress the

role of the redistribution of wealth in social processes. The governor was not listening, he continued scolding Sheviakov, using exclusively the third voice pronoun:

Although the respected scholar (*uvazhaemii uchenii*) believes in this theory, in Afghanistan they don't relate fertility to income. They make children without any consideration of their income. Same in the US. In Europe they also don't believe in connecting birthrate to income. The larger income we have, the more desires we have. These [consumerist] values in turn shape parents' behavior which makes it less likely that people will be willing to spend more money on children when they can spend it on themselves. My personal opinion is that income doesn't affect the number of children people would have.

Sheviakov made another attempt to respond to this critique by saying that he thinks that social policies need to take into account how income is distributed in society. The governor replied:

Your calculations are deceitful and sly (*lukavie*). I am friendly with statistics and math too but your initial theoretical assumptions are categorically wrong. We need to focus on the concept of morality, the idea of family, generational succession, heritage. This cannot be substituted with any material resources [...] You cannot measure these things with money.

Without ever giving Sheviakov a chance to respond to his diatribe, the governor left the room after briefly replying to a series of questions from the audience. Until this moment, the debate between Sheviakov and the governor resembled other debates I often heard in the institute that involved demographers and their economist colleagues, of whom they usually disapprove as erring on the side of economic determinism. Aside from the elevated tone of the debate, the adamant insistence on family, heritage and generational succession as the foundation for the good demographic theory was an interesting addition to this debate that caught my attention. The governor insisted on excluding economic dimensions of the demographic problem as irrelevant and almost illegitimate. "Our theory," he maintained, is the one about morality and values, not poverty and inequality.

After the first day of the conference when Borisov, his Moscow colleagues, including Sheviakov, and I were dining at one of the city restaurants, the public incident with the governor had obviously become the focus of our conversation. Borisov told us that after the member of the regional parliament responsible for the coordination between scholars and government bureaucrats participating in the conference received the title of Sheviakov's paper with the word "poverty" in it, she contacted Borisov and asked him to rename the paper as she was not feeling comfortable using the word "poverty" on the conference program. Indeed, as far as the program indicated, the word "poverty" was taken out, instead, the talk was neutrally re-titled: "The socio-economic dimensions of the demographic policy in contemporary Russia."

Echoing the governor's statement, the next day local newspapers published articles about the conference with the following titles: "Health, Family, and Children Are The Most Important Things" (*Glavnoe – zdorovie, semia, deti*) (Gorlov 2010); "Russia needs to create a friendly approach towards families" (Edinros 2010). The conflict between Sheviakov and the governor was never mentioned in the press. The year after, when I visited the field at the time of the next demographic conference, the governor repeated his statement from the previous year although this time with no real or imaginary opposition to it: "We cannot solve the problem of underpopulation if we don't start thinking about family. What is family? Why did the population grow before the revolution (before 1917)? Because family, generational succession, and *dukhovnost'* were the most important things for people then." No longer understood as a complex set of issues, the demographic problem became exclusively one of family and morality. Such a framing of the problem also made certain debates illegitimate and unwelcome. Thus,

while it is acceptable as a topic for open debate and discussion when it is a question of morality and family values, it becomes a somewhat uncomfortable and politically threatening topic when framed as the question of inequality, poverty, and unequal distribution of resources and wealth.

The irony of this debate, of course, is that although clearly influenced by his own political interests, what the governor claimed to be his own personal opinion (i.e., that one needs to talk about family and morality when talking about demography) is in fact something he most likely learned from his and his advisors' interactions with demographers and his or his advisors' exposure to a highly popularized debate between two Moscow-based schools of demography: that of Anatoly Vishnevsky and that of Anatoly Antonov. This debate and the ultimate popularity of the latter in the public imagination shed light on the governor's adamant insistence on family as the focus of the population problem. It also offers an explanation of how in the interactions between demographers and government officials, demographic variables become conceived of as having metonymic relations with the social imaginary about morality and family values. Metonymy, in which a part stands for the whole (e.g., Kremlin stands for Russia's political regime), provides means for people to understand reality and to make sense of their surrounding (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 36-37). In the context of changing political conditions in Russia, demographic changes and fluctuations stand for the contesting moralities as people are trying to both make sense of their present and envision their future.

The debate between the two schools of demography precedes the recent population problems and dates back to the 1970s when both Vishnevsky and Antonov were leading

active scholarly lives. A simple Internet search brings dozens of links to the passionate debate between the two. Although social scientists in Russia ascribe to a variety of approaches to studying demographic trends, these two schools of thought, especially the highly publicized debate between them, occupy the public imagination when it comes to demography. At first the debate between the Moscow State University-based sociologist and demographer Anatoly Antonov and the Higher School of Economics-based Anatoly Vishnevsky was, as the Russian saying goes, ‘widely known in narrow circles.’ However, this confrontation became more popular when the concerns about the demographic future of the nation reached media and public debates during the 1990s.

Once the population problem turned into the apocalyptic debate about depopulation (see Chapter I about the “Russian Cross”) rather than a more neutral concept of population decline, the opponents began using sharper terms in the debate. Antonov accused Vishnevsky of effectively articulating in his work the erroneous stance of the Soviet state that claimed that the population problem does not exist on its own and could only be solved as part of a large socio-economic context by using a planned economy. He further hinted that Vishnevsky was generously rewarded by the state for his arguments while others (read Antonov) were marginalized and their writings were censored (Antonov and Borisov 2006) (see Chapter I on the Soviet approach to population problems). Vishnevsky, in turn, accused Antonov of promoting interventionist and anti-liberal perspectives to demography, substituting the quality of life for the quantity of population growth (Vishnevsky 2005).

It is important to note that both Antonov and Vishnevsky share similar concerns when it comes to the demographic situation in Russia. Both would have liked to see

birthrates that would enable basic population reproduction – two to three children per woman (Rivkin-Fish 2003). Both of them refer to Russia's population decline as a geopolitical and economic problem that does not favor Russia's position within the "global demographic hierarchy." This in turn prevents Russia from competing with the rapid pace of the population growth in developing countries (Vishnevsky 2007:44-45; Antonov and Borisov 2006:5). Both schools are also concerned with the territory/population ratio of Russia, where 22 percent of Russia's population lives on 75 percent of its territory, while the remaining 78 percent populates the much smaller European parts of Russia (25 percent) (Vishnevsky 2007: 43).

Yet, their approaches part ways at the point when the possibility of reversing demographic trends is discussed. In a nutshell, Vishnevsky argues for the irreversibility of falling fertility rates grounded in the theories of demographic transitions popular in Western demography. Since 1976, when he first published his influential monograph "The Demographic Revolution," Vishnevsky opposed pronatalist claims popular among other demographers that higher birth rates can be engineered by the state (Rivkin-Fish 2003). Russia, he argued, similar to other European counties is undergoing a transition from high to low fertility rates with ever growing aging population (Vishnevsky 2007; Zhakharov 2008). Although inherently social in their character, these demographic patterns have independent and autonomous trajectories of development that cannot be *directly* correlated with other social and political processes. Given these assumptions, Vishnevsky and his colleagues have always been less enthusiastic about pronatalist policies and largely call into question their efficacy (Vishnevsky 2005; Zakharov 2008). It is precisely this theory that the governor coined as "not our theory" in his response to

Sheviakov.

Increasing fertility rates using pronatalist policies is not a realistic goal, according to Vishnevsky and his colleagues (Rivkin-Fish 2003). Even if unprecedentedly high mortality rates could have been decreased, population decline is inevitable and even according to the most optimistic forecasts will reach 10-14 million people (Gritzuk 2010). Although Vishnevsky acknowledges political risks related to larger scale migration policies, he nevertheless sees attracting migration as a real possibility to enable Russia's recovery from its population decline. Vishnevsky's pro-migration stance is a highly unpopular opinion in contemporary Russia, where labor migration from former Soviet Asian Republics – a day-to-day reality in every major or middle city in Russia – is conceived of as a threat to the nation's sovereignty and security (ibid). Vishnevsky's point of view could be described as liberal and anti-interventionist (Rivkin-Fish 2003). Using growing anti-Western sentiments, Antonov's proponents often accuse Vishnevsky of being influenced by his frequent collaborations with Western European research institutes such as the French National Institute for Demographic Studies (Institut national d'études démographiques, INED).

A prominent sociologist and a poet, who was also trained as a physicist before his graduate training in sociology, Anatoly Antonov, sees the essence of the population problem not in the inertia of demographic trends but in a changing moral nature of modern society. He argues that fertility rates are plunging because of the diminishing childbearing values and a declining normative need for children (*potrebnost' v detiakh*) in contemporary society. For him the demographic crisis is really a family crisis, in which migration is only a temporary remedy that rather than solving the problem, defers it for

the next 30-40 years at best (Antonov 2006: 5-8). Antonov directly calls for pronatalist interventions to reinstall the value of family life and childbearing and sees the state as the ultimate regulator in reversing unfortunate demographic trends (Antonov et al 2002; Antonov 2006).

The state plays a crucial role in Antonov's approach to the population problem. Historically, Antonov claims, declining demand for children (*potrebnost' v detiakh*) grew out of the state policies that stripped family out of its significance as the basic unit of production. At the same time, it is the role of the state and its agencies, according to Antonov, to restore the value of mid- and large-sized families and to provide structural incentives for childbearing. To return family its economic significance, the state can incentivize its citizens to have more children through a variety of tax policies and the development of family businesses (Antonov et al 2002). Pronatalist intervention, according to Antonov, is a two-tiered process in which first, families that decide to have children should be able to do it without fearing for their material wellbeing: "because in our country, giving a birth to a second child usually throws a family under a poverty line," he told me in an interview. "Only after that," he continued, "should we have a social policy which will restore the prestige of family and marriage, policy that will assure that people want to get married and have more than just one child as it is the case today." Family and a normative need for children (*potrebnost' v detiakh*) supported by structural incentives are at the heart of his theoretical approach. Although conservative in his views, in my interview with him, Antonov argued against dogmatic Russian Orthodox Church interventions and its attempts to frame abortions as a murder, claiming that then "one would have to call millions of Soviet women murderers."

Refusing to surrender to the inertia of demographic trends, Antonov puts more emphasis on social forces in their capacity to alter population trends. When I asked Antonov about his idea of interventionist policies that would potentially restore people's need for children, he sketched a plan on piece of paper before he answered my question. On it, he drew a rectangle with the name "the state" in it. Opposite from it, he draw a smaller rectangle named "science." Between the two he drew "media," which he identified with a series of arrows as mediating between the policies proposed by the state-science alliance and society. With a complex set of arrows he outlined the relationship between the state and science based on a feedback loop that together are supposed to devise and implement pronatalist policies that would ultimately give the best possible outcomes and resolve the family crisis. Under the supervision of its scientific advisors, the state needs to re-allocate its resources, designing a comprehensive pronatalist policy aimed at fostering and incentivizing reproduction and fertility. The state is ultimately the source of this intervention, and a scientist or in this particular case a demographer is the main theorist behind the interventions.

When it comes to the circulation of the population debate, Antonov is clearly a more popular figure than Vishnevsky. Both of them have seats on a federal advisory committee and serve as experts for the government, yet Antonov appears more often in the public arena and he clearly enjoys the attention he attracts. Both of them publish public and polemic essays and both of them interview for major newspapers and magazines when it comes to population policies. Yet, it is much easier to purchase Antonov's books and textbooks at a regular bookstore and his name is more familiar to the audience of non-demographers. Vishnevsky has a more scholarly style while Antonov

enjoys being polemical in his writing. The latter uses a lot of figures of speech, which makes his style more passionate and his messages more alarmist.

In short, Antonov's position is the more popular one and he is widely read by people inside and outside the discipline. During one of the dissertation defenses at the institute, a graduate student was presenting her work about one of the small industrial towns in Sverdlovsk region that has undergone dramatic demographic changes following the privatization of the industrial enterprise around which the town was built. Responding to her analysis of the circulation of labor resources in light of these changes, one of the respondents told her referring to the conference I discussed before: "Everyone is concerned about underpopulation. But as the governor told to the guest speaker from Moscow: 'the quality of life does not make people want to have more children.' What about morality, what about moral education (*nравstvennoe vospitanie*)? You need to incorporate it into your work." Making a reference to the conference in which the governor of Sverdlovsk oblast scolded an economist from Moscow for talking about poverty, the respondent continued: "Family instability leads to the lack of moral education and this leads to the lack of morality (*dukhovnost'*) and because of that demography is suffering." Not in so many words, this summarizes Antonov's approach to the crisis of underpopulation that is constituted by the deterioration of the moral foundation of human society, namely family. It also perfectly corresponds to what the governor claimed to be his personal opinion in the matters of the population problem.

Aside from his colorful personality, what makes Antonov's approach more popular and even dominant within Russia is the very clear distinction that he makes between state and society. While Vishnevsky speaks of the inertia of demographic

processes, trying to convey their historical complexity, Antonov points to the state as the main tool of any population intervention, the main source of power, capable (with the right scientific advice) of altering individual behaviors and changing social processes. It is this distinction and the ultimate allocation of power to the already powerful actor that makes Antonov's approach convenient and digestible in the eyes of the general public. In other words, it points the finger to the entity responsible for the social change or the failure to produce it. Further, this framing offers public officials and bureaucrats a way to articulate the direct causal relationships between the state and society, in which society is always separate and subordinate to the state. These causal relationships (i.e., policy – desired effect) enables to frame a social problem by excluding certain inconvenient dimensions of social reality, such as the redistribution of national wealth in the case of the debate I observed at the conference in Yekaterinburg. The problem of morality and values, unlike the problem of the redistribution of wealth, could not be quantitatively measured and thus requires less accountability on the state part.

In fact, the terms that the governor used to attack Sheviakov at the conference in Yekaterinburg resemble the terms in which the debate between Antonov and Vishnevsky is construed: Antonov insists on family and childbearing values to be the major focus of any state interventions in population dynamics, while Vishnevsky argues for the futility of the task. The way the governor rejected other possible framings of the problem of underpopulation resembles the ways in which Antonov's proponents insist on framing the problem of underpopulation as the problem of values and moral attitudes. What I observed at the conference clearly takes after the ways in which the dominant school of thought in demography in Russia identifies the problem of underpopulation by excluding

its embeddedness in a complex economic reality and suggests reversing the trends using elaborate pronatalist interventions initiated by the state.

The following section will describe a series of learning interactions in which the scholars from the institute and the government officials and bureaucrats from the regional government learn to frame the population problem. In this political process, both scholars and bureaucrats learn to identify the problem and to detect the causal relationship between the state and the rest of society. These learning interactions are only a small part of a larger political and cultural context in which social problems get conflated with morality.

Learning the Language of Demography

The political applicability of research conducted by the institute scholars was a popular theme in nearly every monthly faculty meeting. The director of the institute would often encourage scholars to find ways to communicate their knowledge and research across different contexts. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Borisov and his research team of demographers and social scientists had been actively seeking interactions with the officials, offering them his expertise as the instrument of management and governance. To discuss the effects of this process and the dispositions that are built in the process of learning and teaching the art of interactional expertise, I will focus on the interactions that took place in the classrooms in which Borisov taught demography to various groups of bureaucrats. As these interactions shape and are shaped by the power relations between state officials and scientific experts, by reconstructing the process of teaching and learning I show that in this learning process public administrators hone their ability to

diagnose and frame particular social problems they are in charge of solving and alleviating. I argue that it is in this interactive process that the social meanings of the crisis of underpopulation are constructed and the moral underpinnings of this crisis are negotiated and constituted.

In the fall of 2009, Borisov received a phone call from the ombudswoman's office inviting him and other experts to attend a meeting, the goal of which was to review the government report outlining the effects of the population programs introduced by the state several years ago (see Chapter I). Borisov and other policy experts were asked to review the report and to come to the meeting with possible policy recommendations for the local government. The advisory committee that Borisov was asked to participate in would be constituted from experts from various scientific institutions and state agencies around the region: demographers, sociologists, economists, educators, public health professionals, and representatives of non-profit organizations. After hanging up, Borisov sighed: "I guess it means that we can expect changes in the [regional] government" I asked why. He replied: "They usually call us when they expect changes, either a new governor is going to be appointed²⁹ or other changes in the current government. It is usually when they need us, the scholars (*uchenie*) who can produce evidence-based reports for them."

The meeting with the ombudswoman was part of a larger set of learning interactions through which Borisov and his colleagues try to "eradicate demographic illiteracy" (*demograficheskii likbez*). To analyze these and other efforts to communicate

²⁹ In 2004, as part of the political project of centralizing political power in the Russian Federation and in the aftermath of Beslan tragedy, Vladimir Putin canceled direct elections of governors. Since 2005, heads of Russia's regions have been appointed directly by the president.

to a variety of bureaucrats and government officials the intricacies of demography and its application to the world of policymaking, I use the concept of interactional expertise coined by Collins and Evans (2007). They define the interactional expertise as “expertise in language of a specialism in the absence of expertise in its practice” (Collins and Evans 2007:28). The particular nature of interactional expertise is that it is a social process in which experts slowly gain knowledge through discussions about the object of expertise. Similar to the idea of Becker’s marijuana user who needs to learn to identify and judge the meanings of the effects of smoking in order to enjoy it (Becker 1953) or a magician who learns to interpret her practice as effective (Luhmann 1989), interactional expertise is an inherently social process. It is not the object of expertise that gives an expert her status; rather, it is the communicative process itself that makes her an expert.

The outcome of this social process is that someone who possesses interactional expertise understands the object of this expertise (a scientific concept or a technical skill) and can easily discuss it. However, even when this someone earns a very high level of such interactional expertise, she or he is still not able to do it, they can only to speak it (cf. Carr 2010). Interactional expertise in something is always dependent and always learned through interactions with experts who have contributory expertise in this something: “...one cannot imagine that interactional expertise would do anything other than die out if not refreshed from time-to-time by contact with those actually doing the thing – the contributory experts. It is the contributory experts not the interactional experts who define and develop the content of language that the interactional expert tries to master” (ibid:39).

My first encounter with the process of acquiring such interactional expertise in demography was when I followed Borisov and his colleagues to the meeting with the ombudswoman of the Sverdlovsk region. The ombudsman is not an elected role, but is appointed by the governor of the region and serves as an intermediary between the regional government and the public, in charge of investigating its complaints and concerns. As part of her responsibilities, the ombudswoman also mediates advisory committees in charge of social policies. Although the ombudswoman of the Sverdlovsk region has a semi-independent status, she nevertheless operates under the auspices of the regional government and serves its interests.

After a two-hour conversation with the ombudswoman, Borisov, his older colleague from the institute – Raisova, and I were drinking tea in her office back in the institute and gossiping about possible political changes in the government. When I said that I was very impressed with how respectful and attentive the ombudswoman was to the things they had to say about demography and social policies, Raisova replied: “Of course she respects us. When we met with her many years ago, she was demographically illiterate (*demographicheski bezgramotna*). Throughout all these years, we taught her a lot of things (*mi ee mnogomu nauchili*), of course we deserve to be respected (*mi zasluzhili uvazhenie*).” Ultimately, the importance of the process of eradicating demographic illiteracy is not in its definite outcome but rather in its circular nature that allows Borisov to establish and re-establish himself as a valuable partner in a political process, the one with ability not simply to describe reality but also to prescribe authoritative treatments to deal with the demographic problem (Shore and Wright 1997).

Indeed, during the meeting itself, the ombudswoman acknowledged this long-term exchange and what she learned from it by pointing out to the rest of us sitting around the large table that a variety of important statistical indicators are missing from the regional government report summarizing the effects of the first stage of a long-term population policy implemented by the government in 2007. She turned to Borisov: “I don’t know whether it is because you taught me well or because I’m just clever but I noticed that there is no information on TFR (total fertility rates) and on children parity (number of first, second and third children).” Borisov looked very pleased at this remark and he did not miss an opportunity to comment on it. After the meeting he told Raisova and me that when he first started interacting with the ombudswoman and her colleagues from the government in the late 1990s, she [the ombudswoman] could not distinguish between any of the demographic indicators:

The idea was so foreign to her. She didn’t know the difference between total fertility rates (TFR) and the total number of births. It was all the same to her. The concept of a rate in demography was incomprehensible to her. And let’s not even talk about mortality tables. It took time to teach her to read statistical reports but for example she knows now not to trust newspapers reports that say: ‘population has been growing in 2010 because we have over 1000 births more then we had last year.’

Both Raisova and Borisov emphasized the value of their knowledge in the production of state policies by identifying to me the long-term relationship they had developed with the local state agents. Emphasizing their interactions with the ombudswoman as being educational in nature, both of them identified their role in this long-term relationship with the ombudswoman as mediators between social reality in the form of statistical reports (i.e., TFR instead of absolute numbers) and informed political decisions. In this process, the ombudswoman and other government officials are supposed to benefit from

interacting with the experts – in this case experts in demography – because this interactive process teaches government officials “how to read accurately” social reality that they are trying to act upon.

In a certain way, the ombudswoman is Borisov’s ideal student. She listens to what he says. She acknowledges the important role this knowledge plays in her political education. Although she definitely thinks that she has acquired the language with which to speak demographic policies, she continues to invite Borisov as a policy advisor and she continues to rely on his contributions as an expert in the matters of population. In this long interactive process, Borisov’s reputation remains that of an expert. Although the basic demographic illiteracy is eradicated, his contributions remain important enough to continue the learning cycle. In this learning process, both the ombudswoman and Borisov make the demographic reality readable, they learn how to identify the problem, how to select evidence, and what assumptions about social reality to choose in order to interpret its chaotic nature.

My next encounter with interactional expertise came when I joined Borisov in a classroom full of high-ranking civil servants from the Yamal Peninsula who came to Yekaterinburg, the center of the Ural federal district, for the professional development seminar in public administration. It was only a short distance to get from the institute (Borisov’s academic home) to the hotel in which the seminar was conducted. As we were taking a shortcut through the park, Borisov lamented about the peculiar nature of bureaucrats, in anticipation of meeting a large group of them. How is it, he asked me, that they always know how and in front of whom they need to bow down (*prognut’sia*). He did not expect me to reply. Instead he answered his own question: “They just know. I

don't know how and I never will." He then added: "but I can smell their presence from afar."

After introducing himself to a male-dominated group in suits and ties, Borisov handed out a questionnaire for his own survey that he had been conducting among public administrators since the introduction of the demographic policy in 2007 (I joined him in the second round of the survey). While handing out the questionnaires, Borisov explained: "What I like is that since the government launched the new [demographic] policy, a new demographic bureaucracy, in a good sense, has been formed. There are people who really understand what is going on. I know people from your government, for instance, who understand and appreciate demography." Replying to students' questions about the purpose of the survey, Borisov said:

Today, we are studying the outcomes of the demographic policy, of your work, the work you have done. This questionnaire is a part of our seminar today. It is our teaching tool. I am turning you into autodidacts, you see. Fill it out first and we will then see what all the questions and answers mean. Maybe you will even be able to catch my mistakes. There are mistakes there. Let me know if you catch them.

By complimenting their work, by sharing his own research instruments with his students, and by allowing them to be his critics, Borisov constructed his students as capable of learning the intricacies of demographic and sociological research. Yet, almost immediately, he proceeded by saying to them: "Demography has become a popular discipline. But bureaucrats don't know demography. Look at you for instance, you have a sociological questionnaire in your hand, but it doesn't mean that you're sociologists." There was a recurring effort on Borisov's part that I observed in this and other classrooms to hand over knowledge and the language of demography to his students

while simultaneously reminding them that without his contributory expertise this language does not mean much and cannot be properly used.

Most of the professional development seminars I visited during my fieldwork were composed of bureaucrats of different ranks and from different branches of the government. These seminars are part of a larger strategic program “Innovative Russia 2020” developed by the government in order to develop professional skills of its bureaucratic cadres (Surnacheva and Gabuev 2012b). Some of the seminars were only several days long and some of them were several weeks-long courses. The majority of these professionalization seminars were organized under the auspices of the Ural Academy of Public Administration,³⁰ responsible for training public servants in the Ural federal district. To conduct these seminars, the Academy, in turn, hires specialists across the city’s scientific institutions. Since specialists in demography are a somewhat rare commodity, it is usually Borisov or one of his colleagues from the institute who is responsible for introducing students to the intricacies of demography as a scientific discipline. In addition to demography, students learn the basics of micro and macroeconomics, law, and public administration.

The groups are quite diverse in terms of their age and gender distribution. While middle-aged men dominated the lecture to the Yamal public administrators I described

³⁰ The Academy is a postsocialist reincarnation of the Higher Party School existed in the Soviet Union from 1946-1991. It was the central organization responsible for training and educating the Soviet cadres. As a matter of fact, the political transition from one school to another is still semi-visible in the building that the Academy occupies. A visitor standing in the corridor leading from an older part of the building to its recently built wing, can see a carving depicting an almost biblical scene, in which Lenin hands out a thick manuscript to Yakov Sverdlov, a proponent of scientific training of socialist cadres after whom the city of Yekaterinburg was named from 1924 to 1991. The carving is veiled with a semi-transparent curtain.

above, other classes I attended had more women of a variety of ages in them. This diversity, however, does not signify the egalitarianism of the postsocialist political system. Rather, it represents the gendered nature of this political system. Thus, this diversity can be attributed to the differences in public administrators' ranks, which in turn is dependant on the ministry or a governmental organization they belong to. Thus, the Yamal administrators were largely high-ranked administrators from a large variety of ministries, whereas other classes I attended consisted of middle and low-ranked administrators from a single ministry. Many of the public administrators attending these seminars might be considered as what Michael Lipsky (1980) succinctly called "street-level bureaucrats," or those administrators who make decisions on behalf of the government agency through personal contacts with people in need of government services. This diversity of ranks and positions shows that demographic knowledge trickles up and down the bureaucratic apparatus, from policymakers to "street-level" bureaucrats in charge of the final distribution of the resources allocated by the population policies.

The learning process I observed in and around these classrooms is built around perpetual attempts on both sides to evaluate and judge "the other." Public administrators are usually suspicious of their teachers' familiarity with political reality and demographers often question their students' objectives and agendas, often using popular stereotypes of bureaucrats as greedy and not very smart. On several occasions, I had heard students call out their teachers for making factual mistakes in describing laws, reforms, or political decisions. For many of them, these seminars are merely part of their job requirements and they actively express their unwillingness to participate in the

conversations initiated by their teachers. Yet, some are happy to come to the classroom as it relieves them of their work duties for the duration of the seminar. Many of them are interested in acquiring an additional certificate after completing these seminars, as those offer possibilities for career advancement and salary raise. I also often noticed that for many bureaucrats, these classes offer an opportunity to express freely and without repercussions their opinions about policies that they are in charge of implementing. It is not unusual during these classes to hear someone saying: “I am supposed to implement a new policy but I am not sure about how the resources are allocated and distributed. Right now, we are all zooming in on this one thing while the health care system is suffering. This is pulling all the positive effects we achieve down.” Recent political reforms are often the object of these debates and critiques. For instance, when seminars are conducted among the employees of municipal departments, they often express their disappointments over the new federal budget distribution policies that putting municipal budgets under direct control of regional governments. Thus, aside from providing public administrators and bureaucrats with a basic demographic knowledge, these seminars serve as a conduit for political commentary from social actors that execute the power of the state.

Similarly, scholars are also concerned with evaluating their students’ motives, objectives and interests. For many of the scholars teaching the seminars, these short-term courses are an additional source of income. In the context of research budget cuts and uneven outcomes of learning the art of competitive grant writing, these seminars are perfect opportunities for the scholars to stay afloat without leaving the world of academia. As the teaching and research are institutionally separated in contemporary Russia (see chapter II), for Borisov and his colleagues at the research institute, teaching

these seminars is also the way to engage in another form of circulating knowledge outside of their research environment. Social scientists are often skeptical about their students' ability to engage in a serious conversation about demographic reality. On the other hand, they often stress the importance of scientific approach to government and management and praise the organizers of these seminars who "finally understood the importance of scientific knowledge in policy implementation." These mutual expectations and cultural assumptions frame most of conversations developed in the process of learning.

Scholars' depictions of bureaucrats are founded on a popular cultural stereotype of an ignorant and scheming civil servant. This stereotype dates back to the mid-19th century Gogol's satirical portrayals of public officials in the service of the Imperial Russian state. Gogol's stories and novels: "Dead Souls," "The Nose," and "Inspector General" are grotesque accounts of the government bureaucracy of the imperial Russia. "The Overcoat," the apogee of Gogol's work captures the civil servants' awe of hierarchies and power and exposes society in which a person's ranking comes at the expense of social relations. Gogol's uncanny depictions of the Russian government bureaucracy of his lifetime became the literary cannon exemplified in the famous saying attributed to F. M. Dostoevsky: "We have all come out from under Gogol's 'Overcoat'" (Moser 1992: 197). Not only "have we all come out under Gogol's 'Overcoat,'" in literary terms but the portrayal of a bureaucrat as a little man always at reverence to "important people" and always in pursuit of self-interest made its way to the popular culture in the form of jokes, satirical spoofs, and films. Popular political critique in Russia often focuses on bureaucrats, their general ignorance, and their lack of restraint in terms of bribes. As the joke goes: "there is only one thing that would prevent bureaucrats

from taking bribes – they should avoid wearing suits with pockets in them.” Borisov’s representation of his students is in accord with these popular representations of bureaucrats as self-serving people haunted by greed and awe of power³¹.

Anthropologists have analyzed symbolic images and stereotypes of government bureaucrats within a modern nation-state (Handelman 1981; Douglas 1986; Herzfeld 1992). Bureaucracy, they have argued, is part of a modern cultural cosmology and both bureaucrats and people who critique them borrow symbolic representations of authority from this cosmology (Herzfeld 1992: 39). Following this line of thinking, the interactions between government bureaucrats and their teachers in the Russian context are founded on the same cultural ideas of the state and officialdom. Thus, it is often the case that both teachers and their students from different government ministries use similar stereotypes of “the system” to advance their interests and goals. Administrators, for instance, even more often than their teachers, express their skepticism about money allocated to “the maternal capital” funds, the main pillar of the latest population policy. Some call it “mythical money” or “money that doesn’t really exist in the budget.” They attribute the problematic way the money is allocated only for certain purposes to the rigidity of the bureaucratic machine that they themselves are part of. Why, they ask, would the state allocate money for a child’s education when the education is supposedly free and state-sponsored? For the scholars, using popular stereotypes of an ignorant bureaucrat and representing public administrators as unsuitable to the task of governing the country is a

³¹ My argument about the popular representations of bureaucracy is not about resemblance. I am not trying to argue that Gogol’s “little clerks” from the 19th century imperial Russia are the same as their counterparts in the 21st century post-Soviet Russia as some authors do (see De Waal 2012). Instead, I am pointing out a popular semiotic form that people use in order to understand and make sense of reality surrounding them.

social strategy by which these scholars and the scientific institution behind them constitute themselves as knowledgeable experts facing “faceless” and ignorant bureaucratic system.

Borisov often begins his lecture with the following statement: “Demography is about birth and death. Demographers study the basic laws of population reproduction, simply put, we study how generations replace each other.” He then adds: “Our goal is to quantify. Let us first understand quantity, quality comes afterwards.” Despite his statement about quantity as the major demographic tool, Borisov continues his explanation by identifying other important qualitative objectives pursued by the discipline:

Demography is not simply about birth and death. Students often ask me: why is it even important; who cares how many people were born and how many of them died. Your goal as public servants is to realize that it’s not just about numbers, it is about the interconnectedness of these processes. You need to understand that the power of demography lies in its interconnectedness. As good administrators you need to know how all these processes are related to other things too; how birth and mortality rates are related to values, norms, law, military power, economics, history etc. I bet no one here knows how mortality tables are connected to insurance, ah? Of course not, I didn’t think so. But you will learn about it soon.

Two things are important in Borisov’s introduction. First, he uses the quantitative nature of demography to preserve the sense of objectivity of his discipline. Using the popular cultural stereotype that “numbers don’t lie,” Borisov assures his students that by providing them with these quantitative skills, he provides them the ability to accurately read social and demographic reality. Only then he turns to larger qualitative implications of these quantifications. It is again the quantitative calculations that can mediate between the everyday reality of birth and death and larger political processes (military power,

economics, history). Second, by asking his students whether or not they are familiar with the application of demographic knowledge, Borisov reminds his students that although he can pass on some technical skills and can even teach them to be proficient in the language of demography, he, as a contributory expert immersed in the physical community of demographers, has so much more knowledge that his expertise is always going to be crucial.

After this broad statement about demography as a discipline and its applicability to policy issues, Borisov identifies his theoretical approach as that of Antonov, who also served as a scientific consultant for his doctoral dissertation: “I studied with Antonov and my approach is influenced by him. Vishnevsky has a different point of view. I don’t agree with it. Vishnevsky was arguing for self regulating demographic processes but in 1992 this homeostasis stopped working and we plunged directly into the ‘Russian Cross’.” As Antonov’s student, Borisov firmly positions himself on the one side of the long-term demographic debate, which can also explain his alarmist tone when he speaks about the gravity of the population problem in contemporary Russia. His theoretical position that privileges “moral” aspects of the crisis was further illustrated when he asked students a rhetorical question: “Why is it that in Africa they have fertility rates of five children per woman and in Russia it is barely 1.3? They are constantly at war there but they continue to have a lot of children.” He then answered his own question: “Because ruin starts in people’s heads. Ruin is in our heads (*v golove razrukha*).” “*V golove razrukha*” is a popular turn of phrase in the post-Soviet discourse related to economic, social or any other crisis. It most likely originated from Michail Bulgakov’s novel “Heart of a Dog,” in which one of the main characters exclaims when speaking about the state of

Russia following the Bolshevik revolution: “Hence, the rack and ruin are not in the bathrooms, but in the heads” (Bulgakov 1968:37). “Ruin in the heads” is a popular image and is often used to describe the problem of underpopulation. Along with Antonov’s concept of “moral decay” that leads to the decrease in need for children, “ruin in the heads” divorce the problem of population decline from possible political and economic underpinning, making it the problem of moral coordinates that someone (read the state) needs to establish so that people can follow them.

To visualize the significance of demographic trends and to illustrate the importance of “the ruins in our heads,” Borisov draws two different population pyramids on the board. The first one is for Somalia, whose broad base (high fertility rates) indicates an abundantly populated country. Next to it he draws another pyramid, which looks like a barrel with a narrow base and a narrow peak, with the right side bulging more than the left. “This is how Russia looks,” – he says. “This is Russia’s age and gender distribution pyramid.” He points to the horizontal coordinate as the indicator of fertility rates and explains that the vertical one is representing age structure. Right side is for women and left side is for men. “There is no balance here,” – he adds, pointing to the bulging right side of the pyramid. Borisov then explains the implication of this particular age and gender distribution structure to his students: “If something happens to Russia, if there is a military invasion from outside for instance, we are done. We don’t have enough people in general, and enough men in particular.”

To augment his example of the effects demographic changes might have on the military strength of the country, Borisov added another dimension: “Russia is depopulating. But the throne is never vacant (*sviato mesto pusto ne bivaet*).” Borisov did

not have to fully elaborate on this last idiom since his students are clearly familiar with a popular sentiment regarding undocumented migrants from former Soviet Asian Republics and from China. Using the trope of security threat – never fear, there is always going to be somebody to fill the vacancy – in the migration debate in Russia is a tactic widely utilized by media outlets to refer to the presence of unpopular labor migrants in Russian cities. Describing labor migration as an ultimate invasion is a popular scare tactic among the nationalists but it has a broader appeal too. Media outlets also add to this xenophobic sentiment by often framing the problem of unregulated labor migration as contributing to the changing “national” character of the country. By framing Russia’s population decline as a security problem Borisov speaks to the already existing moral panic surrounding the issue of migration and fostered by the ethnohistorical narratives that represent migration as an additional step in the destruction of the Russian ethnic character. By visualizing the problem of underpopulation using two vastly different population pyramids, he also helps his students to not only identify the problem, but also to find pertinent evidence demonstrating its gravity.

Identifying Evidence

The first introduction of demography and basic tools for understanding demographic trends also serves as an entry point into presenting what Borisov frames as the practical significance of demography (*prakticheskoe znachenie demografii*).

Demography has a vast practical significance. It can be used for insurance purposes. Mortality tables could be used to estimate risks, for instance. So, it’s very practical. In the 1990s for instance, there was a popular strategy among people who wanted to invest in cheap real estate to consult mortality tables to see where and when people are going to die soon so

that they can semi-legally get hold of these people's real estate. I am sure these people were using mortality tables for that.

After convincing his students in the practical application of demography, Borisov turns to history. When explaining to students the basic pillars of demography as a discipline (fertility, mortality, migration), he punctuates his explanations of the concept of total fertility rate and the importance of replacement level with historic examples of demographic fluctuations that had taken place in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia: "When in the 1970 and 1980s demographers and statisticians realized that the birthrate is falling they," he says – "they began writing letters to the Central Party Committee. I was writing letters too." In the next couple of years, the Soviet state realized the gravity of the situation, in which birthrates were falling below replacement level thus leading to the general population decline. The state then introduced what Borisov calls a series of "paid motherhood" policies³². Because the vast majority of women were employed, introducing new welfare benefits helped women reconcile work and family life and as a result, birthrates went up.

At this point, Borisov skips a decade and introduces a new stage in the demographic development of the country:

And then in 1992 came Gaidar³³. Do you remember him? It is that guy who told you: Now go forth and multiply...only at your own expense. In

³² Borisov's example is a significantly reduced version of the history of a pronatalist policy introduced by the state at the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1981. Extended maternity leave, unpaid leave from 18 months to 3 years, flexible work schedule, and a special set of subsidies for women with more than three children. The policy was introduced gradually, first in the Far East and Siberia, and in 1982 in the remaining parts of Russia (Zakharov 2008: 920-922). For more on this see Chapter I.

³³ Egor Gaidar was shortly a prime minister of Russia in 1992. He was best known as a passionate advocate of the free market economy and one of the major architects of the so-

the Soviet Union, the state took partial responsibility for childbearing. And then Gaidar and his buddies came to power. Nowadays, people don't like to be reminded of this period because it reminds them of poverty. It is when poverty appeared for the first time on our radar.

After the introduction of new free market economic reforms, which de-facto ended welfare and pronatalist policies initiated by the Soviet state in the early 1980s, birthrates plummeted and mortality rates increased. This period is also known as when, as Borisov puts it, "people were poor and hungry." The decade that began with the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the decade of privatization and liberalization of economy. Borisov identified to his students direct causal relationships between the introduction of liberal market policies, poverty and Russia's population decline. The state in this case, or rather the state retreat from its traditional role, takes a full responsibility for causing this decline in his account.

When Borisov then introduced the new wave of pronatalist policies launched by Putin's government, he identified the state as coming back as the major actor in changing demographic trends. However, if Borisov identified the links between inequality, pronatalism, and population decline when he spoke about the decade following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when he proceeded to speak about the current state of population affairs, the issue of inequality and poverty disappeared from the causal relationships between policies and demographic patterns. Instead, in 2000s the social institutions of family and childbearing values became the major object of population policy interventions that concerned him. Borisov backed his argument up by evoking the name of Andrei Volkov, a famous Soviet-Russian demographer and the member of the

called shock therapy reforms implemented by Yeltsin's government after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Central Statistical Administration of the USSR. Although Volkov himself was a proponent of the family's autonomy from the state and was very skeptical about the possibility of reversing the demographic inertia of falling fertility rates and going back to multi-children families, Borisov similarly to his well scientific consultant (advisor) Antonov, used Volkov's work to prove his point about the possibility of reversing demographic trends and going back to higher levels of fertility through rewarding and punishing families for having more or less than two children. For Antonov, to improve a general image of family, the state needs to turn the family and not an individual into the basic unit of any attempt to redistribute economic and social resources (Antonov & Borisov 2006: 111-115).

Borisov's description of the new era in pronatalist policies serves as an example of how demographic trends could be changed:

We are witnessing a new process now – the effects of the new demographic policy. Although demographers have been skeptical about the new maternal capital policy initiated by the state, its effects are evident – birthrates are going up and population is growing again. We lost a few million people over the 1990s. Some forecasts even projected 80 million by 2015 but after the new policy it's been growing.³⁴

Although Borisov often remarked on the problematic nature of the maternal capital policy, he said: "I never thought it would work but it did. We see that people are having second and third child. It's a new phenomenon and clearly is an effect of the policy. Only recently, to the question about third child, Russian women have answered: 'we are not fools,' but now you can see that fertility rates are going up." In his description of two different types of population policies, Borisov zoomed in on family as

³⁴ In 2008 Russia's population has declined to 142 million from 148.6 million in 1993, a loss of 6.6 million people (Rosstat 2011).

the main object of intervention. He demonstrated the argument advanced by his scientific advisor and colleague that with the correct set of incentives, the state is capable of changing demographic behavior of its inhabitants and can alter their need for children in accordance with social needs.

This focus on family, childbearing values, and reproductive capacities of women is characteristic of a broader cultural framework through which the crisis of underpopulation is understood and debated in today's Russia. Although in the beginning of the seminar, Borisov stressed the interconnectedness of various variables in shaping demographic reality, in his lectures, he clearly put emphasis on fertility rates as the driving force behind population growth. Migration is practically absent from Borisov's overview of demography: "Migration is part of demography but it is an object of another discipline, it is a separate topic although we cannot talk about demography without talking about migration." Migration is also a politically uncomfortable topic in contemporary Russia and it is apparent in Borisov's lectures: "When in the 1990s we had a negative population growth we opened these floodgates that attracted migrants. But migration does not exist to block holes. Large migration waves might change the demographic structure of the country." Glossing over different types of migration, Borisov says: "It is also dangerous because it fosters national conflicts. With these conflicts, it only gets worse once you try to understand them." Borisov's remarks about migration seemed to be an attempt to avoid a potentially controversial and complex political issue.

Although mortality is a frequent topic in Borisov's lectures, nevertheless, it is much less discussed than fertility or reproduction. In fact, aside from a brief explanation

of total mortality rates, in the dozens of lectures I attended during my fieldwork, mortality usually appeared in the last part of the seminar in the form of intellectual exercise that Borisov asks his students to do. Given the unprecedented high mortality rates for an industrialized country such as Russia, this exercise is especially telling. Life expectancy at birth for men is estimated to be 61.8 years and for women 74.2 in 2008 (Rosstat 2010). One of the implications of high mortality rates for men is that around 45 percent of males who reached their 15th birthday in 2009 will not survive to celebrate their 60th birthday³⁵. In the last hour of one of the seminars, Borisov asked his students to imagine a desirable life expectancy for men in Russia. One of the students suggested 61, which in fact is a statistically estimated life expectancy for men. Borisov asked again: “Well, let’s get wild, let’s get our imagination fly.” Several students suggest 64-65. Several others went for 70. No one raised life expectancy above it.

After explaining to students the appalling differences in life expectancy for men and women (61.8 and 74.2 respectively), Borisov asked if we can force women to live longer, if not to have more children. Both men and women attempt to reply to this question. In the cacophony of voices, I heard: “What for? They already live long enough.” The exercise clearly showed the limits of social imagination as students found it hard to imagine a much higher life expectancy from the actual one. Borisov jokingly suggested raising life expectancy for women to 92 – “like in Japan,” he said. One of the students replied: “Can you imagine what these crowds of single women would do?” After Borisov drew a chart on the blackboard laying out different reasons for high mortality

³⁵ For more data see: http://www.gks.ru/bgd/free/b07_00/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d120/8-0.htm

rates, one of the male students said: “What for? Why do we need to know? We’ll all die in the end.” To that, a female student replied: “Yeah, but I’d like to live a little longer.”

When Borisov, his colleagues and I ran a survey among public servants testing their knowledge of the current demographic policy, I was surprised to learn that in their answer to the question: “In your opinion, how many years does it mean to live long?” the majority of respondents’ answers did not drastically differ from the actual statistics of life expectancy in Russia. 75 years was an absolute limit for the respondents’ imagination and among 102 survey questionnaires, only four people indicated a number larger than 75. A Russian comedian was once asked why people in Europe live longer in comparison to people in Russia. His answer was worthy of an acute anthropological observation: “People in Russia don’t live less, they just live faster.”

Needless to say, the limits of social imagination have a gendered character too. Borisov asked whether or not women should live longer, most likely anticipating the negative response from his students. It never even crossed his mind to ask the same question about men. While women could be forced to “live longer” or “to have more children,” population trends for men seem to follow the inertia of demographic processes. In other words, in this learning process, in which administrators are trained to frame the problem of underpopulation and to identify evidence proving the validity of such a framing, Borisov confirms exactly what the state does – promoting pronatalist policies directed to reproduction while ignoring the much more acute problem of male mortality rates that exists in Russia today.

In the series of communicative acts that make some demographic trends more visible than others, and in which normative and moral foundations of the crisis are

debated, students and their teachers negotiate a set of assumptions with which to interpret social reality. They learn to recognize the effects of the demographic problem by framing it in a way that privileges fertility and reproduction over other demographic variables. By learning to recognize the problem and identify evidence, bureaucrats as well as their teachers learn to discuss changing values, norms, the future of the nation, and the moral obligations of Russia's citizens.

Scientific Management and Governance: Postsocialist Changes and Continuities

The question of the practical significance of demography that Borisov raised more than once in his seminars and the question of who benefits more from the interactions between scholars and bureaucrats are objects of debates and arguments. The ombudswoman at the meeting with which this chapter started admitted the value of Borisov's scientific expertise for the ongoing political projects undertaken by the government. She also pointed out the practical benefits the scholars might have from interacting and collaborating with the government authorities. The practical benefits she referred to were contracts between research institutes and various government organizations for conducting task-directed research, which are especially crucial in the context of a scarcity of research budgets and ongoing reforms of the higher education system initiated by the government several years ago. Indeed, these contracts seem to be in high demand among researchers in the Institute, who, as chapter II demonstrated, actively seek them out in an effort to find additional sources to supplement their incomes.

The idea of using scientific knowledge to promote government policies has been around since the emergence of the modern state. Since its inception, the Soviet State

relied on science to organize and govern society. The new socialist state emphasized scientific management and administrative training as crucial to the central element of its new economic development – central planning (Blum 2001; Graham 1993). The Scientific Management movement, borne out of the modernizing projects of the 19th century, is a Soviet incarnation of the western movement of Taylorism, and it had at its foundation the idea that human societies can be directed in a rational direction (ibid; Bessinger 1988). The Soviet Management movement had been the object of extensive debates throughout the history of the Soviet Union. Lenin embraced Taylorism as a great scientific achievement but tried to “strip it away from the corrupt flesh of capitalism” (Banta 1993:91). In the early years of the movement, not only factories but also ideologically charged entities such as the Party itself were subject to the organizational charts and research on record keeping and paperwork³⁶ (Beissinger 1988:84).

Throughout the 1930s, like its many counterparts, the Scientific Management movement was “subjected to a quick and painful death” (ibid: 141). Following Stalin’s terror, the Scientific Management movement was almost entirely displaced by the Stakhanovite movement³⁷ with its focus on breaking individual records instead of

³⁶ As socialist managers were making efforts to improve productivity and efficiency by using some of the disciplinary techniques introduced by Taylor and Ford, contradictions within Taylorism as it was applied to the command economy became evident. The introduction of the centrally planned economy transformed the Taylorist model and unlike in a capitalist enterprise where upper-level managers make crucial decisions, in the Soviet Union, central planners were responsible for making decisions at the national level. This, in turn changed the dynamics of work organization, the scale at which decisions were made, and the ability to gain power in the political system (Verdery 1996: 19-38; Dunn 2004: 8-18).

³⁷ Stakhanovite movement named after Alexei Stakhanov, a miner from Donbass, who in one shift dug 102 tons of coal when the norm was 7 tons. Soon other miners as well as workers from other industries began breaking this record producing over 500 tons of coal

scientifically determined norms of labor (Beissinger 1988:135). Nevertheless, the Scientific Management movement continued to have practical implications on how the Soviet State thought about the industrial development of the country and its planned economy.

In the last decade of the Soviet Union, using scientific research in determining administrative policies was no longer questioned (ibid:288). In the post war period, different industrial ministries established research institutes under their own jurisdiction but even if they did not have one, ministries could always take advantage of the existing network of research institutes under the auspices of the Soviet and later Russian Academy of Sciences. In the Academy of Sciences system, contracts with governmental organizations constituted up to 25 percent of their annual budget and in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, research institutes began relying even more heavily on industrial, civil, or military contracts (Graham 1993:180-188).

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, knowledge produced by statisticians and demographers enabled the state to conceptualize population, while experts in demography played an active role in the Soviet project of establishing a modern administrative state. Statistical categories produced by these specialists became a crucial element in the political decision-making process as the state often designed policies to either promote or repressed individuals or groups based on the criteria determined by the experts' scientific research (Blum 2001; Blum and Mespoulet 2006; Hirsch 2005; Holquist 2003, Slezkine 1994). Demographers and statisticians saw their role to be invaluable in educating the state about possible and desirable transformations and

a shift. Managers in the Stakhanovism movement were subordinated to supply and serve individual workers rather than manage the entire factory floor (Bessinger 1988:135).

improvements. Thus, Blum and Mespoulet (2006) describe the Soviet demographers and statisticians' interactions with the state as a project in which scholars and researchers envisioned the state as subordinated to the scientific project of administration and government. For them, statistical sciences of population could determine a variety of governing possibilities, which made statistics and demography a crucial addition to the political project of government (Blum & Mespoulet 2006:263-279).

Discussions about terminology and bureaucratic procedures of naming and categorizing different groups using various criteria (e.g., nationality) together with policies that entitled or disinherited these groups were part and parcel of the technocratic approach to policymaking. For the generations of scientists serving as population experts and administrative specialists, science determined the possibilities for governing population. Through the process of categorization and classification of 'people,' Soviet experts made extensive use of census and ethnographic knowledge not only in order to "place their subjects into standardized knowable categories (a definitional grid) that facilitated centralized rule" (Hirsch 2005: 102); the Soviet regime also used expert knowledge in order to consciously transform people's identities and sense of social obligation.

Statistical figures and numbers, although not necessarily open to a larger public were part of the body of knowledge that served as the foundation of the modern Soviet administrative state. In the last decade of the Soviet Union, using expert or specialist advice in determining social policies was no longer questioned (Beissinger 1988:288). The renewed interest in the role of the discipline of demography and statistics as a governing tool in the wake of the Soviet Union demonstrated the importance of expert

knowledge in determining policies and in directing life trajectories of several generations of Soviet citizens within dramatically new political and economic contexts. Yet, two decades of postsocialist regime in Russia have seen significant changes in the role played by policy experts in the processes of political decision-making.

The first post-Soviet census is a telling example. The last Soviet census was conducted in 1989 and the first post-Soviet one was conducted in 2002³⁸. Valery Tishkov, the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow, reflecting back on the events preceding the 2002 census, stressed the dialogue between a group of experts from the Institute of Ethnology and a variety of regional scientific institutes and the Russian Federal Statistical Bureau (Rosstat). These relationships began in the 1990s with a routine request from Rosstat to provide an expert opinion on a series of census questions regarding “nationality” category. This first request grew into a long-term exchange between the bureau and a group of experts and it involved different stages of census taking – from formulating questionnaires to finding right ways for interpreting responses. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a group of experts from the Institute of Ethnology proposed to change the order of questions about native languages and nationalities. In addition, they proposed to introduce a new category of a mixed ethnic identity into census. The rationale behind this proposal was to neutralize the highly politicized nature of the nationality category in the new Russian state. The proposal was

³⁸ The census scheduled to be conducted in 1999 failed, most likely because of the political and financial disarray of the Federal Statistical Bureau but also because of Yeltsin’s government’s reluctance to face its political opposition and public outcry over the consequences of misery caused by the shock therapy of Yeltsin’s political and economic reforms. Some of the most respectable academicians of the country saw census as a quantifiable proof of the misery and disarray caused by these reforms (Tishkov 2003: 19).

accepted by Rosstat for a very short period of time and the new questionnaire was implemented in the interim census of 1994.

Yet the 2002 census reversed the order of questions to the original one, going back to a more conservative list of nationalities (Tishkov 2003:16-17). Tishkov's recollection of these events several years after the fact is perhaps the most revealing fact about the long-term relationship between the state and its scientific community: "Although we were not able to significantly alter the program of the 2002 census (i.e., the modes of asking questions about nationality and native languages and the modes of interpreting responses), nevertheless our discussions with Rosstat were extremely beneficial for the scientific community and the state" (Stepanov & Tishkov 2007). It is the dialogue itself and not the final outcome of this exchange that Tishkov puts emphasis on here. He also points to the change occurred in the nature of this exchange. While he describes the 1990s as a rewarding period for an open exchange between the state policymakers and knowledge experts, the results of this exchange indicate a degree of detachment that knowledge experts began experiencing during the first years of Putin's rule.

In fact, the moment in time that most of the scholars I worked with identified as the most favorable period for a fruitful collaboration with the state was the mid and late 1990s. Like Tishkov, they emphasized this period as that time when the use of demographic knowledge and statistics was an object of an open intellectual debate that involved scientific experts, public officials, and government bureaucrats. So for example, Dr. Elizarov, a demographer from the Moscow State University, who has been a policy expert for the central government since the late 1980s, described the 1990s in the

following terms, noting in particular the existence of the first post-Soviet presidential group of experts in demographic policy:

Things were happening all the time then. This expert group consisted of comrades in arms (*spodvizhniki*). This level of collaboration doesn't exist anymore. We used to have demographers and they would represent different schools of demography. There was a dialogue and our opinions were heard. It's all gone now; there is a committee of experts, which I am a part of but it's a different structure now. There is no real system in place. It's much more arbitrary now and no one is really listening to what we have to say.

The Kremlin continues to follow this tradition of conducting weekly meetings between federal bureaucrats and outside and independent experts, which the current government inherited from the mid-1990s Chubais' government. Yet, in the past decade, the role of these experts has changed from that of an advisor to that of an invited expert whose de-facto role is to scientifically justify decisions accepted and approved prior to the meeting itself. Their role is reduced to that of a public relations manager who can give a scientific gloss to a political decision (Surnacheva and Gabueva 2012a).

Perhaps the most recent population policy built around incentives for women to have multiple children is the best example to the disconnect between policy experts and government actions that Elizarov was referring to. The "maternal capital," a lump sum of money that women can get for the birth of a second child, that became the central measure of the new population policy, turned out to be a major surprise for the majority of policy experts who took part in a variety of advisory committees prior to the announcement of this policy. Elizarov and his Moscow based colleagues told me on several separate occasions that they were aware of the fact that Putin would announce a new demographic policy in his annual address to the federal assembly, but among those actively consulting the government on possible policy measures, no one expected this

monetary component to be at the forefront of the long-term political project of fostering population growth.

Elizarov's recollection of the past contradicts more popular representations of the 1990s as an unruly and lawless period in post-Soviet Russian politics. The 1990s are often portrayed both by Russian political analysts and their Western counterparts as the period when all hell broke loose: the shock therapy of privatization and market based reforms, growing rates of poverty, budget deficits, political conflicts, to name just a few. In popular culture they are often called "the wild or reckless 1990s" (*likhie devianostie*), referring to what a Russian sociologist Vadim Volkov (2002) called "violent entrepreneurship" of making Russian capitalism. While, the 1990s are often represented as the lawless age in which the state took a back seat while other social actors, especially oligarchs and organized crime, filled the power vacuum, Elizarov's representation of the first decade of the new post-Soviet state of Russia focuses on an open debate that was encouraged by the state and its agencies. For Elizarov, and for Tishkov too, it was that period when expert knowledge was welcomed by the state and when he considered himself as a true partner in the political process, in which the future of the new state was at stake.

While talking about "the wild 1990s," Elizarov described these committees as somewhat spontaneous and open debates were encouraged by the state. When depicting more recent developments in the relationships between the state and its policy experts, by contrast, scholars referred to these collaborations as institutionalized and routine events supported and directed by the state. Despite this positive development, however, social

scientists often describe these meetings as mere formality, as lip service paid by the state to the concept of scientific management.

The current disconnect between scientific expertise and the state is a new phenomenon and it sheds light on a new *raison d'être* developed by the post-Soviet state in the last decade. Paradoxically, the institutionalization of expert committees led to the growing disconnect between the state and its policy experts. I have heard more than once from researchers and scholars of demography that in fact in recent years they have more opportunities to serve on expert committees initiated by either national or regional governments. One of the demographers in the institute referred to them as “routine committee meetings.” He said: “Every Monday, twice a month, we are going there and they make it look as if they are interested in what we have to say.” Ironically, after knowledge experts received what they were striving for – to become an institutionalized partner in the political process – most of them see this partnership as non-effective. While in the experts’ recollection of the 1990s, their collaboration with the government is represented as a dialogue, in the new routinized and somewhat arbitrary collaborations, experts see their role as reduced to a mere reporting with no clear knowledge of whether their reports will ever be incorporated into new policies.

Conclusion: The Effects of the Learning Process

This chapter focused on a series of interactions between social scientists and government officials through which scholars’ reputations and their role as valuable partners in the political process are established and managed. It demonstrated the strategies social scientists involved in the production and dissemination of research related to the crisis of

underpopulation use in order to manage their reputation. As they transfer the knowledge to bureaucrats whose demographic illiteracy they seek to eradicate, they establish themselves as contributory experts without whom the interactional expertise of their students would eventually die out if not repeatedly refreshed and renewed. Historicizing their prior relationships with the state by invoking the concept of the scientific management, these scholars remind themselves and government officials of their previously successful participation in the political process that should grant them respect and regard.

Second, in the learning process, in which the scholars attempt to provide government bureaucrats with a set of assumptions with which to interpret social reality, they teach them to recognize the problem of underpopulation, identifying it in a way that privileges family and reproduction as its major sources. In the interactive learning process, in which the meanings of the crisis of underpopulation are negotiated and reconfigured, bureaucrats are trained to exclude certain evidence (such as inequality) as irrelevant and as the ethnographic moment with the governor demonstrates, also illegitimate source of discussion.

Finally, by representing the state as an ultimate yet unstable source of power, policy experts can continue participate in this open-ended evaluative process, in which actual policy results are less relevant than the process of interacting itself. In this process of mediating between social reality and political decision-making, social scientists gain a source of power insofar as they create alliances with the state officials that in turn can extend their scientific results as relevant to the society. Representing the state as a separate entity – an ultimate source of power and a “faceless” mechanism, ignorant of

other social institutions and actors – appears here not as a theoretical conundrum discussed by anthropologists of the state (Hansen & Stepputat 2001), but as a social strategy of evaluating the possibility of partnership in a larger political process.

CHAPTER IV

“Reproductive Drama:” (Sanitary) Culture and Biomedical Authority in Contemporary Russia

Introduction

Embedded in a new set of population policies introduced in Russia in the late 2000, is the development of a net of medical centers oriented towards reproductive health and new reproductive technologies. A member of the Sverdlovsk parliament (*zak sobranie*) once commented on this development, mincing no words:

We opened our prenatal center even before the country knew how to pronounce “prenatal.” And let me tell you: the demographic situation will ultimately determine whether or not the state of Russia will continue to exist. As simple as that. Therefore, when women are admitted to our prenatal center, they don’t belong to themselves. They have a national task and this task is to give birth to a healthy child.

Ideas about health, sexuality and gender play a crucial role in the national politics of postsocialist countries. The discursive and practical debates about reproduction have shaped postsocialist politics in the form of programs designed to “renew the population” (Gal and Kligman 2000:16). In these discourses human reproduction and gender become a legitimate object of state intervention and public discussions about fertility, sexuality, and childcare constitute relations between the state and its subjects. The ideas about reproduction, gender, and sexuality, when legislated and implemented in policies, create the boundaries by which national selves and national groups are produced and reconstituted (Gal and Kligman 2000). For these newly established nation states

“legislating reproductive morality for its citizens is one way in which a government can appear as ‘good,’ as a moral actor in social life” (ibid:29).

In the current Russian politics, biomedical and public health professionals are taking an active part in establishing the state authority in the matters of reproduction. Medical anthropologists have shown the importance of healthcare providers to the state-building processes taking place in postsocialist societies (Bazylevych 2010; Rivkin-Fish 2005; Raikhel 2010; Field and Twigg 2000). Rivkin-Fish (2005) had shown how political and popular discussions that focus predominantly on low fertility as the core of the population problem affect women’s interactions with their physicians. Her ethnography demonstrates how chastising women about their reproductive behaviors has become a real disciplinary practice but more so an increasingly valid means for physicians to assert their professional and moral authority. In this interactive process, conditioned by the national politics of the “population renewal,” social problems get medicalized, which displaces public attention from broader, structural and socioeconomic issues beyond individuals’ control, such as unemployment, major cutbacks in public services, and plummeting public health indicators (ibid).

This chapter will contribute to the discussion of the medicalization of the population problems and reproduction by focusing exclusively on a group of obstetricians and gynecologists in a large maternity hospital in Yekaterinburg. The chapter will demonstrate how this community of biomedical experts appropriate existing discourses of the “crisis of underpopulation” and assign to them new cultural and social meanings in their clinical and research practices. Rather than focusing on the acts of individual patient care, the chapter will examine how these medical professionals negotiate their power

outside their clinical care as they participate in the demographic debate and in the development of regional prenatal care programs.

The chapter reveals how this group of health providers in one of the largest maternity hospitals in the city, borrowing from their Soviet past as the de facto experts on population health and growth, pragmatically use population policies and discourses around them as an opportunity to establish their institutional identity and reaffirm their authority vis-à-vis the state. It demonstrates challenges to this objective, which include continuing privatization of the health system and dramatic transformations in state support to medical institutions. This chapter suggests that in response to these challenges, physicians appropriate terms like culture, emotions, and values from other state agents participating in the population debate (e.g., social scientists, psychologists, and educators) and infuse these concepts into their analyses and policy recommendations. By infusing biomedical way of thinking with concepts borrowed from social sciences and psychology, they redefine themselves as a vanguard in the state's efforts to promote demographic recovery. The chapter argues that they strategically deploy particular understandings of "culture" as a way to reproduce biomedical authority over the matters of reproduction and population dynamics. Furthermore, in the era that seems like a complete rupture with the past, these medical professionals' reassertion of biomedical authority over population predicaments involves significant continuity of their Soviet institutional and social practices.

Each one of the following sections introduces one piece of the puzzle that sheds light on the role of medicine and expert knowledge in the narratives about the problem of under-population and the ways to overcome the crisis. First, I introduce a group of

medical professionals and public health specialists as they advance themselves as important contributors to the demographic debate prominent in contemporary Russia. By focusing on their practices, such as programs surrounding childbirth and pregnancy education, I follow the concepts of knowledge expertise used by this particular group. Second, I provide necessary historical background in order to demonstrate how these medical experts borrow practices from their Soviet past that ultimately intend to establish themselves as a community of experts and as a legitimate and powerful force of social change in postsocialist Russia. The last two pieces of the puzzle aim to demonstrate the complexity of the demographic debate by situating it in the context of other social changes occurring in contemporary Russia. To this end, I introduce other social actors taking part in the demographic debate. I demonstrate how medical professionals, in their attempt to institute themselves as a powerful source of knowledge regarding population intervention, must face other forces of social change in contemporary Russia. By introducing these forces, first, in the form of organized alternatives to biomedical knowledge and second, in the form of new state policies, I demonstrate how medical professionals transform their narratives and institutionalized practices in order to compete for resources and to sustain their authority as a community of experts in the context of population crisis.

Sanitary Culture: How to Give Birth with a Smile

As an anthropologist conducting fieldwork in Yekaterinburg and interested in population policies in Russia, I was a frequent participant in a series of conferences, meetings, and roundtables dedicated to the problem of population decline in the Ural region and Russia

more generally. The majority of conferences and events dedicated to the demographic problem I had attended in the field were called “scientific-practical” conferences (*nauchno-prakticheskie konferentsii*). The idea behind a “scientific-practical conference” is to bring together and facilitate interactions between researchers and practitioners in a particular field of knowledge. In the end of every such conference its organizers formulate a document expressing their expert view of the problem, put together a series of policy recommendations, and send it to the local or regional authorities. Although many of the experts I interviewed during my fieldwork lament about how little their views and recommendations matter, every conference I attended stubbornly ended with a same ritual of creating a policy recommendation document. Over time, I became acquainted with the majority of the participants in the conferences and roundtables dedicated to the demographic crisis. I often used these conferences as a place to meet different experts, introduce myself and my research to them, and to learn about these experts’ roles, strategies, and interests in the process of debating and negotiating local and national demographic programs and initiatives. One of the meetings I participated in was a day-long conference entitled “Reproductive Behavior in the Age of Population Crisis.” The conference was organized by the department of Social Education at one of the universities in Yekaterinburg and it brought together social workers, city council members, civil servants from the regional government (*oblast*), social scientists, religious anti-abortion activists, prenatal psychologists, and health providers from a number of the city’s hospitals.

At this conference, I met Galina B.,³⁹ a physician who came as a representative of one of the oldest and largest maternity hospitals in the Ural region. The hospital occupies an avant-garde constructivist building erected in the late 1920s. Both in its avant-garde architecture and in its historical status as the oldest maternity hospital, it projects an image of a progressive and technologically advanced institution. The hospital was among the first in the region to invite fathers to be present at their wives' deliveries (*partnerskie rodi*) -- a practice that did not officially exist in the Soviet Union and is still not very popular in the majority of maternity wards. According to Galina B. and some of her colleagues, the Ministry of Health allows a relative (either a parent or a husband but someone with either blood or legal ties to a woman) to be present in the delivery ward if the physical conditions of the hospital allow it. A medical official I interviewed indicated that many maternity hospitals simply cannot afford men's presence at birth because their delivery wards are often too crowded. Some of my other interlocutors (and medical professionals were among them) had a more cynical view of the issue at stake. Lidia, a nurse, told me that some hospitals take advantage of the physical conditions' clause in the law in order to create additional revenue for the hospital by institutionalizing paid services. One of the popular practices is to renovate and redecorate several hospital rooms and for an additional charge of 30-50 thousand rubles (\$1000-1500) to offer these renovated rooms and a private delivery ward for couples striving to give birth with both partners present.

³⁹ All individual names are pseudonyms. I refer to my interlocutors using first names only although I have been using patronymics in my conversations with some of them. I indicate this by using the first letter of their patronymics (e.g., Galina B.)

Going back to the conference, Galina B. had come to the event to present an educational program that she and her obstetrics colleagues at the hospital developed to prepare women and their partners for childbirth. In her presentation, Galina B. stated:

Our educational program is called “Giving Birth with a Smile” (*Rozhai s Ulybkoi*). Our goal in this course is to make families stronger (*ukrep’it sem’iu*). We talk about family values, about family aspects of pregnancy, about family relations and about how children interact with other members of the family. Besides, we are all *mnogodetnye mamy* (we have large families with a lot of children) ourselves. I have three children; my colleague Elena K. has three. We, all of us, are family oriented (*semeino orientirovannie*)...

One recurrent theme at this particular conference as in other events dedicated to the crisis of underpopulation was the question of family values. The social institution of family occupies an important role in the population debate and crumbling family values are often blamed for Russia’s population decline. Speakers before and after Galina B. emphasized the disappearance of family values as the reason for the demographic crisis. Their presentations of the “moral decay” of the society resonated well with a scope of public debates about “the crisis,” in which family and family values became the main point of reference and the main object of the state intervention (cf. Zhuzhenko 2004; see also chapter III).

In the Soviet discourse, family occupied an ambiguous position. On the one hand, Soviet leaders feared family as a place of potential challenge to the party. They often saw it as the place of potential betrayal. On the other hand, they represented Soviet family as a necessary mechanism of Soviet politics, precisely the place where intimate loyalties to the state are formed and enacted (Hooper 2006). It is through this legacy of ambiguity that contemporary knowledge experts attempt to address the role of family in the current “crisis” of population. In the population debate, family is at the convergence of different

expert discourses and is the ultimate object of discourse about the crisis of underpopulation. Addressing the declining population trends in Russia, the former deputy director for the State Statistics Service, said to a journalist: “Population will continue to decline if there are not going to be revolutionary changes in people’s minds.”⁴⁰ He then explained that the main change “in people’s minds” should be in the way Russian families work and live. The former governor of the Sverdlovsk oblast said repeatedly that the demographic situation is not going to change as long as people do not acknowledge the importance of family and intergenerational connections in the country’s efforts to overcome the crisis. Psychological discourses, as becomes clear from the two last chapters of this study, utilize family and succession as the main object of intervention and the ultimate remedy for the population problem.

Galina B.’s reference to her program in preparation for birth entitled “Giving Birth with a Smile as “a family oriented enterprise,” addressed popular and well-defined concerns over the future of the “Russian family.” Because prior to this conference I had already attended several more of them, to me her introduction sounded very much like the presentations of Galina B.’s counterparts from family centers, municipal clubs, and private “psychological centers.” Family and reproduction become here a locus of power struggles embedded in a particular political and social context. It is through this focus on the moral ideology of family, as Rivkin-Fish (2010) amply argues that “state power and citizenship are being created and transformed” (Rivkin-Fish 2010: 702; see also Zhurzhenko 2004; Philips 2008).

⁴⁰ <http://www.connews.ru/news/47>

After this short introduction, in which Galina B., assured her public that she is well-versed in the language of the population debate, her presentation took an unexpected turn. “Would you like a riddle?” – she asked. “How do you both go into labor and keep smiling?” After a theatrical pause, Galina B. said boldly:

Sanitary culture (*sanitarnaia kul'tura*). If you are sanitary educated you can give birth and smile (*togda ty mozhesch rodit s ulybkoi*). The goal of our program is to improve the state of a sanitary culture (*povyshenie sanitarnoi kultury*) among women and men alike. We nurture a responsible attitude toward pregnancy and we teach our patients the basics of mutually responsible reproductive behavior. By doing so we actually succeed in making our women give birth and smile at the same time.

“Sanitary culture” played an important role in the history of medical profession in the Soviet Union. By referencing the critical importance of the traditional field of knowledge possessed by the Soviet medical community, namely, social hygiene, Galina B. is affirming her identity as an expert in the field of reproductive education and culture. Soviet physicians in the 20th century played a powerful role in disciplining patient behavior through claims surrounding social hygiene, a topic that I will discuss later in this chapter. When listening to Galina B. and in light of this history of the Soviet medical profession, I was eager to explore how “sanitary culture,” biomedical knowledge, and the language of family values co-exist and operate as an educational tool in the context of childbirth. Moreover, because I was familiar with the fairly progressive practice of *partnerskie rodi* (men’s presence at birth) in Galina B.’s hospital I wanted to know whether there is a relationship between this practice and the concept of sanitary culture. I also wanted to learn more about the institutional context in which Galina B. and her colleagues were able to introduce *partnerskie rodi* at their hospital, given its lack of popularity at other medical institutions. After a series of short conversations, Galina B.

granted me access to a course in preparation for birth entitled “Giving Birth with a Smile.”

One Saturday morning, after I convinced a woman at the hospital reception desk that I was there for the pregnancy class – despite the fact that she could not see my belly – I joined eight other women and three men in the conference room of the maternity hospital. We listened to a lecture about pregnancy, delivery, and partners’ presence during childbirth. One of the most important parts of the program, we were told by our lecturer, was to make ourselves familiar with the hospital environment. “This is what distinguishes us from other similar programs in the city,” our lecturer Elena said. Following forty or so minutes of attentive listening, twelve of us followed Elena through numerous hospital corridors. The hospital was built in the 1920s during the vanguard period of the Soviet architectural history and when photographed from above, the architectural form of the hospital vaguely resembles an embryo. Its avant-garde structure did not make the task of orienting oneself in the hospital easy. The hospital building has a complicated system of passages that connect numerous hospital wards, halls, and galleries. In order to be able to navigate the corridors of the hospitals with a relative ease, one needs a significant amount of practice.

In addition to the initial disorientation we felt in the twisting and turning passageways, we were also told that the shortest way to move from point A to point B in the hospital is through its basement floor. As it turned out the basement floor was the least renovated part of the hospital, for which Elena apologized profusely. After finally familiarizing ourselves with various parts of the hospital we reached our final destination – the maternity ward itself. As our hostess showed us the ward with its predominantly

white and metallic colors, she concluded: “As you can see, it’s a very friendly environment and it’s spacious so you and your husband can feel comfortable here.” Faint giggling sounds coming from other participants, however, suggested that not everyone was convinced by the friendliness of the medical environment. One of the members of the group whispered: “I don’t think so.”

After the lecture I spoke to Elena, a woman obstetrician and a public health researcher, who was one of the first organizers of this educational program preparing women to give birth at her hospital. When I asked her to tell me the story behind the course and consequently of men’s participation in the program and at birth (*partnerskie rodi*), which all of her colleagues were so passionate about, she first emphasized the fact that unlike other hospitals in the city, their institution did not charge partners if they want to be present at birth: “It is the only mature and responsible decision the couple could make. And this is their right and duty.” She then returned to her initial point about the importance of sanitary culture, reproductive education, and father’s presence at birth. When Elena was talking about women she is working with, in other words, her patients, she defined the current reproductive cohort (i.e., reproductively active women of the last five or so years) as “not a very healthy generation. They give birth to unhealthy children and the index of health is declining as we speak, hence, the importance of sanitary education. After all what we really want is to bring up a new healthy generation of children and future parents.” “How would you do this?” – was my only question.

What is important here is the microbiological aspect of having your husband around at birth. Let’s talk about the microbiological level of ‘*partnerskie rodi*.’ Babies have a very limited interaction with the environment. They receive all the important microorganisms from their mom and dad. Those babies who were born with both parents around have less intestinal diseases when they grow up. In terms of health, there is a

clear difference between babies who were born in '*partnerskie rodi*' and those who were not. In addition, we offer a sanitation treatment for both parents during their stay in the hospital. We treat them for a specific kind of staphylococcus that exists in all the maternity wards. These moms and dads get healthier too when they get out.

Although Elena did not mention her source of evidence, I later learned that the microbiological aspects of '*partnerskie rodi*' was a topic of her doctoral dissertation that she defended a few years prior to our conversation. From Elena's perspective, *partnerskie rody* is a "mature and responsible decision," in which microbes are considered human immunological allies and are exchanged between men, women, and their newborn babies at the time of delivery (Latour 1993: 199; Martin 1998). As with the link Galina G., her colleague, established between sanitary culture and a woman's smile when she explained the main objective of her educational program, Elena is convinced that '*partnerskie rodi*' provides the optimal environment for the exchange of these protective microbes, and this practice, in turn, makes women and their partners not only healthier, but also happier. In short, "sanitary culture" or sanitary knowledge shapes and enhances the microbiological level of human existence, which in turn improves reproductive health outcomes and makes the partner's presence a necessary emotional component of every partnership.

For Elena, emotional wellbeing of her clients is the ultimate goal of the educational reproductive program. Anthropologists have demonstrated how in various social contexts emotions become an object of disciplining practices and intervention (Rapp et al 2001; Rivkin-Fish 2004; Lemon 2009). Anthropologists have documented how doctors in postsocialist societies deploy different practices to discipline patients and to claim their legitimacy in the context of unstable reality and perpetuate social change (ibid; Gabriel 2005; Bazylevych 2010). *Partnerskie rodi* and the educational program

advertized by Elena and her colleagues constitute a social practice aimed at remaking interpersonal relations and ways of thinking (cf. Rivkin-Fish 2004, 2005). My ethnographic data further reveal how these medical professionals extend these “disciplining practices” outside their clinical practice to the current population debate. Here they infuse social categories of the demographic debate with biomedical knowledge, sanitary education and emotional aspects of interpersonal relations. While the major categories around which the debate is built are family and morality, these medical experts introduce new meanings to the concept of moral, responsible, and family-oriented behavior. In the following pages, I will demonstrate how by drawing upon their traditional expertise from the Soviet past – social hygiene and its role in demographic policy interventions – the medical professionals at this particular hospital sought to reproduce their authority over the matters of reproduction and population dynamics. I will dwell upon the legacy of social hygiene and public health research used by medical professionals in order to establish themselves as a community of policy experts.

A History of Medical Demography and Social Hygiene

That cold December morning after the first meeting of the “Giving Birth with a Smile” class, when I introduced myself to Elena and began to tell her about my research interests, she interrupted:

The OB/GYN community has important skills to help improve the demographic situation in the country. We are able to strengthen the reproductive capital (*reproductivnyi potentsial*) of our country. We cannot influence social values; this should be the government’s role. We have other resources. We can support demographic policy by offering sanitary education and by helping young people make right choices. We know how to do that.

To understand Elena's adamantness, it is necessary to situate her response within the historical relationship between medicine and demographic policies in Russia. Historicizing Elena's statement might shed light on the question of why she and her colleagues consider themselves population experts and consequently, specialists in demographic policies and interventions?

The history of the Soviet medical community is a turbulent one. Soviet physicians have been active in research on social hygiene since the early 1920s. Soviet social hygiene emerged as the science, which studied "the influence of the economic and social conditions of life on the health of the population and the means to improve that health" shortly after the revolution under the authority of the Commissariat of Public Health (Narkomzdrav) (Solomon 1991: 175). Soviet social hygiene altered the field of public health research and teaching in Soviet Russia of the 1920s beyond recognition. Social hygienists enjoyed this leading position in public health research until their studies began revealing disturbing realities of the Soviet existence that could not co-exist with the regime's commitment to industrialization and progress. By the early 1930s, the majority of social research on health was discontinued and research departments were shut down (Solomon 1991). Unlike other social scientists, whose fate was much more tragic, the majority of prominent social hygienists of the 1920s, continued to do public health research well into the 1930. Yet, many of them (e.g., Semashko, Frenkel, and Molkov) had to take refuge in other departments and institutions, working under the auspices of other disciplines, such as medical statistics, general hygiene, or the health care organization (Solomon (1991: 192-193). More generally, however, Stalinist purges of the Academy of Medical Sciences in 1947-48 followed by personal denunciations,

incarcerations and institutes' reorganizations left the medical profession shattered and fractured (Nakachi 2008: 232-315).

Soviet physicians in general and obstetricians and gynecologists in particular became active in the debates over the nation's population trends in the post WW II period, especially following the enactment of the 1944 Family Law which was also reflected in the post-war maternity care (Nakachi 2008: 232-315). Aftermath WW II, obstetricians and gynecologists assumed an important role in the state attempt to recover from a steep population decline by fostering birthrate growth. Their roles included two major tasks: delivering preventive care and policing non-clinical abortions, which were temporarily banned in 1936 (*ibid*). In the 1960s, medical demography, led by prominent social hygienists who survived the purges of the 1930s, emerged in the Soviet Union as the field of research and teaching. The majority of research was conducted in the departments of social hygiene and public health and it was largely concerned with the problem of declining fertility rates (Feshbach 1986). In their studies, medical demographers and social hygienists argued that health, and especially the mother's health, was an important determinant of family size and the reproductive decisions of Soviet families.

The dominance of the biomedical approach to population issues and especially the focus on reproduction resulted in the foundation in 1975 of the Scientific Council on Social Hygiene and the Organization of Public Health by the Academy of Medical Sciences. Three of its four central commissions were directly concerned with the problem of social hygiene and the organization of public health, medical information, and sanitary education (Feshbach 1986: 69-78). The influence of health conditions, infertility, and

abortions on birth rates became the main subject of this research (ibid). The significance of studying hygienic processes and their effects on demographic processes was also translated into and reinforced through policy recommendations, outlined in the program entitled “Scientific Foundations of the Protection of the Health of Mother and Child for 1978-1990” prepared in 1978 by the Academy of Medical Sciences and the State Committee on Science and Technology (ibid: 74).

The problem of declining fertility rates, as well as infant and maternal mortality rates, remained the major object of study among social hygienists throughout the 1980s. Special courses on social hygiene and its effects on population processes were re-established and taught at medical institutes, policy recommendations were formulated, and new research institutions were established (e.g. “Laboratory of the Hygiene of the Labor of Women”). During this period, political leaders devoted the majority of the state’s social hygiene and public health resources to the development of research and state programs in the field of obstetrical and gynecological health (Feshbach 1986: 76-77). These developments helped establish social hygienists working in the field of Obstetrics and Gynecology as experts in population studies. In the post-war Soviet Union they were the principal authorities consulted on the relationship between health factors and effective interventions in the realm of demographic policies. Elena and her colleagues were products of this history.

Nearly thirty years after the rise of social hygiene as a foundational discipline in the study of demography, “sanitary education” remains a vital body of knowledge among medical professionals. In fact, it is arguably becoming an even more important field now for these individuals, as it consolidates their identity as a community of experts, in the

face of increasing numbers of other social actors outside the field of Obstetrics and Gynecology contributing to the population debate (e.g., psychologists, religious activists). When Galina G. presented her education program at the conference, she emphasized its distinction from other pregnancy classes offered in non-medical institutions. She did so by claiming that ultimately, women will return to medical settings, such as hers, to deliver their babies, and their lack of familiarity with this environment could not only jeopardize their health, but also their emotional state:

There are a lot of other places out there for pregnant women. We, as an oldest district maternity hospital, accept all kinds of patients including some of those who go to these other classes for pregnant women. The problem with these places is that they are not part of the medical environment; they are isolated from the place where women actually give birth. Therefore, women are left with a very idealistic understanding of the process. They were told one thing and when they come to us they see a completely different situation. Women who come to us get adapted to the reality of the maternity ward and therefore they smile when they give birth (*rozhaiut s ulybkoi*).

Among other socio-economic factors, such as the rise of consumerism and new middle class values (Patino 2008), the explosion of new options for childbirth classes in Yekaterinburg reflects the increasingly diverse groups emerging as experts in different population interventions. While there are a few organizations that exclusively assist women in homebirths, they do not advertize it openly for legal reasons. Even though homebirth is a relatively popular practice among many women in Yekaterinburg, professional doulas operate in a somewhat murky legal environment. There are no certified doulas in Russia, though the practice of homebirth has existed in Yekaterinburg since at least the mid 1980s. One of the “doulas” lamented during an interview: “Officially, I cannot do this but I do assist women at homebirth though I cannot take responsibility if something goes wrong.” A woman I interviewed who gave birth to her

two sons at home told me that when she had complications during her second delivery, her doula called an OB/GYN doctor she knew and apparently worked with constantly, and this doctor gave her medical assistance off-duty. Valentina Shirokova, the head of the department of the child and maternity health at the Russian Ministry of Health said to a journalist: “Homebirth is not banned in Russia, not officially at least. However, there are no normative documents or rules dealing with this procedure.”⁴¹.

Nevertheless, the majority of pregnancy classes prepare women for a hospital birth. They are fairly similar in structure and usually include a short series of informative lectures about different psychological and physiological aspects of pregnancy, labor, delivery, and breastfeeding. In addition, these classes offer couples psychological consultations throughout the pregnancy. Similarly to Galina’s approach, these courses emphasize emotional aspects of pregnancy and try to prepare women for possible psychological changes that could affect their wellbeing. Yet, unlike “Giving Birth with a Smile,” these programs make a clear distinction between psychological and biomedical aspects of pregnancy and birth. As one of the teachers told me: “women can look up all this information [physiological aspects of pregnancy] on the internet or read brochures that they receive when they go to a doctor.” Galina B. disdainfully referred to this emphasis as “an idealistic understanding of the process,” where the functioning of the psyche is perhaps privileged over the tangible physical health risks that require the close monitoring of legitimate medical professionals. From Galina B.’s perspective, it is not merely ignorant, but also irresponsible for women to lack “exposure” to the clinical

⁴¹ <http://www.minzdravsoc.ru/health/child/82>

environment -- echoing Elena's concern for instructing parents on making "mature and responsible" decisions in their birth plans.

When Galina B. wanted to underline the difference between her enterprise and other pregnancy courses in the city she used the concept of "sanitary culture": "These [other] schools don't have any medical or sanitary knowledge. They don't work with obstetricians, and they promote non-traditional forms of medicine that inevitably lead to increasing infant and maternal mortality rates." When I asked her about the mortality statistics, she simply replied: "There is no statistical data on this. It is not revealed." Galina B. continued, "But surely, [our hospital] promotes the most modern and safe methods of medical assistance during pregnancy and our infant and maternal mortality rates are almost negligible. And we all know that these mortality rates are one of the main reasons for the 'reproductive drama' in our country." By referring to "sanitary education" and by highlighting her knowledge in promoting women's health, Galina B. called attention to the importance of her expertise in the context of population crisis and nation's declining fertility rates.

Reproductive Drama – Doctors and Others

As the Russian state attempts to enact pronatalist policies through the system of fixed financial payments, the authority of the biomedical community as a leading force in the questions of population has begun to be challenged by an array of other social actors. Governing emotions and especially the emotions of pregnant women, has become a popular enterprise. The "reproductive drama" of population decline, Galina B. was referring to, is also a social drama between different experts participating in the

demographic debate. It is within this debate that professional identities and hierarchical relations are established and reconfigured. Natalya, the owner of a private family center that specializes in educational courses for pregnant women and their partners, was among this larger body of individuals making claims on the emotional wellbeing of pregnant women and questioning biomedical authority over matters of reproduction, childbirth, and the hospitalization of pregnant women. Natalya self identified in an interview as “a scapegoat of the medical OB/GYN community in the city.” This position came as a surprise to me as I had heard repeatedly about her center’s popularity from several women and even a man who had participated in the education course.

In between Natalya’s breastfeeding class and a birthday party she had organized for her daughter in the daycare, I met with her for coffee and she told me her story. As a woman in her forties and a mother of four young children, Natalya has had an unusual career path. She worked as a pianist in a middle school for several years. She then received a degree in psychology and opened her first family center in 1999:

I thought that I had something to share, I thought there is this niche and no one is interested in doing this but I have things I can share with people [...] My own experience, my knowledge, for example. I did my final project in the university on prenatal psychology [...] and I am a mom myself. I wanted people to be happy in the process of pregnancy. I wanted them to feel inspired instead of being fed scary stories.

Natalya, similarly to the obstetricians from the hospital, declared enhancing women’s emotional state as one of her main goals. These “scary stories,” she described, became evident in her interaction with her doctors during her own first pregnancy. She described, “When I came to the clinic (*konsul’tatsia*) and said that I was pregnant and need to register with them, the answer I received was: ‘Do you need an abortion or are you keeping it?’ This is when I began looking for alternatives.” Rivkin-Fish (2005) makes a

forceful analysis of such clinical practices and attitudes toward pregnancy and reproduction and their embeddedness in the social and political context of postsocialist Russia. In her exploration of the medical authority as a form of power in Post-Soviet Russia she demonstrated how health providers employ practices that aim to distinguish them from the fallout of the state power and to restore legitimacy lost during the Soviet Era (Rivkin-Fish 2005). Following her encounter with the official health system, Natalya eventually decided to deliver her baby at home and received help from one of the two city centers that specialized in homebirth.

Natalya's decision to turn to alternative forms of childbirth as well as her future family center for pregnant women did not emerge in a social vacuum. She is part of a larger social movement that has its roots in late socialism. In the 1980s, a network of "family clubs" (*semeinie klubi*) all across the country began practicing alternative medicine and what has since been labeled as "spiritual midwifery." Doulas I met during my fieldwork had had their first exposure to alternative medicine during this period and through this network of "family clubs." Rather than being a product of what is usually considered a one-directional movement of post-1991 New Age ideas coming from the West, Natalya's ideology and practice can be traced back to late socialism and the circulation of what an active member of such a club, Ludmila V., called "an ideology of traditional medicine" (*traditsionnaia meditsina*). Post 1989, Western ideas and objects have spread across postsocialist countries exponentially and affected the ways people there imagine themselves and others (Berdahl 1999). However important these influences may be, ideas often circulate in different directions and empirical evidence often point to the different origins of these ideas. For example, Alaina Lemon (2008, 2009) explores the

movement of ideas, values and techniques in an opposite direction. Her study of the Russian Academy for the Theatrical Arts challenges the notion that influential ideologies and values are arriving only from the West or that these ideas and values have been blocked by the Cold War (Lemon 2009; also see Rogers 2010).

In my conversation with Ludmila, she identified the main goal of her family club activity in the 1980s as “fostering healthy, strong, and happy families” (*vospitanie zdorovoi, sil’noi i schastlivoi sem’i*). During the Soviet period Ludmila’s family club was accused of being a religious sect, yet they continued to practice what she called “a holistic approach to body, soul and spirit” (*telo, dusha i duh*). Similarly to her medical counterparts, Ludmila spoke about the link between the emotional state of women and their health. Yet, she articulated that her objective was to offer an alternative to what she considered an unnecessary medicalization of people and family relations. Ludmila successfully transformed her late Soviet experience as a family club activist into the organization of the first NGO in Yekaterinburg dedicated to family, health, and children. Today she operates as a successful expert on writing grant proposals for other NGOs in the city. The way she put it: “As our kids grew up, so we grew up as experts in this field.” Hemment (2007) describes the world of women’s NGOs in Russia as “a site of agency and creative compromise, where the global and local come together in dynamic improvisation” (16). She demonstrates how, in the era of market-oriented policies, involvement in the world of foundations and grants allowed women involved in the world of women NGOs to maintain integrity amidst harsh socio-economic conditions. In the new marketplace of NGOs, their activism became a part of the professional sector with little to no connection to local reality and with constant requirements to navigate

bureaucracies, to master grant writing, and demonstrate “effectiveness.” (cf. Philips 2008).

Natalya is Ludmila’s younger colleague and her family and pregnancy education center is the third generation of the city “family clubs,” dedicated to childbirth, families, and alternative medicine. Although there are other private family centers with a similar agenda of promoting a non-medical approach toward pregnancy, Natalya is among the most successful. When Natalya decided to devote her career to working with pregnant women and their partners, she enrolled in a nursing school and became certified as a nurse-obstetrician. Perhaps, this certification is what gives her the courage to openly confront physicians about their practices. When I asked Natalya to tell me why she considered herself to be a “scapegoat” of the medical community, she told me:

I think I have some sort of a revolutionary spirit in me and that is how I paid for it... We always do a little survey in our courses when women first come to us. One of the questions is about how women prefer to give birth. And I had 100 surveys by then, it was in 2000, and 45 women said that they would prefer to give birth at home [...] So I went to the city department of health with my surveys and I went straight to the head of the OB/GYN department and I said, “Here’s my suggestion, let’s use one of the city maternity hospitals and set up a maternity ward there that would resemble a home environment.” She [the head of the OB/GYN department] told me: “We don’t need you, we have it all, because we have enough refrigerators and TV sets in our hospitals.” I tried to say something about different poses that women would be allowed to choose. She began giggling: “Next you’ll tell me about all the psychological help women need and all these things I am reading about on the internet. This is all very funny, because we, obstetricians decide how women [give birth]. And in general, I like C-section, because C-section saves lives.”⁴²

⁴² Cynthia Gabriel (2005) documents doctors’ decisions to make C-sections in one of the Saint Petersburg maternity hospitals. She describes women’s struggles with doctors when they ask to have a vaginal delivery while doctors insist on C-sections for no explicit reasons (Gabriel 2005: 76-80).

The obstetrician dismissed Natalya's suggestions as irrelevant to women's health, insisting, rather, that reproduction was an inherently medical matter. Natalya was stunned by this response: "It was a revelation that this was an opinion of a woman and a doctor who is supposed to be progressive and to be the vanguard of the OB/GYN profession." Appalled by Natalya's suggestion, this official then published an editorial in a medical journal casting Natalya as a "black midwife" who promotes dangerous and anti-scientific approaches to childbirth.

After this editorial was written, Natalya's practice was widely castigated by the medical community for jeopardizing women's health. She continued:

Since then our center has been receiving very negative responses from medical officials. They conceive of us as if we are some sort of a cult that prepares women for unidentified, underground (*podpol'nye*) childbirth. I've heard from our women that even in the X hospital [where Galina works], which is considered to be progressive, when women ask doctors what kind of [medical] interventions they are going to do during delivery and if they can refuse to these interventions – in our courses we actually train people how to build relations with doctors, how to talk to them – just as they [doctors] hear these questions they become very aggressive and they can even say: "Ah, you're coming from Natalya's center, we won't accept you here."

In my interviews with doctors and other medical officials in the city, I had often heard these negative views expressed about Natalya. It was clear that Natalya's definition of "progress" did not correspond to the way obstetricians and gynecologists understood progress, as they disagreed whether pregnancy was a normal physiological process or a medical condition. This competition for women's emotions and pregnant bodies clearly demonstrates different forces of social change at play in contemporary Russia and it also reveals different stakes these social actors have in this competition.

Childbirth Voucher (*rodovoi sertifikat*) – Medicalization from Above

Competing beliefs about maternal wellbeing are not the only issues at stake in this drama. The obstetrics and gynecology community's response to Natalya's enterprise and their competition for women's (and men's) emotions were also, in part, the outcome of an economic competition created by the national health project, which pitted hospitals both against each other and against alternative birthing centers for state funding. In 2006, recognizing the deteriorating state of its reproductive and maternal healthcare system and its negative effect on population growth, the government issued a new form of monetized aid to pregnant women. This "childbirth voucher" (*rodovoi sertifikat*) came in the form of a voucher (11,000 rubles or \$370) for a woman to attend maternity clinics (*zhenskaia konsultatsiia*), for routine exams and other medical expenses during her pregnancy, including delivery itself, and the first year of her child's healthcare needs.

Although issued to an individual pregnant woman, as part of the larger process of the "monetization" of social benefits, these "childbirth vouchers" are actually direct state investments in the healthcare system. Thus, for each visit a woman makes to a maternity clinic (*konsultatsia*) with her voucher, the government pays that clinic 3000 rubles. These vouchers guarantee that maternity hospitals (*roddom*) receive 6000 rubles per individual accepted for hospitalization there, and pediatric clinics receive 2000 rubles.⁴³ The resources received by a hospital through these birth vouchers can be utilized to buy additional equipment or to increase staff salaries. However, if a woman decides to go to another hospital or to have a homebirth, a hospital loses a portion of its anticipated

⁴³ For the official government issued information on birth certificates:
<http://www.rost.ru/projects/health/p04/p34/a35.shtml>

revenue. To secure this source of income, maternity clinics and hospitals employ various strategies to attract women to their institutions.

Pregnancy courses are one such strategy. The “Giving Birth with a Smile” class,” that Galina presented at the conference is a good example of a strategy that is designed to attract pregnant women to a medical institution. The class is held at a medical center that operates both as a day clinic and as a maternity hospital, a rare combination in Russia where normally an obstetrician in a maternity ward is not the same specialist who followed a woman during her pregnancy. As the major regional maternity hospital, it operates under the authority of the regional ministry and admits women from the area much larger than the city and is not easily accessible to the city dwellers. Because of its reputation, however, women and their partners often mobilize their personal and kinship networks (*znakomstvo*, *blat*) to gain access to its health providers (Ledeneva 1998, 2006; Rivkin-Fish 2005). Aside from mobilizing personal and kinship networks (*znakomstvo*, *blat*) to gain access to the hospital facilities, Elena told me that in previous years the ministry of health has given the hospital a limited option to offer private services. The price for a private room and delivery ward was approximately 30,000-50,000 RUB (\$1000-1500). When I was doing my fieldwork in Yekaterinburg, I had heard that this option is not available to them anymore.

To overcome this obstacle several formal and informal solutions have been developed by the hospital administration. Offering the education course within the premises of the hospital, for example, could be seen as a substitution of the previously existing private practices through which administrators successfully attract women to deliver their babies there as well. An official price for the course is 8840 rubles for 10

class meetings. This price also guarantees that a woman could then give birth in this very hospital “free of charge.” In lieu of payment for the hospitalization, the hospital would accept this woman’s childbirth voucher. The hospital thus benefits from two sources of income simultaneously: the course itself and the federal assistance attached to the childbirth vouchers. Their investment in technologies and specialists, and their reputation as the leading institution in obstetrics, further support the hospital’s institutional efforts to lure women to attend these programs and to deliver in their hospitals. The women who attended this course with me indicated that they prefer this particular course to any other courses primarily because it gives them access to one of the best hospitals in the city with highly qualified doctors.

Although I did my fieldwork with a group of obstetricians in only one maternity hospital, I had heard throughout my fieldwork about other hospitals that employ very similar strategies to attract women to deliver there. More importantly, many of my interlocutors who got pregnant after the implementation of this policy testified that since then there is a growing pressure on them to attend clinics and hospitals numerous times even when they do not consider it necessary or desirable. This transformation illustrates the importance of mapping the institutional and political economic context in which medicalized approaches to reproduction emerge and develop. Rather than simply glossing over medicalization and calling it a “cultural” attitude toward pregnancy and reproduction, this example of the implementation of one healthcare policy illustrates how this medicalized approach was enhanced by economic necessity and competition created by the very same policy.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the roles and strategies of biomedical experts as a lens into the complex webs of social practices that constitute forms and relations of power in contemporary Russia. It has demonstrated how, in the context of Russia's changing political conditions and in the context of changing economic and social policies, different social actors can use demographic knowledge and knowledge about human reproduction as "ideologically and politically charged acts of representation and intervention." (Szereter et al 2004: 6). A group of passionate health care providers I discussed in this paper uses the popular debate about the demographic fate of Russia to reinforce their authority as experts in the field of population policy interventions. To do so, they have adopted a language that emphasizes social and emotional aspects of pregnancy, which they have grounded in microbiological principles. Their normative standards of being "cultured" were infused with claims of superior value of biomedical knowledge. Their historically grounded reputation as leading experts on the issues of reproduction and social hygiene allowed these doctors to translate the presence of men during a woman's delivery (*partnerskie rodi*) as a progressive practice because of the immunologically protective "microbes" passed by men to their partners and babies. These physicians shared with their colleagues from other fields the belief that restoring "family values" and putting emphasis on emotions is an important milestone in resolving the problem of underpopulation. The moral and emotionally responsible decisions they lauded, however, centered on the use of medical services, and not taking unnecessary risks, which are posed by "non-traditional" birthing techniques.

Furthermore, the practice of borrowing the concepts of "values" and "emotions" as

important linguistic tropes reveals that in the current era, biomedicine not only creates but also capitulates to other powerful forces of social change. Natalya's "non-traditional" enterprise regarding childbirth and reproduction is such a force. She challenges biomedical approaches to pregnancy and "compete" with OB/GYN doctors for women's emotions by introducing new psychologically and spiritually oriented practices to govern them. In light of this competition, while hospitals are indeed transforming their services to meet the new social reality and to accommodate new health and demographic policies by introducing "emotions" as part of their professional vocabulary, they are in effect institutionalizing a biomedical approach toward reproduction and population dynamics.

A medicalized approach to reproduction is hardly new, after several generations of Soviet physicians have employed it for so many years (Rivkin-Fish 2005). Yet, a market economy, and the competition introduced by the national health projects have subjected Russian physicians to new constraints. Though I did not aim to reduce my analysis solely to the question of political economy, new economic competitions created by monetized and liberally oriented social policies play a crucial role in these biomedical experts' assessment of the situation and in their practices of establishing authority vis-à-vis the state and other social actors. In assessing the "problem" of low fertility and by offering their medicalized framing of it, medical experts simultaneously pursue the state concerns over falling birthrates, and try to protect their own professional interests and autonomy in securing state resources. Furthermore, while hospitals are indeed transforming their services to accommodate new health policies, the practices discussed in this chapter could be seen as the institutionalizing the informal practices that have been characteristic of the Soviet health care system (Rivkin-Fish 2005).

Given the current political prominence of the “demographic problem” as a policy priority in Russia, this paper has revealed only a fraction of two larger questions. The first question is: how does the postsocialist state function and disseminate power through its various agencies, biomedicine being one of them. The second issue is: whose diagnosis of the underlying causes and prescriptions for treatment is viewed in contemporary Russia as authoritative, and why? In the following chapters I will continue discussing how the questions of what constitutes the problem of under-population in contemporary Russia and how this problem is framed and gets depoliticized by a seemingly scientific reasoning produced by the state experts.

CHAPTER V

Searching for Genealogical Capital: Psychological Expertise, Kinship, and the Crisis of Underpopulation

It is a wonderful feeling, belonging to Medea's family, a family so large that you can't know all its members by sight, and they merge into a vista of things that happened, things that didn't, and things that are yet to come.

Ludmila Ulitskaya, *Medea and Her Children*

Disharmonious Mind and the Psychologization of the Problem of Underpopulation

When I met Nina N. at the regional conference dedicated to the problems of underpopulation in Russia (see chapter III), she asked me about my research. After I told her that I came to Yekaterinburg to study "the demographic crisis" in Russia, she took a deep breath and said:

You want to know why people don't have more children. I can tell you why. The problem is psychological in essence. Look around, we have healthy parents, women who are ready to give birth, but no children. Why? The problem is in our kin history (*v nashem rodu*). It is the problem of a disharmonious mind that we inherit from our ancestors and that we continue to pass on to the following generations. This is the core of the demographic problem.

As often the case in anthropological fieldwork, my encounter with Nina was entirely serendipitous. Nina was casually introduced to me by another interlocutor who had met her 13 years prior in a course preparing them for birth. Nina came to the conference as a

representative of a non-profit organization specializing in working with families and children. She is a soft-spoken woman in her late forties and she introduced herself as a teacher and a psychologist from a “family club” (*semeinii klub*) in one of the city’s neighborhoods. Nina’s commentary on the psychological essence of the perceived population crisis offered me an opportunity to explore another link in the chain of expertise that constitutes population-relation knowledge in contemporary Russia.

Interestingly enough, when I introduced my research as a study in the demographic crisis (*demograficheskii krizis*), Nina immediately construed this as involving the problem of low fertility rates in Russia. As other chapters demonstrate, she was not the first one to focus on fertility as the quintessential problem of underpopulation. At this point of my research I had heard more than once about the problem of underpopulation as exclusively the problem of low fertility, which is often associated with changing moral contexts (*Geist*) in contemporary Russia. Depending on speakers and their political, religious, and generational affiliations, the decline of Russia’s population is associated with the ever increasing influence of the consumerist culture, the destructive and paternalistic legacy of the Soviet state that skewed the wrong and the right of people’s life compasses, and even the Western (read American) conspiracy to limit Russia’s population growth through a network of family planning clinics financed by George Soros and other similar foundations.

As previous chapters demonstrated, both in expert and laypersons’ discourses, family values are often mobilized to reflect on the dire demographic situation. In these discourses, family and related moral values occupy a nonmaterial, virtuous, and ethical sphere most often described in Russian by the concept *dukhovnost*, a capacious term

variously denoting morality, spirituality, and other facets of both religious and secular experiences and practices. Nina's reflection on the problem of low fertility as a psychological problem added a new dimension to the complexity of the discourse about the population crisis in Russia. She articulated the metaphysical and nonmaterial problem of family values using the mechanism of biological inheritance through which the disharmonious mind of the past is transmitted to new generations. Nina's emphasis on psychological problems that people inherit from their ancestors is another element in the chain that forms population-related knowledge in contemporary Russia, and as such offers a window into the relationships between morality and knowledge about population and population-related issues.

Rodologia: A Royal Road to Happiness and Self-transformation

As I learned later on, Nina's representation of the problem of low fertility (and high mortality) as the problem of psychological inheritance is mediated by a psychologized form of popular genealogy called *Rodologia* (from *rod*=kin and *rodstvo*=kinship) in which she and her colleagues are involved at the family club where she works. This chapter documents this cultural practice and follows Nina and her friends' search for the solution to what they deem to be the core of the population problem or, in her own words, "to reestablish harmony in [our] own kinship (*v nashem rodu*)."

Called *Rodologia*, this particular form of genealogical pursuit is concerned with identifying the effects of long-term social calamities on people's personal and family histories. A person taking part in *Rodologia* is called *rodolog* and people I have met in the club often make a deliberate effort to differentiate their particular approach from

traditional forms of popular genealogy. *Rodologists* are looking for psychological explanations that can elucidate historical transformations as they are observed in their own personal narratives. In other words, they try to make sense of their own relationships with their kin in the present by turning to the dead. My interest in the way people articulate their social reality and learn about their family histories through psychological reasoning prompted me to join a group of approximately 20 other women and men participating in the club activities related to *Rogologia*.⁴⁴

In a nutshell, using a Lamarckian-like idea of heredity, *Rodologia* argues that social calamities, such as deportations, wars, revolutions, illness, social instabilities and so on, leave marks on or “bruise” one’s genes. Lamarck, whose evolutionary theory preceded Darwin’s and who first posited the idea of genealogical links between different species, is traditionally known for his theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.⁴⁵ Unlike Darwin, whose idea of evolution was based on diversification, Lamarck believed in transformation as the basis for evolutionary development (Zerubavel 2012).⁴⁶ Put in behavioral terms, *Rodologia* is based on a premise that the unique ways in which people respond to social events form a particular pattern of behavior, imprinted on

⁴⁴ The numbers varied from one meeting to another although not significantly. Women were an absolute majority in this group; throughout the year, I met no more than five men interested in *Rodologia*, although two of them were diligent participants in almost all of the activities. The almost total absence of men is an important aspect of the study and could be attributed to broader gender distinction in contemporary Russia where women are more identified with psychology and especially when its main medium is family and familial ties.

⁴⁵ Historians of science continue to argue whether those were Lamarck’s original ideas or whether he simply articulated what was widely accepted as a folk wisdom since antiquity (Gould 2002: 170-208).

⁴⁶ An example of Lamarckism reproduced in almost every biology textbook is that of giraffes that constantly stretch and lengthen their necks to reach leaves positioned high up on trees. According to the theory, such exertion would result in offspring having longer necks.

one's genes, which in turn manifests itself in the conduct of descendants/future generations. In the parlance of *rodologists* themselves: social cataclysms, wars, and the like, leave "scars" on people's genes. Even though the memory of the event might disappear or younger generations might dismiss it as unimportant, this dramatic event materializes in one's descendant's genetic make up and consequently in his or her behavior in the present.

Rodologia is a particular form of social analysis projected onto biology. Prerequisite to such an analysis is the construction of family histories and genealogical interest and research looms large among practitioners. First, a person learns to identify dramatic moments in family histories and the ways they manifest themselves in the present. He or she is then taught to use what *rodologists* call the power of one's kin ties (*sila roda*) in order to solve her or his emotional problems in the present. Only by reconnecting with one's own past, the practitioners of *Rodologia* told me repeatedly, can a person begin to understand and solve his or her psychological problems in the present (e.g., with a partner, at work, with children etc).

An example of a particularly popular pattern of behavior discussed in *Rodologia* meetings is one in which someone, usually a woman, is concerned with problematic relationships with her partner. Lena, a woman in her early forties and a mother of two teenage children, disclosed her concerns about her marriage to a group of *rodologists*. After a series of prompts from the participants and questions from the moderator, Lena articulated her concern in terms of a constant anxiety about the imminent dissolution of her marriage. After the problem was established, *rodologists* proceeded to collectively analyze Lena's kinship chart that she drew in advance of the meeting. Unfolding a large

poster with her family tree, Lena told us that she was successful in identifying four generations of family members on both her maternal and paternal sides. She then drew little black arrows next to some of her grand- and great-grandparents, identifying their death, as well as black rectangles identifying critical moments in their history (e.g., violence caused by external forces, such as wars, famines, prosecution, displacement etc) (see Figure 5.1 for an example of symbols used to identify these events).

After studying her kinship chart and discussing different scenarios, participants variously suggested that because three generations of men in one of Lena's lineages were either killed or went missing during two world wars and several men from another lineage died in the GULAG camp or were deported from their villages during Stalin's collectivization program, women in Lena's family, in order to deal with the loss, learned to push these traumas deep into the unconscious and formed a set of assumptions about and unconscious expectations from their relationships with men. The group's psychological exegesis of this trauma could be expressed as follows: "it is dangerous to be happy in marriage because men are always leaving and never coming back." This fixed set of expectations made its way down to Lena's genes, which in turn should explain the cause of her anxiety about her marital problems. In other words, because of the repeated trauma that marked her ancestors' genes and then made its way down to hers, Lena, without necessarily being fully conscious of it, lives with an expectation that her husband is inevitably going to leave her.

To change this expectation, the moderator then offered Lena a series of transformative exercises through which she was supposed to consciously change this set of assumption from "being married means my husband is inevitably going to leave me"

to “men do not leave; it is safe to say that my husband can stay with me.” The use of genealogy identifies Lena as the ultimate source of her marriage problems, absolving her husband of any responsibility in the relationship. This in turn reproduces unequal gender relations, according to which women are solely responsible for the integrity and duration of marriage. It suggests that although Lena’s unhappiness has genealogical and historical origins, her happiness is her personal responsibility and it can only be achieved by realizing her role as a faithful wife.

This chapter suggests that by creatively reintroducing family histories into one’s personal narratives, *Rodologia* accomplishes two opposite goals. On the one hand, recording family stories and narratives offers *rodologists* an opportunity to (re)establish actual relations with their relatives or long-lost family members. Rather than conducting archival research, most *rodologists* that I have met turn to oral histories in order to collect fragmented memories and documents preserved by family members. This reconnection with the living through their search for the dead supplies them with the possibilities for new and renewed social connections. At the same time, in the process of meaning making which these stories and histories provide, *Rodologia* offers a highly biologized and predestined interpretation of one’s relations with others that constrains the course of action of the self. This chapter will focus on the psychological and therapeutic aspects of *Rodologia*, exploring the horizons of the course of action that *Rodologia* offers to its followers through both its psychologization of social life and through its quest to locate the past in order to shape the present. In the next chapter, I will continue the discussion of the psychologization of social experiences as it makes its way to the discourse on the crisis of underpopulation.

Rodologia and a New Psychological Expertise

Rodologia is clearly a part of a larger thriving market of popular psychological enterprises in contemporary Russia. Social scientists have demonstrated the myriad ways in which therapeutic discourse has become central to the ways people understand themselves and others in contemporary Western societies. This has been variously accomplished by appropriating therapeutic language into the political lexicon (Carr 2011), by serving modern capitalism through the naturalization of human desire as competitive and self-serving (Illouz 2008), by naturalizing normative gender roles (Lutz 1990), and by producing neoliberal subjects through turning the self into the subject of governance (Rose 1996). In Russia, this therapeutic discourse expresses itself in a variety of cultural, social, and institutional settings. Similar to their Western counterparts, the range of forms in which therapeutic discourse manifests itself is “dauntingly abundant and dauntingly eclectic” (Illouz 2008: 16).

The rise in the popularity of psychology and psychotherapy in postsocialist settings over the last twenty years is striking. In bookstores, yards of shelves are dedicated to psychology and techniques of personal growth. An eclectic mix of psychological trainings and self-help seminars (*treningi*) in a great variety of themes led by coaches, gurus, healers, and psychotherapists are available to a public eager to invest in its personal growth and development (Mazzarino 2010, Matza 2009; Lerner 2011). In 2005, TV advice talk shows in which people are asked to transform themselves constituted 13% of the weekday broadcast of five main TV channels (Matza 2009: 490).

Despite the early Soviet experimentation with psychoanalysis (Etkind 1993) and despite the popular diagnosis of neurasthenia that became emblematic of post-

revolutionary Russia (Bernstein 2006), for most of Soviet history, psychology, under suspicion of being of “bourgeois” and of individualistic origins, had always been in tension with the dominant socialist ideology.⁴⁷ In Post-Soviet Russia, therapeutic enterprises range from conventional psychoanalysis, to spirituality seminars, shaman workshops, parapsychological sessions, TV programs built around psychological expertise, and team building workshops for marketing departments conducted in large corporations. Similar to other technologies of the self, popular at the flourishing self-help market in Russia, *Rodologia* utilizes idioms of self-esteem, personal growth, individual success, and self-awareness (*samopoznanie*) (Matza 2009: 492, see also Mazzarino 2010, Lerner 2011).⁴⁸ As Illouz argues (2008), these different forms of popular and professional psychology share a common emotional style that provide social actors with language and metaphors for framing their relationships with others. It also makes therapeutic discourse “a cultural resource, a way for actors to devise strategies of action that help them implement certain definitions of the good life” (ibid: 20).

To situate *Rodologia* within a thriving self-help market, it is important to understand both *Rodologia*’s premises and its effects with respect to its counterparts. *Rodologia* is both similar and different from other forms of psychotherapy. On the one hand, it is similar to a variety of popular psychological enterprises ranging from classic

⁴⁷ The writings of the most renowned figure in Soviet psychology, Lev Vigotsky, are especially popular in the West. Vigotsky’s research on child development, although very popular in the 1920s Soviet Union, declined significantly during Stalin’s prewar period but reemerged after WWII giving rise to pioneering research in neuroscience (Graham 1993: 103-108). As a field of professional training, psychology in the Soviet Union was restricted to experimental and educational psychology dedicated to different techniques of self-control (Matza 2009: 515).

⁴⁸For a detailed analysis of one such talk show see Matza 2009. In this article Matza masterfully describes how these manifest as “neoliberalizing projects,” aimed at creating entrepreneurial subjects.

psychoanalysis to the self-help ‘Landmark’ seminars because it utilizes the same set of idioms and key concepts built around the idea of self-realization/self-fulfillment and it joins these other forms of therapy in their imperative to find happiness and fulfillment (Ahmed 2010). On the other hand, *Rodologia* uses a highly biologized style of reasoning, in which psychological problems and their solutions descend from one generation to the next. Paradoxically, however, despite its biological and pre-determined nature people narrate their experiences of *Rodologia* as being more psychologically effective in comparison with other forms of psychotherapy because, they tell me, their personal familiar stories confirm their authenticity and uniqueness. While other forms of psychotherapy use a “one size fits all” approach (i.e., every self is necessarily the same and what works for you should work for me), *Rodologia* is tailored to each individual through the originality and authenticity of one’s family histories (i.e., what determines my life trajectory is unique to my family history). By providing people with possibilities to imagine themselves as integrated in a larger network of kin, *Rodologia* gives more leeway to people’s self and makes them unique by confirming the authenticity of their family histories.

According to a popular scheme existing in psychological trainings, which in Russian are simply called *treningi*, a person participating in *Rodologia* activities, be it a group seminar or a private consultation, is required to “work on” a specific problem, something that she or he considers to be at the core of his or her emotional unhappiness. As McGee (2005) argues, in this culture of self-help, with its constant demand for self-evaluation and its imperative to perpetually find and disclose truth about oneself, the self becomes a site of continuous self-invention or what he calls the “belabored self.” After

the problem is established, the person is encouraged to switch to a different terminology and is asked to think about this problem as an assignment (*zadacha*), rather than a problem (*problema*), since the former has a more positive connotation, and is thus in keeping with a popular approach espoused by a variety of self-help enterprises.

For example, one of the permanent features of each of the two-day seminars is an exercise called “a flaming chair” (*goriachii stul*). Before the seminar, participants have an opportunity to request to be on “the chair,” on a first come first serve basis. During the exercise, a person on the chair discloses to the rest of the group her or his questions or concerns. There is nothing particularly Russian or post-Soviet about these questions. During the year I spent with the community of *rodologists*, the questions ranged from “I am engaged to be married but I have my doubts” and “I am often mad at my child, I feel guilty about it I but can’t control myself,” to “my husband left me after 30 something years of marriage and I don’t understand why” and “I am a successful businessman and I have four sons, but none of them is interested in taking over my business. Why?”

The majority, though not the entirety, of the people I met during these seminars had experimented with other forms of self-help training and seminars (*treningi lichnostnogo rosta*) and they exhibited familiarity with the idea of introspection and self-reflection endlessly enacted in these seminars and in self-help literature. Therapeutic discourse is clearly the language with which they interpret and frame their relations with others (Illouz 2008: 12). One of my interlocutors, a woman in her late 20s with misgivings about marriage and family, expressed her introduction to Rodologia in the following terms: “By the time I arrived here, I was already familiar with the basic categories. I already knew that people themselves are responsible for everything that

happens to them. I knew that we ourselves attract things that happen to us.” As an ethnographer I myself was often asked to bear the same burden of permanent self-reflection. It was often the case during my interviews that I was asked to reflect on my own questions and to think about what prompted me to ask them. When I tried to ask provocative questions aimed at more lucid articulations of people’s ideas, I was asked to think about why I find it hard to believe what they articulated to me in the first place.

People become interested in popular psychology for different reasons. The trope of change, however, is especially popular among people interested in psychotherapeutic practices and among those involved in the *Rodologia* community. Nina was one of the many people who, when I asked her about her interest in psychology, told me that the birth of her child prompted her to learn about herself. Others talked about marriages or divorces. One of the participants, a woman in her forties, told me that she became interested in psychology around 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the privatization of the industrial factory where she worked for several years after graduating from college. Not only did she lose her job but her job description was eliminated altogether and as a result she also lost an opportunity to receive public housing, for which she was eligible prior to the privatization campaign. She told me, during one of the *Rodologia* seminars, that her “assignment” throughout the last couple of seminars was to overcome her anger and frustration with the state: “I am furious with the state (*gosudarstvo*), it took all these things from me I used to have or hoped to have one day.”

Matza (2009) attributes this rising importance of focusing on the “self” to people’s attempts to reckon with new market forces and neoliberal state governance, in

which therapeutic idioms of self-management and self-realization are implicated in capitalist self-fashioning and neoliberal entrepreneurship. Drawing on Foucault's approaches to therapeutic discourse, he sees it as a political project that aims to discipline new post-Soviet citizens into neoliberal subjects. In his account, searching for themselves and disclosing truth about themselves is a political instrument in the hands of diffuse state power. To make sure, this is not a conspiracy in which what looks like an instrument of self-fulfillment and liberation is actually what makes individuals docile and manageable. Rather, that which enables someone to discover herself is also what enables her to discipline and manager herself as well. Although my work is in accordance with this approach, here I am less interested in the kind of political project that Matza (see also Mazzarino 2010) elucidates. Rather, I am interested in how the therapeutic language, through its interactions with already existing cultural idioms, makes it way into the discourse of the population crisis and shapes peoples' self-understanding in the context of political and social transformations.

As an object of intervention and articulation, the "self" is not strictly a post-Soviet phenomenon. Historians of the Soviet Union have demonstrated time and again the importance of technologies of the self in forging revolutionary subjects in the early days of the Bolshevik state (Hellbeck 2006; Halfin 2000, 2003; Kharkhordin 1999). Perhaps Soviet citizens lacked the vocabulary of the consumerist self-help language, but this does not mean that the self was absent from their cultural repertoire (see also Lerner 2011: 80-82). The socialist self was constructed around different metaphors – "self-control" rather than "self-esteem" and "self-evaluation" according to socially ascribed criteria rather than "introspection" were the key idioms through which Soviet citizens were trained to

transform themselves (Matza 2009: 500).⁴⁹ Instead of using the language of psychotherapy, people utilized different cultural models to articulate their experiences of self. Soul (*dusha*), for instance, has been an important trope through which people in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Russia understood social reality around them – they often framed their experiences of this reality through cultural rituals of soul (*dusha*) related to bathhouses, drinking rituals, ‘sitting’, *blat*, gifts, and so on (Pesmen 2000). Consciousness is another key concept around which the experiences of self were constructed in the Soviet Union (Halfin 2000). Finally, *lichnost’* is the Soviet version of personhood or what Marcel Mauss conceptualized as “a category of mind,” (Mauss 1985) that Soviet citizens conceived of as being natural, wholesome, and fundamentally moral (Petryna 2002).

Lerner (2011) argues that in the post-Soviet era, some of these key concepts with which Soviet citizens articulated their subjectivities have been partially displaced – *soznanie* (consciousness) because of its affiliation with Marxism-Leninism, almost disappeared from the public discourse, while *lichnost’* (personhood) found a new yet discursively different home in self-help literature, and *dusha* (soul) gradually transitioned from secular to both to religious (and nationalist) discourses (81-82). I agree with Lerner that Western anthropologists studying Russia or any other postsocialist polities for that matter often assume with no clear evidence that these displacements create social and discursive vacuums: “there is always a lack of this or that in Russia” (ibid: 82). On the

⁴⁹ Assuming clear cut boundaries between a Western tradition of self-exploration and Russian or Soviet approaches to self-formation would be erroneous since both traditions were born out of the larger historical transition to modernity. In some cases, ideas about the psychological makeup of the characters appearing in the literary works of Russian realism in the 19th century (e.g., Leo Tolstoy and Nikolai Gogol) preceded and became influential in the development of psychoanalysis in the 20th century (Lerner 2011).

contrary, postsocialist contexts are fascinating precisely because new therapeutic cultures build upon and intermingle with already existing, through slightly misplaced, concepts, cultural models, and values. This discursive displacement of social concepts is certainly a fertile ground for new therapeutic discourses introduced by popular psychology in its various incarnations. Moreover, as the case of *Rodologia* demonstrates, the new therapeutic language not only co-exists but also incorporates old cultural articulations of subjectivities and self (ibid).

Imported Western ideologies of self-help and psychotherapy are built around the idiom of introspection, which has become one of the major tools of self-transformation advocated by their proponents. Anthropologists studying these new forms of expertise emerging in Russia tend to assume that introspection is indeed an almost exclusive therapeutic technique on Russia's psychological market (Matza 2009). My ethnography reveals, however, that there are other therapeutic techniques in circulation throughout contemporary Russia. Thus, *Rodologia*, for example, claims kinship to be the organizing principle of one's inner self and unlike its western counterparts that utilize introspection as their main therapeutic instrument, it asks its followers to move outwards first and search for answers outside of the self, not only in one's family histories but also in the effects historical developments might have had on these histories. In this sense, *Rodologia* actually hews closer to popular Soviet techniques of the self where introspection was seen as a rather unnecessary interrogation of self and where self-evaluation had as its main referent social demands of the socialist order (Kharkhordin 1999).

Despite the prominence of therapeutic discourse, the professional field of psychology and psychotherapy in postsocialist Russia is an unregulated one⁵⁰. It is not unusual to receive a business card of a traditional healer or a coach that employ the term “psychologist” to describe the nature of his or her work. I was once prompted by one of my interlocutors in the club to go and talk to a highly-acclaimed psychologist who worked in the city. When I asked what she does, the interlocutor replied: “She transforms energy around you. She does it with her bare hands.” I paused. She then gave me her business card. It said: “Snezhana. The psychologist.”

Although Nina, when I met her at a conference, introduced herself as a psychologist, I later learned that she, like many of her colleagues at the family club, graduated from university with a degree in an unrelated field (in her case, economics). Only later in life she became interested in psychology and is currently working on acquiring a certificate in *Rodologia*, which allows her to call herself a psychologist. Nina told me that she became interested in becoming a psychologist after she attended “several seminars on self-acceptance” (*seminari po priniatiu sebia*) in the 1990s: “I had this desire to understand myself. I had a lot of doubts about many things in my life. Like, for instance, I had a profession, I could work as an economist, but I had my doubts. Especially when my son was born. A child is like a mirror. Some people say that children

⁵⁰ It is different, for instance, from the field of traditional medicine, which has been highly regulated since the 1980s. The Soviet Ministry of Health licensed conventional physicians to practice alternative forms of medicine, such as acupuncture, reflexology, etc. In 1993, the first post-Soviet Ministry of Health made an effort to license traditional healers if they could prove to the professional medical community that they have a true gift of healing, a somewhat vague request. In today’s Russia, healers live in a legal limbo because although in 1998 the practice of healing was officially banned, the amendment that allowed healing practices to exist remains untouched (Yarskaya-Smirnova 2011: 27-46).

limit our development; I personally think that children are the main source of our development.” After the birth of her son, she grew more and more serious about the process of self-realization (*samopoznanie*). She did not return to her job as an economist after her maternity leave was over, but instead began working at the family club, devoting most of her time consulting others and leading meetings and seminars dedicated to *Rodologia*.

For many people like Nina, psychology is a second profession acquired later in life. In fact, throughout my fieldwork, I met only two psychologists (both working at a municipal psychological center) who were trained *only* in psychology. Since the 1990s, as a response to the growing popularity of psychology, both public and private institutions of higher education expanded their departments and opened new training programs in psychology. Outside of private practices, new graduates in psychology have found quite a few job opportunities in newly established networks of psychologists at schools and psychological centers under the auspices of different ministries, which include the Ministry of Social Security and the Ministry of Education (Matza 2009:492). Outside of the institutions of higher learning that train students in psychology, a variety of private institutions provide certificates in psychology and psychotherapy. Yet, contrary to psychiatry, for instance, there is no unified policy executed by the professional community that might restrict access to the profession through board exams⁵¹.

⁵¹ Although psychology as a professional field is better regulated in the West, blurred boundaries between popular and professional psychology are not foreign to other Western contexts. In the United States, for instance, professional psychologists and psychoanalysts often turn to popular mass media to appeal to a broader audience (Illouz 2008).

Rodologia – Origins and Institutional Settings

The school of *Rodologia* operating at Nina's family club was founded in the mid 1990s by a local couple, Larisa and Valery Dokuchaev. They became interested in psychotherapy in the 1990s when the self-help market in Russia began flourishing. During the late socialist period, Larisa was briefly a schoolteacher before she became a successful local political operator and her husband Valery worked as a physicist at a research institute. Valery and Larisa are two charismatic people in their mid-fifties. They have been together since their early twenties, and they have four grown children (two of whom are adopted). The youngest son is a member of the political opposition (the party "Just Russia") and the year when I was in Yekaterinburg he was running for the party's seat in the regional parliament. The Dokuchaevs belong to what in the Soviet era would be identified as members of the intelligentsia. Both graduates of Ural State University with wide interests in philosophy, literature, and only later in psychology, the Dokuchaevs project wit and intelligence. Preserving the image of a secluded scientist, Valery is more quiet while Larisa is usually the one who gives public interviews, participates in TV programs, or represents their organization at public events. Valery writes books that are then made available for purchase on their website.⁵² It is Valery who most of the time leads group seminars while Larisa does all the public relations work. Both of them are natives of the Urals and their provincial origins are something they often reflect on in the group seminars. There is a certain entrepreneurial yet not very aggressive spirit to the way they try to promote *Rodologia* among different parties – from

⁵² <http://www.rodolog.ru/category/metki/magazin>

trying to find new places to conduct *Rodologia* seminars and writing popular books about it to collaborating with different ministries related to domestic and social affairs.

Aside from Nina's club, where they lead 8 to 10 two-day seminars throughout the year, they work from home, conducting private consultations. Both of them often come to Nina's club to take part in informal meetings organized by Nina for the members of the club. Applying their developed entrepreneurial spirit, the Dokuchaevs travel to places outside of Yekaterinburg where they successfully lead group seminars and hold private consultations. Moscow and Saint Petersburg are among their frequent destinations. Turning on its head a popular depiction of symbolically remote places like Yekaterinburg as being in deep hibernation compared to the vibrant life of Russia's two metropolises, Valery once told me: "While they were hibernating there in their capitals [Moscow and Saint Petersburg], we've been developing our practice here in the provinces. Now we bring it to them on a silver platter." They proudly call their enterprise an international school of *Rodologia* given that they work with groups outside of Russia. The bordering Kazakhstan with its massive Russian-speaking population and several places in Ukraine, both former Soviet republics and now independent nation-states, turned out to be amenable to the ideas of *Rodologia*. Once a year, usually during the summer months, participants and consultants from different parts of the country have an opportunity to meet at the International Festival of *Rodologia* where they all have a chance to outline the different ways in which *Rodologia* transformed their lives or helped transform the lives of people close to them.

The Dokuchaevs are incredibly busy people. They travel, manage their private practice, and their expertise is often in demand by local and national TV stations. In

addition, Larisa is the chair of the regional nongovernmental foundation “The 21st Century’s Family” and a member of the public chamber at the parliament of the Sverdlovsk oblast. The chamber serves as an oversight committee selected by the governor and was created to monitor the activities of the parliament. This is not Larisa’s first experience in Russia’s political system. In 1999, she ran for the state parliament (*Duma*) as the representative of “Women’s Movement of Russia,” a liberal women’s social movement, but did not acquire enough votes to participate in national legislative politics. The following year Larisa ran for the regional parliament, on a platform which proposed legislating a national family policy. After another unsuccessful run, she decided to form a nongovernmental organization and registered her foundation in 2001.

Larisa’s position within a wide network of political power – both regional and national (she was also part of the national committee on family policies in *Duma*) – made her a key figure in the process of legitimizing psychology and therapeutic discourse as forms of expertise in the creation of knowledge about the population crisis in Russia. In almost every public event dedicated to the questions of demographic development of the country that I attended in Yekaterinburg, either Larisa herself or one of her colleagues from Nina’s family club was asked to speak and to reflect on the psychological make-up of the country and its effects on the country’s demographic, economic, and political potential. Similar to the eclecticism of popular psychology more generally, psychological expertise at these conferences is often very broadly defined. At the multiple conferences I attended while in the field, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church would often pair with psychologists under the title of “the moral and psychological problems of the crisis of underpopulation” to mourn the moral decay of Russia’s youth. *Rodologists*

themselves are frequent guests at these conferences. What I heard from Nina during our first encounter about the problem of disharmonious mind, I then heard echoed by other *rodologists* and experts in popular psychology. I will more fully explore the institutional mechanisms and settings in which the psychologization of the state discourse about the perceived crisis of underpopulation occurs in the next chapter.

(Re)connecting with Others: Genealogical Imagination and the Power of Kinship

Throughout the year, after Nina introduced me to the *Rodologia* community, I participated in *Rodologia* seminars, attended informal meetings, interviewed *rodologists*, went camping with them, went to a bathhouse, traveled to visit their homes in and outside of Yekaterinburg, talked to and about their spouses and children, and observed their interactions. Like other self-help seminars popular in Russia today, *Rodologia* seminars are not publically advertised. People typically find out about them by word of mouth, usually from friends or relatives who participated in one of the seminars. When I asked people what prompted them to join *Rodologia* or any other self-help seminar for that matter, they often told me that they joined after they had been genuinely impressed with and excited about a friend's personal transformation following such a seminar. In addition to the seminars, people interested in discovering the resources hidden for them in their kin history (what they call the power of kin [*sila roda*]) can get a private consultation from one of the *Rodologia* consultants.

Once a month, at Nina's family club a group of devoted *rodologists* meet to discuss issues that either one of them or Nina herself proposes to discuss. Similar to the more formal seminars, during these informal meetings, people were asked to focus on the

behavioral resources that could be extracted from their family histories. Around March 8, International Women's Day, for instance, Nina held a meeting entitled "Women in My Family." For the next two hours, as we were seated around a large table with tea with biscuits, we told each other stories about several generations of women in our families. Nina, a devoted *rodoligist* herself, would from time to time reflect on our stories, connecting them to what she knew was already going on in our lives: "Look at all the women in your family, you have the power to overcome obstacles the way they did," she said to one of the participants.

Look how powerful they were. You need to pay attention to this power. Your grandmother was deported [during Stalin's collectivization campaign], another one managed to save five of her children during the Kursk battle [WW II] while feeding the army soldiers; she returned home, raised her children. This power in your family history, in your kinship (*sila roda*) can give your energy to go on (*energia zhizhni*), it should be your life force.

The power of kin (*sila roda*) is a phrase that *rodologists* often use to encourage one another when someone is complaining about a difficult life situation or about a problem that they are attempting to solve. Put differently, family histories become a sort of "genealogical capital" that people use in order to direct their actions in the present. This form of "genealogical capital" (Zerubavel 2012: 24) is purely symbolic, as in this case it does not come in the form of material wealth (e.g., inheritance or restitution). It is used as a psychological tool, and resource for the conceptualization of the current social reality that people are trying to comprehend and act upon. The idea of genealogical capital has also been appropriated in the discourse about the crisis of underpopulation. As the earlier chapters demonstrated (especially chapter III), the idea of intergenerational succession and familial ties has been used by politicians, scholars, and various experts in order to

conceptualize the problem of underpopulation as exclusively the problem of family and moral values.

Building kinship charts (see Figure 5.1) and collecting family histories constitute the majority of activities undertaken by *Rodologia* students. Each person participating in the activities of the school is called a *rodolog* of his or her own family. Because building kinship charts and membership in the *rodological* community also entails collecting oral histories and family records, it also often means reconnecting with long lost relatives that might help reconstruct family histories. A common narrative among people describing their introduction to *Rodologia* is that at first they knew nothing about their families and could not build a kinship chart beyond the generation of their parents. Yet their growing interest in and the challenge of learning more about themselves prompted them to ask questions, to look for relatives, to search for documents and photographs and for some of them even making a trip to archives. For many of the people I interviewed and became acquainted with during my fieldwork, the Internet turned out to be a valuable tool in discovering their roots and reconnecting with lost relatives. It was often the case that in the beginning of each seminar in which I participated, people introduced themselves by saying, tearing up a bit, that since they became interested in *Rodologia* they found a long-lost relative whom they either did not even know existed or whom they believed to be already deceased.

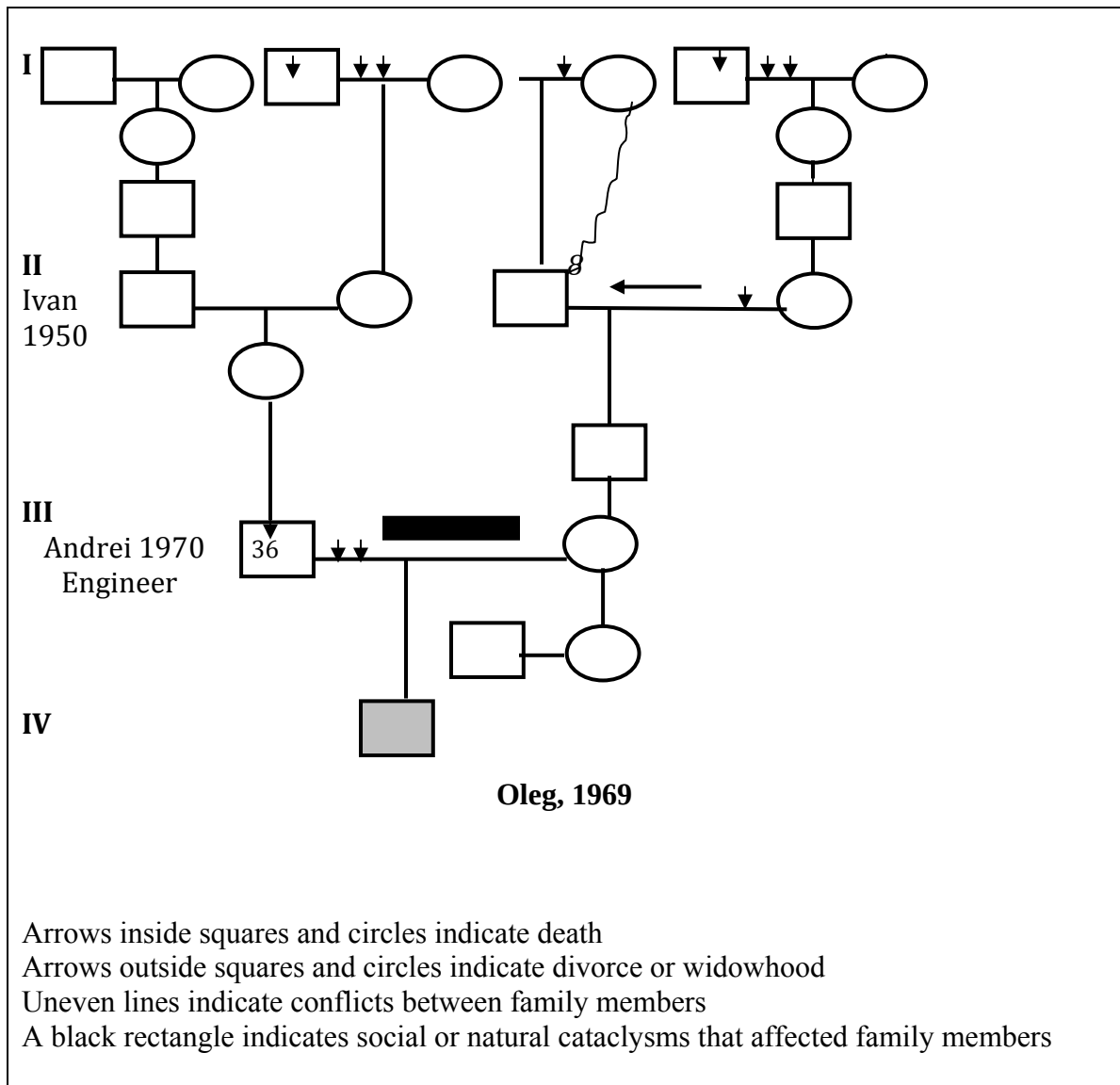


Figure 5.1: Kinship Chart of Oleg, born 1969

Source: <http://www.rodolog.ru/genogramma>

In *Rodologia*, genealogy is imagined as almost a psychotherapeutic instrument, something that can potentially lead people forward in their search for better lives and “self-realization.” This self-realization is achieved through both research and everyday experiences with kin. I have heard numerous accounts of the emotional labor that went into reconstructing family stories and fragments of memory from living relatives. As I

mentioned before, for institutional reasons (i.e., the difficulties surrounding access to archives), oral histories are more popular among *rodologists* than archival research. People are encouraged to talk to their living relatives to reconstitute their family trees. The first thing Nina asked me to do when I initially came to visit her at the *Rodologia* club was to build my own kinship chart: “You absolutely have to do it before you come to any of the *Rodologia* activities.” After I mildly resisted by saying that it is going to be an impossible task because the majority of my family perished in the holocaust, Nina said that everyone thinks that it is an impossible task until they start talking to their relatives. Inquiring about one’s past forms new links with living relatives but also creates new conflicts and opportunities for misunderstanding. Nevertheless, for *rodologists*, the first step of reconstructing one’s family history is an important part in the process of “self-realization” and “self fulfillment.”

In *Rodologia*, the genealogical imagination⁵³ serves as a general framework for understanding not only relatedness in general but also how it plays out in people’s lives and endeavors. Accordingly, historical authenticity or accuracy per se is not prioritized. What is important is to establish symbolic proximity with the reconstructed past through which people can foster their relationships with the dead and the living (Zerubavel 2012; Verdery 1999). This symbolic proximity is of course complicated by profound political transformations that people and their families experienced over the last century. As the social tribulations and their effects on families discussed during *Rodologia* meetings

⁵³ Shryock (1997) uses “genealogical imagination” to explore the concept of “genealogical nationalism,” a phenomenon he describes in his ethnography of Jordan, where local tribes use their oral historical traditions to make claims for inclusion in a larger national community. There he examines how local notions of genealogy figure into national historical narratives. My use of the term is much more loose.

roughly correspond to the unstable history of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia in the 20th century, these practices of tracing family histories shape and in turn are shaped by the ideas about belonging to the Soviet and the new post-Soviet state.

The history of the Soviet Union and postsocialist Russia, here, is introduced in the form of kinship charts and family trees, which also identify major moments in people's lives and how they precisely affected them. Olesia, a young journalist, born in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, whom I met at one of the conferences, told me that when she heard about *Rodologia*, she did not necessarily think about it as a psychological tool aimed at her personal transformation. Rather:

My first thoughts were not about myself, they were about Russia. It was after the Dokuchaevs said something about the way men are treated in today's Russia as children, that they have been infantilized because of a larger tendency to protect men that grew out of the violent history of the 20th century with its wars and repressions. This history generated women who have one mission in life – to hide men behind women's skirts, to protect them. I thought to myself: we need to change this mission, we need to make men powerful again and to reaffirm our trust in them."

Using her professional journalistic skills, Olesia very clearly articulated her insight: "It made me feel like a part of something larger, of a network, and then several of those networks create an even larger network, which is called a nation. I felt chill in my spine. I was part of something; I was a small cell in this big net. I felt a sense of responsibility for myself, for my family, for Russia. This was my entrance to *Rodologia*."

The genealogical imagination has played a profound role in postsocialist politics and considering the socially disorienting experience that people in these countries have had, situating oneself on a genealogical chart has been an important part of both personal and collective self-understanding. As Verdery (1999) demonstrated, postsocialist politics involve the use of kinship, genealogical idioms, and the dead in people's plight to reorder

their worlds of meaning in the wake of drastic social changes. The understanding that people have about ancestry and genealogy has a strong influence on how they shape their historical narratives (Verdery 1999). When people think of themselves as the descendents of one common ancestor, the history has a shape of a cone and a deeper timeline. When people imagine themselves as products of many forefathers, the history is configured as a fan (Verdery 1999:117-119). What we see in a fairly typical kinship chart in *Rodologia* is a combination of cones and fans with most of the kinship charts I observed covering up to four generations of family members (see Figure 5.1). This situates the person under consideration within a relatively modest timeline.

Seeking retribution and justice as well as reconfiguring national imaginaries, citizens in postsocialist countries as well as political opportunists use genealogy as a symbolic device in order to rewrite history. This revisionist attempt of course builds on the endless attempts of various communist parties across the bloc to revise the pre-communist historical periods (p. 112). Communists were engaged in the rewriting of their histories using their own genealogical imagination that has the shape of a rake, in which Marx begat Lenin and Lenin begat Stalin (who was later excluded from the genealogy) and these three are followed in turn by their offspring (Verdery 1999:117-118). Post-Soviet political leaders have similarly revised historical accounts of the Soviet period and this process is far from complete. The following example captures a moment in this attempt to attribute a particular shape to history and to situate one's sense of self in time.

During one of the informal meetings at the club, we collectively analyzed a kinship chart of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a well-known and celebrated Russian author who lived in exile in Vermont for many years and returned to Russia after the fall of the

Soviet Union. The idea behind this exercise is somewhat futile yet it clearly demonstrates the kind of effect that *Rodologia* tries to achieve. The idea is to explain the life of a person as part of his or her larger kinship system. In this case, it was an attempt to understand what social events were crucial in Solzhenitsyn's parents and grand and great-grandparents' lives, how it then became genetically imprinted in Solzhenitsyn's ancestors and how this imprint materialized in Solzhenitsyn's life and work. In other words, they study the question that they already know the answer to: "Did Solzhenitsyn have predispositions to become what he became?" The answer is of course a resounding "yes" and the exercise meant to show how one could work with kinship charts and what they can tell us about a person in the present. For example, Solzhenitsyn's rebellious spirit could be referred back to the 18th century because one of his paternal ancestors was the leader of a peasant rebellion and was then deported to Siberia. Rebellion, confrontations with the state, and exile are shown on the chart to be very prominent in Solzhenitsyn's family history and materialize themselves in his life and art.

When Ariana, a young woman who reconstructed Solzhenitsyn's kinship chart using mostly Internet resources, was asked why she picked Solzhenitsyn, she replied by relaying the story of her own family: "My family history resembles Solzhenitsyn's story," she assured us. "And I feel it in my life. I also had a great-great-grandfather who ran away from home and built his own home despite the conflicts with his wife's parents. He became important and his name is mentioned in the book I read about the region where he ended up building his house." There is a particular set of famous characters that *rodologists* often use as their "learning tools." Ariana, for example, explained that as part of the course she took in order to become a *Rodologia* consultant, they were all

offered a few famous names to work on: Solzhenitsyn, Rostropovich (a famous cellist who left the Soviet Union in the 1970s and returned to Russia in the 1990s), Pushkin (a famous Russian poet from the 19th century) and Yeltsin (the first president of Russia, a native of Yekaterinburg, and a controversial figure in today's political environment). "No one wanted to pick Yeltsin. I don't know why," she contemplated after giving us the names. Throughout my fieldwork I had not heard any attempt at analyzing either Yeltsin or any other politician for that matter. The figures chosen to represent the power of kinship and inheritance are usually less controversial, although several times I had heard Valery Dokuchaev retelling the story of the Kennedys as an example of what *Rodologia* can do. Without going into the details of his analysis, Valery essentially outlined all the tragic events in the Kennedy family while describing how they were already predisposed to their fate because of their family histories.

In this selective process of reconstructing the past of her country through the story of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Ariana was involved in the two-tiered process. She first established a connection between Solzhenitsyn's family history and her own ancestors, situating them in the same historical context. Then, by presenting one of her ancestors as a historical contemporary of Solzhenitsyn's paternal ancestor she deduced a symbolic proximity not only between her great-great-grandfather and Solzhenitsyn's family but also between herself and Solzhenitsyn (Zerubavel 2012: 16-23). It is this distortion of historical time, allowing for the construction and deconstruction of genealogical communities, that the genealogical imagination achieves here. By including certain historical figures and excluding others (Solzhenitsyn in, Yeltsin out) Ariana has been

actively involved in the process of reconstructing the genealogical community to which she herself belongs.

“Who Do You Think You Are?” Popular Genealogy and the Care for Self and for Others

Social scientists have documented the important role genealogy plays in the European and North American social imagination (Nash 2008, Zerubavel 2012; Segalen 1991, 2001; Cannell 2011; Howell 2009; Legrand 2009). Anthropologists have provided plenty of evidence demonstrating that family trees and genealogy in its current form are themselves based on a very particular model of European kinship (Bouquet 1996, Strathern 1992: 17, 2005: 43-46; McKinnon and Franklin 2001; Nash 2008; cf. Zerubavel 2012).⁵⁴ Through a genealogical reckoning of descent, kinship in this model turns into an artifact of knowledge that can also provide possibilities for knowledge about oneself and one’s relations to others (Strathern 2005: 46, 67-71). In genealogy, as Strathern would have it, “knowledge creates relationships: relationships come into being when the knowledge does” (Strathern 2005: 70).

David Schneider (1980) argued that ‘distance’ is one of the major mechanisms of selection in the potentially endless cognatic system of kin. To select who is and who is not your kin, this model has a built-in selection mechanism, according to which, kin is a person who you must have a relatively active relationship with. Dead kin, especially the

⁵⁴ When Darwin was writing about different degrees of affinity between species, he built his conclusions on the widespread social ideas of his time concerning relatedness and genealogy. In twentieth-century Western culture, however, biological relatedness has become conceived of as prior to social relations. In other words, social ideas about human relations were borrowed by biologists to describe nature, and in the twentieth century social sciences borrowed ideas from biology to make sense of human affairs (Strathern 1992: 17).

more distant ones, are far more likely to be left out of the active kinship system (see also Kannell 2011). Genealogical research helps reestablish relationships with the dead by vertically delineating ancestry and descent (Kannell 2011). But genealogical research and the way people interested in genealogy reconstruct their family histories are able to symbolically distort the distance between different generations by changing degrees of difference among them (Nash 2008). Thus, more distant relatives that carry a considerable symbolic importance in the eyes of the person doing genealogical research might be accorded greater attention in the process of creating kinship charts (see also Segalen and Michelet 1991). Because genealogical diagrams have both length (ancestry) and breadth (co-descent), they visually “distort” the distance and show generational interdependence and “co-descent” (Zerubavel 2012).⁵⁵

Although anthropologists pioneered the use of genealogical diagrams in their research (Rivers 1968), the literature I am interested in here takes genealogy as an object of ethnographic study and genealogical methods of recording as ethnographic data (Bouquet 1993). Popular genealogy as a form of care for the self and/or the care for others has been recently a growing area of study among anthropologists of Europe and Northern America. Genealogy as a hobby is often seen as a symbolic strategy through which people retreat from the gaze of the state and celebrate their origins in the private. A

⁵⁵Genealogical imagination is not necessarily dependant on biological ties alone. Symbolic lineages are constructed through the same genealogical imagination that serves to construct genetically dependant ties. We often use these symbolic ties to activate our cultural capital (ibid: 120). For instance, as young academics, we might invoke our “symbolic ancestry” by connecting ourselves to a particular intellectual and theoretical trajectory in the form of intergenerational chains of advisors (ibid). In post-Soviet political discourse, certain genealogical ties (i.e., Yeltsin’s family) often stand as a symbolic signifier of the ongoing political transformations in Russia (Orlova 2004).

symbolic dimension of family, “which was long denied to modern societies, is now acknowledged” through the practice of genealogy as a hobby (Segalen 2001: 256). Segalen and Michelat (1991) have argued that the versatility of genealogical research entails various social functions yet its main function is to help establish a person’s individual identity. People often do it by stressing one line in their family trees and by associating their identity with this particular line. Kannell (2011) claims that Segalen and Michelat (1991) reduce popular genealogical pursuit to a psychological compensatory practice by unduly focusing on individual identities. In her ethnographic account of amateur genealogists from East Anglia as well as her analysis of the British TV program “*Who do you think you are?*” she argues “that genealogy is a process by which the dead are brought back to some form of social life, the life of kinship, through the work and the journeys (both literal and emotional) which their living descendants undertake on their behalf” (Kannell 2011: 469). In her account, genealogy is fundamentally about the care for the dead that can also bring about new links with the living. Amateur genealogy, therefore, is a moral space in which the living English revive their ancestors, thus reconfiguring the problem of the distance, outlined by Schneider (1980) and bringing the dead back to be part of a shared social life.

Although Kannell’s debate with Segalen and Michalet is interesting and provocative, it runs a risk of reconstituting the dichotomy between the care for the self and the care for others that Kannell herself tries to overturn. After all, anthropologists have argued that the genealogical imagination is fundamentally about both – it is as much about the self as it is about people’s relations with other. Genealogical imagination indexes a particular way of thinking that is shared by both European cultural metaphors

and modern science. In this model, people are imagined as integrated people that both have unique identities and are connected to others (Strathern 1992, 2005). The genealogical imagination offers people the position of an author who narrates his or her own experience vis-à-vis others. The story of a personal experience, thus, receives spatial and temporal dimensions (Oushakine 2004: 37). Genealogical research, in short, provides people with knowledge that confirms their unique identity and simultaneously situates them in a larger network of affiliations and kinship (Strathern 1992, see also Legrand 2009).

Genealogy and roots tourism are often cited as one of the most popular hobby worldwide (Basu 2007; Timothy and Guelke 2008) and its popularity augmented by Internet technologies and DNA testing through genetic ancestry labs is growing exponentially (Nash 2004; Zerubavel 2012).⁵⁶ The popularity of TV programs such as “*Who do you think you are?*” in both its British and American formats is a good example of such popularity. Versions of this program were sold to and successfully circulate in other European countries. In Russia too, at least two programs exploring genealogical relatedness are in circulation. In the program similar to the American “*Who do you think you are?*” every week, a Russian celebrity takes on a journey to explore her or his family histories. The program makes use of historians, local genealogists, while simultaneously

⁵⁶While traditionally, genealogical research had been almost exclusively in the hands of the European aristocracy, which was concerned with registering and preserving its inherited positions, in the 19th century genealogy became popular among the newly emerging middle class and served to preserve and reinforce their bourgeois pedigree and property rights (Tebbe 2008; Timothy and Guelke 2008). Throughout the 19th century, genealogy has also played an important role in constructing the narratives of nation building and promoting the importance of family research for national interests (for the German case see Tebbe 2008; for the Scottish case see Basu 2007; for the Irish case, see Nash 2008).

advertizing software programs and websites through the use of which the broader audience can conduct their own private genealogical investigations. In post-Soviet culture, the popularity of genealogy and personal biography more generally is attributed to the disappearance of the traditional Soviet system of meanings. Creating family histories allows people to attribute new meanings to the ruptures in the social processes (Oushakine 2004; Razumova 2004; Savkina 2004).

Popular genealogy has been historically entangled with the politics of race, ethnicity, and nationhood. Social scientists pointed to the problematic conceptualization of identity, mobility, and place through the genetic inheritance of behavioral traits in the genealogical imagination. They have argued that it privileges sedentary models of citizenship and rejects the idea of citizenship as rooted in the concept of mobility (Malkki 1992; Gilroy 1996). In this critical analysis of the genealogical imagination, it is deemed politically conservative because it rejects any form of relationality and assumes both a fixed identity and a culture determined by ancestry (Hall 1996; Gilroy 1996; Nash 2008). Yet, in the late twentieth century, the practice of popular genealogy itself played an important role in challenging these sedentary models and essentialist narratives of nationhood by addressing “the neglect of those ‘hidden from history’” (Nash 2008: 8). Perhaps the most popular example of such a project of cultural recovery is Alex Haley’s (1976) bestselling account of his journey to his ancestral home in West Africa, entitled *Roots*. Haley’s book was an attempt to reconstruct a family history of an African-American, who was denied a past by the mainstream and unmarked American culture both through slavery and through the politics of the melting pot. His book brought a broad recognition to slavery as an important part of the US history and challenged the

mainstream ideology of assimilation. The popularity of Haley's book is undoubtedly responsible for the rising interest in genealogy in the US as related to the diasporic imagination and the exploration of ethnic roots (Nash 2008). In short, in this historical transition, genealogy based on family research aimed at securing pedigree and property rights became a form of political activism aimed at recovering marginalized histories (ibid).

In the Soviet Union, as *rodologists* would tell you, genealogy was far from being a popular hobby. On the contrary, the accounts of collecting family stories and documents that I had heard in the club were full of memories about relatives who were trying to actively forget or selectively remember the past. In different periods throughout the history of the Soviet Union, one's origins might have had serious repercussions for one's freedom. Numerous times I have heard stories about the accidentally surviving picture of a great-grandfather in the Russian Imperial Army officer uniform during the Great War that people kept despite all the danger it entailed because being an officer in the imperial army almost automatically meant being an enemy. In many cases, people shared stories about trying to extract information from the older generations in their families and utterly failing because many people refused to talk or even engage in the process of the recollection of the past. One interlocutor once reenacted her dialogue with her paternal grandfather, whom she had begun to ask about his past. It went like this: "My father told me: 'go talk to your grandpa. He remembers everything.' So I went to see him. I said to him: 'So, tell me about your life.' He started yelling at me: 'What for? You don't need to know! Don't try to outsmart me!'" After a series of short yet loud outbursts, she finally succeeded in reconstructing fragments of his life story including deportations,

GULAG incarceration, and experiences during WW II with each question followed by a short outburst and sometimes profanity. I asked a local amateur genealogist to comment on why people are so reluctant to share their stories. As a former Russian language teacher in her late seventies she belongs to the generation that is often associated with people who are hesitant to speak about the past. She told me in response: “Sometimes people just don’t want to know. They are afraid to discover some painful truth. What if their relatives were not Stalin’s victims but rather were serving in his death squads? It is hard to confront these things.”

The fact that genealogy as a hobby was not popular in the Soviet Union does not mean, however, that people in the Soviet Union were not preoccupied with their origins and with reconstructing their genealogies. Paradoxically, the repressive political system of the early Soviet Union had actively trained its new Soviet citizens in self-expression. There is a large corpus of works in history that demonstrates that following the Bolshevik revolution, Soviet citizens were actively engaged in the autobiographical process in which they reconstructed their family histories and their eschatological trajectories of becoming communists. In this perpetual exercise of self-expression, they traced their personal and familial life trajectories in order to prove to themselves and to others that a communist spark had always latently existed waiting for the right historical moment to find expression (Helbeck 2006; Halfin 2000).

Autobiographies of Soviet communists and popular genealogical research that I observed in the club are similar in their essence. Both are built around a deliberate attempt to reconstruct narratives in a particular way and to define certain relationships as more significant than others. It involves an imaginative work of reconstructing

fragmentary stories and memories and giving certain directions particular focus while downplaying others (Nash 2008: 16-17). Following Verdery (1999), both could be seen as different instances of an attempt to attribute a particular shape (deep or shallow) to a historical narrative. However, while the Soviet style of reconstructing the past was built around a particular communist genealogy (Marx begat Lenin) and the autobiographer's objective was to demonstrate her or his symbolic proximity to the rake (Verdery 1999, cf. Zerubavel 2012), the new genealogical pursuit that I observed in Russia is built around a different historical shape that privileges an individual agent (Verdery 1999:118).

The rise of genealogy and biography in post-Soviet popular culture is considerable. Oushakine (2004) argues that the genealogical imagination became a prominent feature of Russian discourse subsequent to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the absence of classificatory and evaluative models provided by the state, genealogical ties, he argues, tends to acquire the organizational and classificatory logic that help people in the process of meaning-making (Oushakine 2004: 10). Even among genealogists that are not part of a more psychologized *Rodologia*, I had heard accounts that suggest psychological explanations to their genealogical maps. At one of the meetings of a popular genealogical club I attended in a small town outside of Yekaterinburg (one of my interlocutors became interested in *Rodologia* after she had been a member of the genealogical society for 15 years), a man was giving a presentation of his family tree that had at least 15 generations in it, going back to 1030. The majority of his research focused on the first imperial attempts to occupy the Urals when his ancestors began moving to the east in the 17th century. He concluded his presentation by emphasizing the importance of the psychological make-up of his ancestors that he

discovered, pointing out that among all 150 people he has in his family tree, there were no criminals at all and they all had strong families and died old. At the same meeting, another woman sighed after her presentation and said: “After I reconstructed my family tree, I had more questions than answers. I don’t know why all these people found themselves in my family. What does it say about me? Why did they react to social events the way they did? I think if I could understand it better, I’d be a happier person and people in my family would be happier too.”

“Kinship Culture” – Resource or Curse

When I asked the Dokuchaevs about their influences they told me that they were trained by an American psychologist, physicist, and one of the ideologists of universal consciousness, Champion K. Teutsch. Once a popular “success” consultant in the US and the co-author of *From Here to Greater Happiness* (1975) Teutsch, at the age of 72, found Russia to be fertile ground for his theory of “psychogenetics.” *Rodologia*, similar to “psychogenetics,” is based on the premise that every problem or conflict has a genetic etiology and in order to solve it one must first discover these roots. When I asked Larisa and Valery about the differences between “psychogenetics” and their method, they first assured me that Teutsch, in one of his last visits to Russia, saw and heard them talking about *Rodologia* and fully approved the direction they were going in. This is how Larisa explained the difference between the two methods:

What Teutsch and his wife were interested in, mostly, is how inherited behavioral patterns affect individuals. We put more emphasis on kinship than on individuals. Teutsch is a representative of a Western culture, which, as you know, prioritizes individuals. We are concerned not with a particular person but rather with kinship as a system. In our method, we are both interested in what effects our ancestors might have on us today

but also, no less important, on how these ancestors might affect our own descendants.

In other words, the Dokuchaevs are interested in broader intergenerational ties with a larger focus on descendants rather than with the present. Although they do not invoke Karl Jung's concept of "collective unconscious," the Dokuchaevs inadvertently base their theories on the idea that memories and feelings could be inherited from ancestors – concepts that constitute the core of Jung's theory (Jung 1981:43). Quite consciously, the Dokuchaevs translated what they learned from Teutsch into a different cultural context, using individualism as a distinguishing mark that renders Western culture different from their own.⁵⁷

The Dokuchaevs often used kinship systems interchangeably with culture. They would often tell someone: "You need to draw on the culture of you kinship system." Or:

You have a problem of letting people into your life because you are coming from a long line of old believers (*staroveri*) [a dissident faction of the Russian Orthodox church] and the culture of old believers has strong roots in your behavior. Old believers have a very particular culture and

⁵⁷ Aside from a clear difference in emotional style, there was another distinction that people familiar with the popular psychology scene in Russia revealed to me. *Rodologia* turned out to be a much cheaper way to transform oneself. A two-day seminar, at the time of my research was priced at RUB 4,000 (\$120) and a private consultation of two hours cost RUB 5,000. I have heard from many people that their consultations often last much longer but they do not charge any extra money. In comparison, psychogenetic seminars cost RUB 7,000 per seminar day and in addition a person interested in being on a "flaming chair" has to pay separately. If someone is interested in having a private consultation with a psychogenetisist, the price is RUB 7,000-8,000. The average salary in 2009-2010 when I conducted my research was approximately RUB 23,500. Alena, who is very active in the popular psychology scene and is quite fluent in "the language of selfhood" (Illouz 2008) specific to this scene, told me that she stopped going to psychogenetic seminars when she "saw dollars in the eyes of their organizers." I asked what she meant by that. She said that their recruiting methods were too aggressive: "They would call me to invite me to a new seminar and I would say: 'no, I can't. I am still working on my previous assignment.' Their response would be: 'How come? You should have been done with it already.' You see, I don't like it, they are too aggressive. I don't like when I am being forced to be happy. Each one has her own pace."

instead of fighting it, you should take one of its features, like for instance “keeping to themselves” (*vse v sebe*) and turn it into a resource that you can use for your own and your society’s good.

In this seemingly simple exercise, a 54 year old woman from one of the small towns outside of Yekaterinburg with a large population of old believers who escaped prosecutions and fled other parts of the Russian empire in the 17th and 18th centuries, was taught to turn culture into a resource. This woman is part of a very particular genealogical community, which in this case was identified by the Dokuchaevs as “the culture of old believers.” After culture was bracketed out as an entity that something should be done with, she was then taught to effectively use it as a resource with which to solve her personal problems.

Although the motivation behind using culture as a resource is clearly positive, the process of bracketing out culture is based on the stigmatization of certain social groups, lifestyles, and ways of living. One of the popular stereotypes that I had heard from people whose parents and grandparents are coming from the community of old believers is that they live in very closed and secluded communities. In fact, every time Valery Dokuchaev explained how to turn one’s culture into a resource, he would give an example of this particular stereotype: “Old believers for centuries kept to themselves. It is imprinted in their descendants’ genes.” He would then suggest that these skills could be quite handy because it also means they are very good at managing and administrating small communities. There is a process of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion at play here. The stereotype denies old believers a historical co-existence by bracketing them out as an unchanged and untouched by time and culture. “All old believers do so and so” brackets out a particular lifestyle as unique and exotic, based on ancient norms and values. It

denies a particular social group a sense of history and development – old believers have been doing so and so since the dawn of civilization and will continue to be the same until the end of the world. *Rodologia* suggests a way to include social groups or lifestyles into the broader field of “the normative” – old believers could live a happy and content life if they turned their culture into the thing that could be useful to the rest of society. The stigmatization continues through the process of inclusion as well. Instead of being “all to themselves,” they could use their long-term tradition of being good managers of their own closely tied communities into administrative skills from which the broader society could also benefit.

Similar to their mentor, for the Dokuchaevs, a concrete individual with specific problems is an immediate point of reference. They, however, put more emphasis on the question of “kin culture” (*rodovaia kultura*) in their seminars. Reminiscing about their first impressions of the *Rodologia* seminars, several people told me that for them the focus on kinship turned out to be one of the most powerful revelations. A successful manager in a large corporation in his late 20s, one of the few men I met during my time in the *rodological* community told me: “I always felt such a loneliness. But then it turned out that I am not alone. I have my kin culture (*rodovaia kultura*) with me. I can use its resources.” It is this embeddedness in a larger kin system that the Dokuchaevs made their trademark. They often speak about the reproduction of kinship systems and intergenerational continuity as the most important archetypes in Russian culture, a common origin at the base of the family tree that they try to reconstruct. One of the women who prior to *Rodologia* attended psychogenetic seminars commented on the distinction between the two models: “Psychogenetists, when you go to their seminars,

focus more on the questions of financial independence, successful business, and personal happiness. They are always concerned with a specific individual. The Dokuchaevs, on the other hand, are always talking about kinship and cultural distinctions.”

This language of kin culture and shared origins is augmented by a seemingly scientific style of reasoning used by *Rodologia*. Alena, as a former high school physics teacher, was drawn to *Rodologia* because of its use of science (genes):

I like that the Dokuchaevs explain everything from a scientific point of view. When I go to other seminars, they have a much more practical approach. They see a person faced with a specific problem and they give him or her a practical answer. They tell people what to do and how to change their behavior. In the case of *Rodologia*, they explain the mechanism without giving you a ready-made recipe for solving the problem.

I am less concerned here with the validity of this scientific explanation and whether or not I agree with it is beside the point. Simply stating that this is a pseudo-science would not explain why people choose this or any other form of reasoning. I am, rather, interested in what kinds of meaning this biologized style of reasoning generates and how it legitimates peoples’ search for happiness through *Rodologia*. Paradoxically, people involved in *Rodologia*, interpreted the predestined, biologized style of reasoning as having a capacity to preserve their personal sovereignty. Because each familiar history is perceived as unique to a particular person, similarly to genes that never repeat their sequence, these stories define distinctive personal identities. Similarly to the sentiment invoked by Alena, other *rodologists* pointed out that unlike other forms of self-help, be it a leadership seminar conducted by the Russian offshoot of Landmark or a spiritual workshop based on someone’s capacity for extrasensory perception (Geltzer 2011), *Rodologia* has a scientific basis that they find difficult to deny. A person, *Rodologia*

claims, cannot be imagined as independent of her or his kin. Yet, unlike an anthropological rendition of this idea or even Freud's revolutionary idea that the self is defined by its familial past (Illouz 2008), *Rodologia* uses genes as vessels through which people and their relations to others are established. Natasha, a young woman who discovered *Rodologia* and uses it personally and in her practice as a psychologist, reflected on the power of *Rodologia* in her work with children with development problems:

It's a thing in psychology, my clients often tell me: 'oh, you just made it up, your interpretation is wrong.' In *Rodologia* everything is connected to the history of your family and therefore a client can't tell you: you made it up. They look at their family tree, they see what happened to their ancestors and I don't even need to tell them anything, they see it by themselves. This genetic connection is what makes all the difference for me. It's not made up, it's there, and they can touch it.

It is this combination of metaphysical and biological that makes *Rodologia* a powerful tool in people's search for happiness. Comparing *Rodologia* to other psychological techniques, several of the *rodologists* told me that unlike other forms of psychotherapy, *Rodologia* is a more authentic way to transform oneself. It is not a psychologist who operates according to professional prerogative and tells a client what the problem is and how to solve it. In *Rodologia*, each one is supposed to have a unique and authentic family history and only by studying it can people understand their personal problems. Another psychologist who uses kinship charts in her practice told me: "When you show someone a chart and tell them: it is yours and only you can work with it. This is not a new, fashionable, made-up, and imported psychological approach. It is yours; it is your history. This way people believe in it more. It gives them power to work on their issues. It is a great motivator."

From the point of view of someone who discovered *Rodologia* as a tool for self-realization, being part of a larger kinship system is also a form of motivation. Another interlocutor, Tonya, who is also very familiar with the self-help industry, defined the uniqueness of the method for me:

While in other self-realization seminars (*seminari lichnostnogo rosta*), they see people outside of their networks and this is good, it means a person can do a whole lot without any help from the others. But in *Rodologia*, they help you to find the power of your kinship ties. It makes you feel that you are not alone. And maybe you are looking for answers by yourself but your ancestors already found them for you. I never saw it in any other psychological seminar that a method has a capacity to change your relationships with your family.

Such is the power of the genealogical imagination that *Rodologia* draws on. It is not only that the dead are there to help Tonya with her “belabored self” (McGee 2005); the dead are there to help redefine her relationships with the living relatives. Despite its essentialized and biologized style of reasoning, *Rodologia* offers to its followers possibilities for not only contemplating people’s experiences with particular kin (e.g., children, parents, partner) but also devising strategies for reconnecting and reconstructing relationships with these kin. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Rodologia is fundamentally about one’s relations to others – both living and dead. The uniqueness of this cultural practice is that it is based on knowledge constituted through research and study on the one hand (genealogical investigations) and through the acquired experience of kinship on the other hand (explorations of one’s relations with others). In this practice, genealogical research is utilized to reflect on her or his ongoing experience of kinship. Unlike other popular psychotherapeutic forms usually grounded in

the idea of a discrete individual capable of achieving success and harmony by utilizing a set of therapeutic techniques, *Rodologia* claims that the source of personal happiness or what they call harmonious being lies in kinship, which is also deemed as an organizing principle of one's inner self. The first thing that a student of *Rodologia* learns is that one can acquire information about the self and solve personal problems only by studying the history of one's family. By studying inherited patterns of behavior as they appear in current situations one can fully comprehend what is going on in her or his life and in the lives of his or her relatives.

As this chapter has demonstrated, ideas and concepts emerging in *Rodologia* form an important link in the process of the psychologization of social life in contemporary Russia. It does it through the interaction of new therapeutic discourses growing out of the thriving self-help market with already existing idioms through which people in Russia articulate their social experiences. It also does so by using the genealogical imagination in the process of meaning making in the context of what many people consider to be a disorienting experience. The combination of genealogy and psychology creates an interesting amalgam of meanings. Although arising from a popular self-help market, *Rodologia* uses the cultural idioms of genealogy that emerge from a different, more sociological understanding of oneself and others. It projects this sociological imagination onto the individualized logic of psychology and offers a type of social analysis that helps situate the sense of self both temporally and spatially.

Rodologia is based on a biologized and essentialized language of inheritance that at first glance seems limiting and constraining. Paradoxically and contrary to other forms of psychotherapy, this style of reasoning is interpreted by people familiar with different

forms of popular psychology as offering more freedom of self. The authenticity and the particularities of their family histories assure people's uniqueness, which other forms of psychotherapy are lacking because of their universalizing approach to self. Nevertheless, the premises of *Rodologia* constrain the course of action through the essentialization of culture by turning it into an entity that people need to work on.

Finally, the language of *Rodologia* shapes and is shaped by the ideas of belonging to the Soviet and post-Soviet state. It is related to the profound features of postsocialist politics that uses idioms of kinship and genealogy in order to revise the past that is already revised by the communist predecessors. Ideas about kinship not only help revisit historical narratives but also help attribute a particular shape to these histories, situating people in time and in space. As is clear from the stories of selective memories about the past, about sudden realizations of the sense of belonging to something larger, or about the "fury with the state," people use the idioms of kinship and psychology in order to articulate their sense of inclusion in a larger community both temporally and spatially.

CHAPTER VI

“Every Happy Family is Happy in its Own Way”: Kinship, State, and Ideology in Postsocialist Russia

Introduction

This chapter continues to focus on the process of the psychologization of social concerns in contemporary Russia. The previous chapter focused on *Rodologia*, a cultural practice that joined a large volume of other popular enterprises that utilize therapeutic discourse to frame social reality. As the previous chapter has shown, the uniqueness of *Rodologia* is that it is based on knowledge constituted through research and study, that is, through genealogical investigations and personal recollections of family members. This chapter explores how in this process the genealogical imagination serves as a logic structuring people's reflections on their ongoing experience of kinship. Furthermore, it demonstrates how ideas and concepts of self emerging in *Rodologia* forums represent an important link in the chain of expertise that constitutes knowledge about the perceived crisis of underpopulation in Russia. It reveals the importance of other forces outside of state discourses (e.g., popular psychology and ideas about kinship) in generating social expectations and norms about reproduction and family. While the previous chapter focused on the cultural idioms around which this work of psychological explorations is built, this chapter will focus on the institutional settings through which the process of the

psychologization of social life makes its way to the discourse about the crisis of underpopulation and policies that accompany this discourse.

My argument proceeds in two parts. The first section provides a closer examination of a variety of institutional contexts and settings in which the crisis of underpopulation is articulated in eclectic psychological terms. It demonstrates how the institutional settings of “family clubs” and youth programs aimed at exploring the virtues of family life inform the process of the institutionalization of therapeutic language as an important part of the discourse about the crisis of underpopulation. I argue that it is through these institutional settings, which are themselves the legacy of the population planning campaigns of the Soviet Union, that therapeutic discourse becomes the major framework by means of which the state articulates the problem of underpopulation.

In the second section I argue that rather than being complicit with or resistant to ideologies that represent the problem of underpopulation as the problem of family values and morality, therapeutic discourse offers people an opportunity to render this ideology meaningful. It provides them with an opportunity to negotiate not the state discourses on population per se but rather it allows them to articulate *contradictions* between discourses about population and normative models of appropriate family behavior, on the one hand, and actual kinship dynamics experienced by people in their everyday lives (i.e., relationships with parents, children, and partners), on the other hand.

Family Clubs and the Post-Soviet Therapeutic Culture

One of the important dimensions of social change and of the appearance of new cultural idioms to articulate this change is the process of the institutionalization of new cultural

forms and concepts. It is basic anthropological wisdom and an a priori in social theory that for a free floating idea to become a culturally significant and dominant ideology that informs the way we see ourselves and others, it needs to be grounded in a variety of institutional settings. It is through the process of institutional legitimization that the cultural understanding of the crisis of underpopulation as a therapeutic problem becomes common sense. In this section I will show how the therapeutically-informed genealogical imagination, as a framework for understanding the problem of underpopulation, becomes institutionalized (i.e., becomes culturally hegemonic) through a variety of state-sponsored educational programs. I begin with family clubs to show that as part of the legacy of the Soviet planning system, they become the physical and institutional loci through and by means of which this new therapeutic discourse is institutionalized.

As I mentioned earlier, Nina, a *Rodologia* consultant who was the first to introduce me to the method, works at a family club situated in one of the northern neighborhoods of Yekaterinburg. She initially joined the club when she was looking for a course in preparation for the birth of her only child some thirteen years ago. She stumbled upon one of the two places conducting such classes in Yekaterinburg at that time. The club, now Nina's workplace, dates back to the late socialist period. It occupies a basement space in a large apartment building. The walls of the club are decorated with child artwork, members' photographs, and banners from previous festivities and annual summer trips, which members take to one of the pastoral lakes outside of the city.

During the Soviet period, the city of Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk until 1991), as well as the surrounding region (*Sverdlovskaiia oblast*), had a high concentration of

defense-oriented high technology research and development facilities⁵⁸. In the Soviet Union, every industrial enterprise had under its auspices a variety of facilities that served its workers' needs. Family clubs, as part of the extra-curricular education system, were part of this arrangement. Back in 1986, the year of its establishment, the family club belonged to one of the larger industrial factories in the city and the first members of the club were young specialists, graduates of the Ural Polytechnic Institute, Boris Yeltsin's alma mater, who came to work at the factory after their graduation. These young specialists constituted what in Soviet parlance was often termed the "scientific technical intelligentsia," who enjoyed, inter alia, nature exploration, local tourism, and hiking. Although more prevalent in the generation of the 1960s following Khrushchev's thaw, the romantic image of a Soviet engineer who fulfils his life by climbing a mountain somewhere in Central Asia or singing a song accompanied by his own guitar was still widely popular and recognizable in the late socialist period of the 1980s. Indeed, the images of bearded young men with guitars in the hills in the 1980s permeate the artifacts and legends of Soviet popular culture.

The same generation of highly educated young people had also significantly contributed to the popular spiritual movements in the 1980s. These movements promoted alternative approaches to parenthood and propagated traditional forms of medicine as an alternative to the medicalization of childhood. In the late 1980s, when many of them became parents or were preparing to become parents, they began to learn about birth and

⁵⁸ *Sverdlovskaiia Oblast* as well as several other districts in the Urals still have closed towns, where some of the defense-oriented factories and research facilities are located. One of them is the town of Ozersk, situated in the Southern Urals and now infamous for the second largest global radiation catastrophe which happened in its nuclear complex Mayak in 1957. In addition, the region contains an abundance of small industrial towns built around one particular industrial enterprise (also known as "monotowns").

parenthood. Dissatisfied with the mainstream childcare and pedagogical methods popular in the Soviet Union at that time (Doctor Spock was among them), they sought new ways to raise their newborns. The director of the club, Lidia, a slender, fashionably dressed middle aged woman, who simultaneously exuded authority and kindness, described the first steps in developing an alternative pedagogical agenda in the following way: “We were not experts in parenthood or in raising kids; our philosophy was: ‘let’s just help each other. If you did it yourself, share what you learned with others.’ Our first group was a bunch of friends and colleagues who were looking for a different way to do things.” Many of these individuals expressed interest in popular movements of spiritual midwifery and “traditional medicine” and this very club became the one of the two first places in the city that began training women for home birth (see chapter IV). The major cultural idiom through which Lidia reminisced about this time and about her friends’ interests in both nature exploration and spirituality was the idiom of soul (*dusha*): “I remember when we were going hiking in the Ural mountains, we would sit around a fire and sing songs and drink. It was...how should I put it, soulful (*dushevno*).”

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the attendant privatization campaign, the major part of the social infrastructure belonging to particular industrial enterprises was either privatized or eliminated all together. The network of family clubs thenceforth came under the aegis of municipal budgets and often was among the last financial priorities for struggling cities. Once a thriving network of social clubs and extra-curricular educational programs for children and adults, these clubs disappeared as cities strived to remain financially solvent. The family clubs that survived combined their municipal status with providing paid services. In the case of Nina’s club, the course in

preparation for birth and especially home birth differentiated this club from its counterparts operating in the city. Its popularity grew and more and more people were attracted to it. In fact, a lot of people who either became doulas or opened their own schools for birth preparation (see chapter IV) in the last fifteen years began their careers in this club.

For the members of the club, as it was in Nina's case, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the privatization of their workplace coincided with their first experiences of parenthood. Nina told me: "We were young people with small children, usually one child. Some of us were on their way to becoming parents, while others had just had their second child. Some of us were fired and for some of us our jobs were eliminated all together." What saved this particular club from disappearing into the dustbin of history, Nina told me, were the social connections developed before the onset of privatization. A secretary of the party organization from a neighboring factory was one of the members of the club in the 1980s. By the time privatization began and the communist party was abolished, she was working for the city administration to which the club now belonged. The way the story is re-told today (I heard it from several people in the club) is that this woman happened to live in the same neighborhood and was looking for a place with extracurricular activities for her children. She knew people working at the club and trusted them to take care of her small children. She helped them save the physical place from being sold to a private owner.

In addition to the course in preparation for birth, Nina's recollection of the period immediately subsequent to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and factory privatization, involves the club operating as "a collective babysitter." Many of the club members were

laid off or fired and as a result lost some of the social support they enjoyed during the previous period. “Parents would take turns in taking care of each other’s children,” Nina told me. Lidia, now the director of the club, described the incipient social assistance network in the following terms:

We didn’t have certified teachers or psychologists. We would just come and play with children, listen to music together, make a trip to the nature together. We used our own resources. We had this woman, she was a doctor, a first class specialist, but also very familiar with other traditional forms of medicine, so she would explain what to do when teeth are growing etc.

As popular psychology became more and more widespread in postsocialist Russia, many of the people who were significantly involved with the family club became interested in and studied psychology as a new profession. Lidia, the director of the club and an engineer by training, told me that she graduated with a degree in psychology in 1998 and since then almost every year she goes through a series of additional courses to improve her professional skills. Today the club offers psychological services for both individuals and groups of children and adults. The trend of offering private psychological consultations is now commonplace and several psychologists I had met during my fieldwork supplement their work at clubs and municipal centers with private consultations that they often conduct at the same physical space.

Today, the club combines profit with non-profit activities. Although the city budget covers only a small percentage of their activities, it nevertheless supplies the club with a basic infrastructure as well as with political connections inside the city and regional governments. The club runs a training program for home and conventional birth (see chapter IV) and a variety of extracurricular activities for children, including homeschooling programs. As part of the municipal program, the club was recently

contracted to conduct a yearlong training program for college and university students dedicated to “family values” (*semeinie tsennosti*). Every two months, Nina, along with other teachers from the club, travels to colleges in and outside the city where they conduct a series of workshops and seminars, in which family is analyzed as a major conduit for personal success. The reconciliation between family life and personal success, as Nina explained to me, leads to a wholesome existence (*polnottzennaiia zhizn'*).

At the foundation of the educational seminars about family for university students is *Rodologia* with its focus on kinship, genealogy, and personal identity. Nina's description of the seminars that they conduct among students was framed as a process of self-realization and self-transformation, concepts popular in the field of popular psychology: “Every time I meet these students, I get very excited about how wonderful they are. They want to understand themselves better, to know why they do what they do. And we help them realize themselves better.” Using basic premises of *Rodologia* that Nina practices at the club, she and her colleagues who conduct these seminars explain to students how events experienced by their ancestors affect their own individual identities. The way Nina put it:

We show to them that to be successful is to know and to be connected to one's family history. Whatever our ancestors experienced in their lives – wars, repressions, revolutions – might have positive but also negative effects. These effects are like mines; they can be destructive too. But they also have a lot of power and energy in them and we teach young people how to be attentive to and utilize the powers of their own kinship (*rod*).

According to this explanation, knowledge about one's family history is prerequisite to personal success and happiness. Nina continued her description:

It is important that families and family values are still dear to young people's hearts. We don't tell the students what to do but we do show to them how being successful also means being virtuous and spiritual

(*dukhovnii*). Religion can provide some form of spirituality of course, but not necessarily. It is family that gives you this spiritual foundation (*dukhovnuyu oporu*).

The road to personal success lies in *dukhovnost'* and family is where young people can find it: "What we learn from working with these young people is that they all want to be successful and we show them that one can be successful only if he/she is loved and if he/she is virtuous (*dukhoven*)."*Dukhovnost'* is a hybrid concept grounded in a popular trope of *dusha* (soul), new moral dilemmas characteristic of the post-Soviet reality, and a new therapeutic discourse emerging in Russia. Although the concept of *dukhovnost'* has religious connotations and has been recently utilized in the religious discourses promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church, the way it is used in the moralizing discourses about the crisis of underpopulation is surprisingly secular. *Dukhovnost'* indexes a secular cultural reality, in which the soul is a key player in generating meanings, interpreting social reality and understanding one's relationships with others and provides Russia's citizens with means to reorganize their moral worlds.

The concept of *dukhovnost'* often appears in the training courses that Nina and her colleagues teach at the Department of Social Security (Social Work) at a local university. The seminar that I observed was aimed at students in the program interested in becoming social workers who specialize in youth advocacy. Nina explained the rationale to me in the following terms: "We wanted to offer them a set of new psychological techniques. We thought to ourselves: these people are going to be our future colleagues so we can offer them some effective communication skills for the future." It turned out that the seminar, as planned, was largely a failure. Students did not express interest in these skills, which Nina attributed to the low prestige of the department in general and

this training program in particular: “most of them are there because they simply could not get into a more prestigious program. So for them it was a default situation.” After the first session, it became clear that the majority of the students do not actually intend to work with youth after graduation and therefore are less interested in studying techniques of effective communication with youth. Nina and her co-teacher, Lidia, regrouped: “We said to ourselves, let’s try from the opposite end. Let’s try to work with introspection. After all, it was what we wanted anyways, but not from the start and not that obviously.”

In short, the teaching seminar turned into a therapeutic seminar after the first session. They based their seminar on *Rodologia*: “We wanted to blow up the myth that they can do everything by themselves and that they can do it better than their parents. We showed them how what they think and do is related to their family history.” During the first session, after getting a brief outline of the basics of *Rodologia*, the students analyzed the kinship chart of Solzhenitsyn, a popular teaching tool in *Rodologia* seminars. This tool has proven to be extremely efficacious. It was my impression that after seeing the full picture and visualizing the constructed links between different events and generations, students became more reflective about their thoughts and desires as well as about the links between the present and the past of their families. Using a genealogical imagination, Nina and her colleague visualized the link uniting *dukhovnost*, family, and personal success.

How to Make Happy Families or How to Make Families Happy

It comes as no surprise that both educational programs for youth are part of a larger project sponsored by the social foundation “The 21st Century’s Family,” chaired by

Larisa Dokuchaeva, the founder of *Rodologia*. The project involves training social workers and psychologists working with children and their parents. Larisa herself told me that she sees the training of cadres as essential to increasing the social prestige of family in today's Russia. The role of these professionals is to help identify individual problems and how familial histories of a particular individual contribute to these problems, or otherwise affect individual behavior in the present. Social conditions change, she explained to me, but people have fixed stereotypes of behavior that they inherit from their ancestors: "These familial histories define us and affect our descendents too."

Larisa sees family as a main object of therapeutic intervention in the process of psychological recovery from the social changes the country has undergone in the last twenty years. Restoring intergenerational ties and reviving family genealogies are the principle objectives of her foundation. Her educational projects play a crucial role in making psychological expertise an important part of the debates about both demography and the future of the "Russian family." Larisa's extensive political connections, forged during her long-term political career, the foundation she established, and her status as the member of the public chamber of the regional government make it easier for her to secure contracts with different city and regional ministries in order to institutionalize her agenda and to popularize *Rodologia* as means to overcome what she called the "psychological trauma" of the country. She jokingly told me that people often confuse many of her roles: "When I speak at the public chamber, people ask me about *Rodologia*, when I speak about *Rodologia*, they ask me about the chamber." It is clear, however, that regardless of where and under what circumstances she speaks, she always puts familial histories and their effects on individual identities as the center of her arguments.

Rodologia, as she explained it to me, unlike other forms of popular psychology, is able to penetrate the logic of the social problems that people in post-Soviet Russia now experience. She contends that other programs that aim at assisting people in dealing with changes either focus too much on the past while reproducing the problems that they are supposed to solve or create recommendations for solving problems without any basic knowledge about the past. *Rodologia* balances these two extremes and offers an effective way to both show a person's embeddedness in his or her history and to direct him or her to new more effective models of behavior. The underlying basis of the problem in Russia, Larisa explained, is that because family as an intergenerational form of social life was destroyed by the Soviet state, people tend to live as if they could be independent of their own kin (*rod*). This, in turn, leads to a social disorientation and often to an inability to deal with uncertainty or with difficult situations. Using genealogical research and connecting family histories with particular social events that affected one's ancestors, the therapeutic language of *Rodologia* allows one to connect particular models of behavior in the present to the history of one's ancestors.

An example that Larisa and her husband Valery Dokuchaev gave to a group of businessmen and civil servants at the meeting of the Presidential Program for Administrative Cadres' Alumni Association is illustrative of this point.⁵⁹ A young business owner approached Larissa with problems about his fledgling enterprise. He complained that although he invested significant time and energy, his business was very slow in taking off. He was dissatisfied with people he hired as well but could not

⁵⁹ <http://www.prezidents.ru/cgi-bin/news/view.cgi?news=323#>

precisely identify the problem. He and Larisa together drew his kinship chart identifying dramatic and traumatic moments in his ancestors' lives. As it turned out, this man's grandfather was an owner of a big farm but during the brutal collectivization campaign he was deported and died from starvation in Siberia. This event, as Larisa later explained to a group of young and ambitious businessmen, created a particular genetic mark that he inherited from his grandfather. Because of this traumatic event, his unconscious mind associated success in business with death and deportation. This, Larisa suggested, might explain his lack of success in business. Now after they successfully identified the problem, Larisa told to the group of businessmen: "we can start imagining and creating his future based on his own past."

Responses to this event varied. Many dismissed Dokuchaev's pseudo-scientific approach and expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the meeting was organized under the auspices of the governor's office.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the event is part of a larger framework in which family and intergenerational ties constitute an important link in the process of psychological recovery and the reinstatement of "family" as the foundation of social life in Russia. Similar to prominent demographers and regional politicians (see chapter III) Larisa correlates the problem of population with low fertility and low fertility with the problem of family and moral values. The Soviet state, Larisa told me, destroyed this social space by appropriating almost entirely all the functions traditionally associated with families. Her dissatisfaction with the state that either appropriates family functions or completely abandons family as an object of intervention led to the establishment of her foundation "The 21st Century's Family."

⁶⁰ For more on this see: <http://k-kiselev.livejournal.com/115427.html>

Before I continue with how “The 21st Century’s Family” participates in the process of the psychologization of social concerns, I will first identify an internal contradiction in the discourse about the Soviet state as appropriator of functions traditionally managed by the family. In fact, historical studies have compellingly demonstrated that the Soviet state was far from giving up on the social institution of family as an agent of socialist development. It is true that in the Soviet Union, the social institution of family came under attack in the 1920s as an inherently bourgeois institution. For example, the leading Soviet feminist Aleksandra Kollontai famously said: “The narrow, closed family, with its parental squabbles and its habit of thinking only about the well-being of relatives, cannot educate the New Person” (Kollontai 1918 cited in Hoffman 2003: 91). Yet, by the early 1930s, the Soviet state introduced a variety of pronatalist policies (see chapter I) with family as a key instrument of the state in its efforts to increase both population and industrial growth (Hoffmann 2003: 88-117; Hooper 2006; Goldman 1993: 296-336). The state in fact came to perceive the new Soviet family as “a cure for social problems” and as an important pedagogical tool of social reproduction, capable of instilling communist values in future generations (Hoffman 2003: 105-109). Therefore, having a family was not simply a matter of personal desires but a social obligation to the new state (ibid).

When Larisa spoke about the total appropriation of family functions by the state she referred to the welfare regime of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Soviet state stressed the importance of women in the workforce outside the home and offered, although quite unsatisfactory before WWII, a network of state-sponsored social facilities aiming at accommodating women making economic contributions outside of the home and raising

children (Hoffmann 2003; Wood 1997). Historians of the Soviet Union have argued, however, that the introduction of the first pronatalist policies of 1936, which included banning abortion, making fathers more fiscally responsible for their children and offering monthly payments for working mothers with children, increased the double burden of motherhood and work for Soviet women. What it meant in reality was that “the idea that the state would assume the functions of the family was abandoned” (Goldman 1993: 336). In short, the Soviet family occupied an ambiguous place in the communist ideology. It was, on the one hand, a microcosm of the new communist state and a socialization instrument responsible for transmitting proletarian values to future generations. On the other hand, it always posed a threat to the Soviet state because familial ties could potentially undermine people’s loyalty to the communist cause (Hooper 2006).

In theory, families were supported by the Soviet state in fulfilling their functions of biological and social reproduction. In reality, social life in the Soviet Union as elsewhere in the socialist world was practically dependent on families and intergenerational ties. The shortage in the public housing market led large portions of Soviet citizens to an arrangement where multiple generations of one family lived under the same roof. Because of the relatively young retirement age and the relatively early age for the birth of one’s first child, childcare was often in the hands of grandparents. Because of the sex imbalance and much higher life expectancy for women, childcare labor was also highly feminized (Verdery 1994). Thus, the Soviet state reconfigured the structure of household tasks and relations among kin. Social reproduction became significantly “geriatized” and pensioners as opposed to housewives carried out unpaid

household labor, standing in food lines, raising grandchildren and cooking for their children (ibid).⁶¹

Furthermore, the Soviet economy of shortage, in which the monetary value of goods was less important than one's access to social connections useful in obtaining these goods, made family an invaluable source of social connections. What is known as *blat* in Soviet parlance constituted a form of exchange that can be imagined as the "borrowing of one's access (*dostup*)" (Ledeneva 1998: 35). Networks and favors of access involved in *blat* were articulated in the idioms of mutual help and perceived as sharing access with friends and family. These exchange networks thus structured family relations and conflicts and created family strategies in an attempt to acquire access to goods and services. This social reality of everyday Soviet existence demonstrates that family is much more than simply a passive social form waiting to be filled with new social and cultural meanings. On the contrary, family was an active social actor, determining roles and responsibilities, creating conflicts over time, forming hierarchies of care, as well as reconfiguring relations among kin. I will continue the discussion of the contradictions between ideologies and practices related to family in the next section. Meanwhile, I will conclude the discussion of the institutionalization of therapeutic language with the ideology that the foundation "The 21st Century's Family" promotes.

Going back to Larisa's statement about the lack of the clear conceptualization of family as a major problem in the state efforts to overcome its demographic predicaments,

⁶¹Interestingly enough, this reconfiguration of childcare functions was caused by the process that Verdery (1996) calls the "etatization of time," in which the Soviet state expropriated people's control over their own time. Food lines are perhaps the most famous example of the phenomenon whereby shortages of certain items were converted into a seizure of citizens' time.

it seems as though her main goal is to fill “family” with new social meanings that should be accommodated to the social changes that the country is undergoing. The foundation “The 21st Century’s Family” made “a normal and regular” family its main object of intervention. The way Larisa herself puts it: “Normal families, the state completely abandoned normal families. The state is only interested in families when they reach some sort of a critical condition. I say, why let families reach crises at all? Wouldn’t it be more prudent to care for families before they find themselves in crisis?” Critiquing the paternalistic legacy of the Soviet state, she sees the main objective of her foundation as changing cultural ideas and norms about family: “The state invests too much in pathology. In fact, I came up with the idea of this foundation when I realized that it is about time we started to cultivate new norms, the norms of “problem-free” and “happy” families.” By pathology Larissa meant a welfare apparatus of the state that focuses on socially vulnerable populations at the expense of investing in self-sufficient families that could be a more efficient investment in a long run.

To describe the kind of family that she had in mind, Larisa used the combination of *blagopoluchnaia semia*. It is not easy to translate the adjective used by Larisa to describe the set of norms that she strives to cultivate. The word “functional” could be useful yet it does not capture the emotional undertones of *blagopoluchie* which variously denotes “prosperity” “happiness” and “wellbeing”. In Russian, *blagopluchie* as a noun is often used with the adjective *material’noe* (material) and often means “financially prosperous.” As an adjective, *blagopoluchnii* might mean successful or happy. When used as an adjective before family, as Larisa does, it means something like a problem-free family. As a cultural idiom, *blagopoluchnii* sounds more appropriate with the negative

prefix “ne.” *Neblagopoluchnaia semia* (dysfunctional or socially vulnerable family) is a more commonly used combination: “children from *neblagopoluchnie semii*”.⁶²

Although, it has apparent class connotations – after all, as Larisa explained to me, she is talking about families that can accommodate their own needs without the support of others – *blagopoluchnaia semia* does not automatically mean a successful family. When I asked a high-ranked bureaucrat at the ministry of social security, who also spoke of the importance of introducing the concept of *blagopoluchnaia semia* into the state lexicon, about the boundaries between “problem-free” and “dysfunctional” families, he told me:

Can I speak not as a bureaucrat for a second? I have a personal, not a scientific opinion about it. All the scientific answers you can find in all the books you read. So, I think that what determines whether the family is “problem-free” or not is whether or not people are responsible for their families and their children. When I see a mother who is...she looks like...I don’t like her when I look at her...but then she screams and bites the social service representative who came to take her child away and I like this woman. She is like our parents. After the war they did not have much but they would never abandon their children. That’s what I mean. This, I believe, is the meaning of *blagopoluchnaia semia*.

His response to my question indicates the inherent contradictions and the impossibility of arriving at a stable meaning. It makes *blagopoluchnaia semia* a concept that can potentially contain different and simultaneously contradictory meanings. The bureaucrat did not like how the mother he was telling me about looks, as her class signifiers did not match his idea of a self-sufficient person. Yet, he could identify with her plight as he clearly attributed her situation to economic hardship, and on that basis expressed empathy. The criteria of belonging to *blagopoluchnaia semia* remain undetermined.

⁶² Curiously enough, when I tried to Google search the translation of *blagopoluchnaia semia* from Russian into English, Google asked me: “do you mean *NEblagopoluchnaia semia*,” with “ne” here indicates the negation.

Regardless of the validity of his statements about how the post-war generation raised its children (in fact, circulation of children and boarding schools were something of a necessity and a commonplace for the majority of citizens during and immediate post-WWII era), what is important is that the concept of *blagopoluchnaia semia* serves as a symbolic framework that different people at different moments supply with meaningful content.

I had heard Larisa numerous times speaking about the importance of changing definitions of family as it is perceived by the state: “My main goal is to change the meaning and social status of family.” She often provides an historical explanation for the current low status of family as a social institution, blaming both the Soviet and post-Soviet states for completely expropriating functions traditionally in the hands of families themselves: “The paternalistic Soviet state denied families their traditional roles and took the role of the family on itself. After *perestroika*, however, it threw all these roles back at families again, this time denying them any support. From the first days of the Soviet Union until its end, family norms were lost. It is time we re-introduce them.”

The paternalistic Soviet state, she told me, was interested in families insofar as these families were in crisis. In the present, because the ministry of social security (social welfare) is in charge of social issues related to parenthood, childcare, and other family issues, it usually involves families that already reached some sort of crisis. Because of the ideology of paternalism that the ministry of welfare inherited from its soviet predecessor, it prevents the state from developing programs and legislative documents related to normal, functional (*blagopoluchnie semii*) families. When Larisa proposes to reintroduce family as the foundation of social life, she does not necessarily mean going back to the

prerevolutionary norms of family life. Rather, much more broadly, family as a norm of life is Larisa's main objective: "People should be able to see that having families are rewarded by society. It makes me happy, for example, when our politicians proudly declare that they have large families with five and more children. I see it as the emergence of a new norm."

Despite all my attempts to understand what precisely constitutes a *blagopoluchnaia* family as normative and how one could measure a problematic or problem-free family, it is impossible to formulate an operational definition for a *blagopoluchnaia semia*. Sometimes, it seems like having more than two children would necessarily move a family into a category of *blagopoluchnaia*. On the other hand, there are plenty of examples of families with just one child that are considered "happy" and "problem-free." What is clear from Larisa's agenda is that what should make every family happy is of course its history and intergenerational relations that tie it together.

This suggests that *blagopoluchnaia semia* is a category rich with meanings. It can also be imagined as an unmarked category against which a marked category of dysfunctional or socially vulnerable families is defined. Just as in English where "dysfunctional family" rolls off the tongue and is commonplace while "functional family" sounds unidiomatic and is not used. There is a contradiction within Larisa's agenda of making *blagopoluchnaia semia* both a norm and a new focus of state support. As an unmarked, capacious category it could serve as a norm that by its very essence does not require definitional precision. Once this silent norm becomes a focus of state intervention it stops being an unmarked category and therefore loses its own inherent power of being a category against which other things are determined. Although Larisa's

foundation and her legislative activities attend to the need of making *blagopoluchnaia semia* an explicit, quasi-legal, norm, this contradiction makes the concept of *blagopoluchnaia semia* a symbolic skeleton that could be filled with new and ambivalent social meanings.

Larisa's proposals to introduce the concept of *blagopoluchnaia semia* and all the training programs sponsored by her foundation are always mediated by ideas that she borrows from *Rodologia*. Intergenerational ties are important components of *blagopoluchnaia semia* as she understands it. In the language of *Rodologia*, knowing the culture of one's kinship system (*rodovaia kultura semii*) should be a norm for every family. By understanding the laws that led to the development of one's familial history, people can then understand their spouses and children better and thus can lead a more harmonious life. Traumatic events in the lives of people's ancestors and the creative ways in which their ancestors responded to these events function as a starting point from which people should begin to narrate their life stories in the present, as well as their relationships with others. This, in turn, situates one's life narrative in a genealogical grid, connecting this person to both her ancestors and her descendents. The embeddedness of personal identities within a larger structure of familial ties is supposed to make one a wholesome person, capable of self-realization and of forming healthy relations with others. To illustrate these ideas and to introduce their therapeutic methods to the most intimate yet public domains of social life, Larisa and her husband Valery Dokuchaev participated in the public events organized by the city's registry office (ZAGS). Aside from legal consultations, people who visited the registry office on that day could get a

consultation about their kinship histories and how to use resources that they inherited from their ancestors in order to make their families happy⁶³.

Larisa often uses the problem of intergenerational ties and families to explain the much-debated crisis of underpopulation. Although the law of reproduction is the most important law of human existence, Larisa told me, low fertility is essentially a psychological problem. People do not have more children because they live under the weight of psychological stress that they inherit from their ancestors. In addition, the problem of underpopulation, as she told to me, could be explained by the huge gap between different generations of our citizens: “Because we have several generations that grew up during the old regime and a new generation growing up in a new social environment, we lost links between them. So there is no one who can transmit values and norms from one generation to another.”

The generational rupture functions as a framework within which Larisa and her colleagues interested in popularizing *Rodologia* and psychological understandings of the problem of underpopulation narrate their approach. This short in the circuit of social reproduction makes it impossible for new generations to learn the importance of procreation. Generations are disconnected and no one is fulfilling the role of teaching young people the importance of reproduction and the development of familial histories. Larisa’s foundation and her programs aimed at training social workers and psychologists strive to teach new generations of Russian citizens the importance of reproduction and the moral dimensions of family life. To do so, she needs to operationalize the definition of family that she is trying to promote. *Blagopoluchnaia semia* is well suited for this task.

⁶³ http://www.e1.ru/news/spool/news_id-321313.html

In her attempt to make happy/problem-free families the focal point of state attention, the meaning of *blagopoluchnaia semia* remains ambiguous and is available for polysemous signification. It is almost as if the famous beginning of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* "all happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," has been inverted to read: "all unhappy families are alike (i.e., irresponsible and dependent on the state), every happy family is happy in its own way." How unique each remains to be seen.

In the next section of the chapter I will continue to discuss the therapeutic language used in the process of the institutionalization of psychological expertise in the debate about the crisis of underpopulation. Unlike the first part of the chapter that dealt with institutional settings that serve as levers in the process of the psychologization of the crisis, in this section I will discuss how the very same therapeutic language serves people that the state aims to influence in its attempt to overcome the demographic crisis. Ethnographic investigation of this therapeutic discourse shows that people use it to articulate contradictions between normative ideologies about population and family on the one hand, and their own day-to-day experiences with their kin and families, on the other hand.

Family as a State Ideology and as a Cultural Practice ***Normative Expectations vs. Actual Experiences***

During one of the *Rodologia* seminars, entitled "The kinship matrix" (*matritza roda*), Valery Dokuchaev, who moderated the seminar, began by talking about the interaction between biological laws of nature and social laws invented by human beings. Valery's basic argument, which is also quite popular in other New Age forums, was that we live in

the state of perpetual conflict between these two sets of laws. The conflict, on the one hand, is the main impetus driving human development. By applying their socially constructed ideas onto nature people develop technology and facilitate progress. On the other hand, Valery explained to a group of seasoned *Rodologists* who came to the seminar to try themselves either as consultants for others or as *Rodologists* of their own families, it is also a curse because people live in the constant state of dissonance. The basic law of reproduction was an example that Valery chose to illustrate his point. The conflict between nature and society, he explained, undermines the basic natural law of procreation: “It is only if we can bring together these two sets of laws that the basic law of procreation and reproduction (*vosproizvodstvo*) will work. Because there is a disjuncture between psychological and physical laws, people don’t reproduce themselves as they used to. And they are not even aware of it.”

In Valery’s explanation of the conflict between nature and society, procreation belongs to the domain of nature. Conceptualizing human kinship as belonging to nature rather than society is a cultural practice that reproduces itself in different facets of European social experience Strathern (1992:17-18) In Valery’s attempt to foreshadow the nature of the conflict between the biological and the social and use it as a framework to understand the current situation in Europe, he understands society as playing a detrimental role in the natural processes of reproduction:

That is what we see in Europe – “happy” people with no children. They think they are happy but they live in constant fear of something. *Rodologia* can be an instrument for solving this problem. When people understand the essence of this rupture and when they know how to reconcile the physical with the psychological they can begin reproduce themselves and they can also give birth to better children (*kachestvennie deti*).

In the true spirit of *Rodologia*, Valery explained later that it is the identification with one's past that can ultimately reconcile nature and psychology and render human existence more harmonious. He explained the nature of the rupture between the laws of nature and social norms as caused by historical developments that affect our being on a biological level. Valery offered an example, something that he called a "Siege syndrome." The siege refers to the prolonged and destructive blockade of Leningrad (Saint Petersburg) during WWII. The siege lasted 872 days and had profound effects on the city and its inhabitants. The syndrome, as Valery described it, is that people in Saint Petersburg, descendants of those who lived through the siege, have a psychological block that prevents them from having children. He glossed this block as "How can I have normal children after the siege?" which passes from one generation to another. Even if people desire children, the historical weight of the cumulative psychological trauma prevents them from doing so.

Low fertility is thus, an essentially psychological problem founded on the inherited fear of loss that manifests itself somatically through one's genetic make-up. Furthermore, it is essentially a localized problem and it is always related to particular historical developments that affect people and their relatives. Contrary to the exclusively biological model of reproduction characteristic of Euro-American kinship (Strathern 1992; Carsten 2004), reproductive choices are here conceived as both a result of specific social experiences, physically embodied by people and as a given fact, grounded-in-nature and a matter of physiological development. Thus, the problem of low fertility is an embodied psychological problem or a problem of society intervening in natural processes. Valery is not alone in identifying the crisis of low fertility in Russia as a

biopsychological problem. As previous chapters demonstrated, anxiety about population decline is ubiquitous in contemporary Russia – public statements by civil servants and politicians, dissertations defenses, and scientific conferences, all giving expression to this deeply felt concern. The argument usually framed in the following terms: “Why is it that in other countries like Pakistan (insert your own example), for instance, were there is poverty and the lack of political stability, birthrate is high and in Russia people refuse to have children. It is because there are ruins in our heads (*v golovakh razrukha*).”⁶⁴

In the context of emerging ideologies in which the crisis of underpopulation is refracted by the discourse of morality and virtue and in which family values are often essentialized and stripped of any historical specificity, it is easy to conceptualize therapeutic discourses in general, and *Rodologia* in particular, as a channel through which dominant ideologies related to family, *dukhovnost*’ and morality are internalized by people whom the state aims to influence through a variety of family policies and programs. On the other hand, genealogical research as the basic logic that guides *Rodologia*, could be seen as an instrument through which people resist or protect themselves from the emerging state ideologies. Social scientists have demonstrated the power of popular genealogical imagination in challenging mainstream ideologies of nation-states through documenting the past of marginalized populations that were denied a place in the history of the nation (Shryock 1997; Verdery 1999). In the context of contemporary Russian society, in which Kremlin ideologists work hard to re-write historical narratives, excluding politically controversial events, such as Stalin’s

⁶⁴ The distinction made here is very similar to the one made by Borisov in chapter III who tried to teach a group of bureaucrats to identify demographic differences between Russia and other countries from the developing world (see chapter III).

repressions, the Red Army's violent presence in post-war Germany, and so on, *Rodologia* might even be considered a form of political critique because the majority of *Rodologia* stories document and creatively engage historical catastrophes and atrocities committed by the Soviet state.

I would like to offer an explanation slightly different from the resistance-compliance model of understanding the relationship between state ideologies and therapeutic discourses popular in Russia today. My dissatisfaction with both explanations comes from the fact that both of them are based on the rigid dichotomy between the public and private domains. Both explanations, as valid and logically sound as they are, read *Rodologia* as a passive text without examining what people actually do with its premises and how they apply its arguments to their everyday concerns. I am interested in exploring the possible tensions and contradictions that arise from the encounter between dominant ideologies and everyday practices of kinship. I am also interested in what happens when the therapeutic language of *Rodologia* is used in an attempt to reconcile these contradictions. When focusing on how people appropriate what they learned from *Rodologia*'s genealogical and therapeutic logics and apply it to their everyday life, one can see the unanticipated and creative uses of ultimately conservative ideologies. The power of ethnography inheres in this capacity to bridge the gap between ideology and practice and to show the reciprocal dynamics between the two (Miller 2001).

I believe that as people are trying to reconcile these tensions, *Rodologia* and its followers participate in the negotiation of the boundaries of the normative behavior in contemporary Russia. Both explanations, privileging the resistance-compliance model, are overwhelmingly interested in the critique of political assumptions underlying

discourses of normativity. Because of this, they run the risk of assuming that people in Russia are not aware of the contradictions between emerging ideologies of family values and real living experiences of their relationships with kin and others. It is true that an uninformed visitor to contemporary Russia would most likely find people endorsing the new state effort to improve the demographic situation in the country. While people I worked with might endorse the new pronatalist policy and the discourses accompanying it, their personal and family experiences related to birth or family formation are often only tangentially associated with state discourses specific to the perceived demographic crisis in Russia. One of my interlocutors who also happened to be at the conference where the governor of the Sverdlovsk region scolded one of the experts in demography for connecting demographic problems to poverty and economic inequality (see chapter III) reflected on this situation as follows: “I was angry when our bureaucrats were joyfully reporting on how everything is better now and how birthrates are rising. They didn’t talk about me, they have no idea what is going on with me and they didn’t want to hear when that scholar started talking about poverty. But it is still good they talk about these issues.”

Family is a site of social reproduction and in state-based societies civic institutions play an important role in codifying the principles of this reproduction in the form of laws of inheritance, family allowances, and affective dimensions of kinship (Bourdieu 1996; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Franklin and McKinnon 2001). Bourdieu (1996) writes: “It is indeed clear that in modern societies the main agent of the construction of the official categories through which both populations and minds are structured is the state, which through a whole labour of

codification accompanied by economic and social effects (family allowances, for example), aims to favour a certain kind of family organization and to strengthen those who are in a position to conform to this form of organization” (p.24). The naturalizing power of the state not only constrains practices but also turns symbolic systems of kinship into essentialized categories of “biological,” “natural,” or “genetic” (Franklin and McKinnon 2001: 5). As the previous chapters have shown, state discourses in Russia are indeed influential in reproducing what is normative and acceptable. While it is clear that the institutionalized forces of the state play an important role in defining what is thinkable and acceptable with respect to family and kinship dynamics, it is also important to remember that the power that emanates from the state and institutional authorities is not the only source from which discourses and practices of normative expectations are generated (Miller 2001: 57-65).

Children and Parents, Brothers and Sisters

Rather than constructing my argument as either part of the compliance-resistance dichotomy, I am interested in the emotional work involved in articulating discrepancies between practice and ideology that people experience in their everyday lives. To explore this idea, I follow Miller’s (2001) argument that what makes kin relationships meaningful is a dialectical tension between the specificity of the relationship with an actual kin and the universality of this person as objectified in the discourse about a particular category of kin (e.g., what a wife or a son should be like) (p.17-56). *Rodologia* is a rewarding object of analysis in this regard. It is fundamentally about one’s relations to others – both living and dead. These two strains of *Rodologia* allow people to creatively use

contradictions and discrepancies between normative discourses and lived experiences of intergenerational ties and to reinterpret and re-formulate both their personal narratives and the state goals and motivations in order to secure material and symbolic benefits gained through historically and culturally situated concepts of relatedness. One of the *Rodologists* put it better than I ever could: “I am trying to understand how values change. I am standing in between my parents and my children. I am trying to reconnect with my parents in order to reunite with my children and ultimately to unite three different generations.”

When I visited Elena, a thirty something mother of two young girls, we talked quite extensively about her family and her living situation. She and her husband are young professionals, both graduates of the Ural Polytechnic University and they own their own apartment. They raise their children completely on their own as both their parents are either still working or dead. Elena told me that many of her friends think that she lives a perfect life because she has a loving husband, two daughters, and they own an apartment. She did not think so herself. Elena first came to *Rodologia* after she heard her friend talking about how through *Rodologia*, she understood and forgave her father who left her when she was a small child: “Because I myself had an unresolved issue with my father who died when I was a teenager, I wanted to try and deal with it the way she did.” Although the death of her father was an initial trigger, while doing research and going to *Rodologia* meetings, Elena began to notice her relationships with her children change as well: “I began to realize that things have changed but I never paid any attention to it. Life is changing. What worked for our parents, doesn’t work for us anymore but maybe it should.” I asked Elena what exactly didn’t work.

We live with this idea that children once they have their own family should live separately from their parents. This is true, I guess. But I thought that there are things that you don't need to think about when you live with your parents. Like, for instance, they could have taken care of my children while my husband and I went to the movies. Things like that.

What emerges in Elena's response is her reflection on the popular normative discourse about modern families that Elena has plenty of opportunities to be exposed to in the media and popular literature. Living either with or independently of one's parents or in-laws is a theme often discussed in a variety of popular talk shows offering psychological expertise to its viewers and listeners (Matza 2009). It is often a continuous conflict with one of the in-laws who reside with a young family that becomes the focus of these shows⁶⁵. Whereas in the Soviet Union, multigenerational arrangements were somewhat of a necessity because of the housing shortage, in today's Russia, living independently is an ideal that young families try to achieve while space remain to be an important social issue. Elena channels this discourse about normative expectations both through the research she had done on her family – her parents and grandparents who for different reasons lived in multigenerational households – and through her own childhood memories of a grandmother who lived with her parents and who variously assisted with domestic responsibilities in the form of cooking dinners, and picking her up from school.

Elena articulated the normative discourse about how the relationship between two generations should be using both her personal experience of kinship and a therapeutic language of *Rodologia* through which she identifies with an older generation. Her interpretation of multigenerational living arrangements which she shares with her

⁶⁵ Multigenerational living arrangements as an object of public discussion are not exclusively a post-Soviet phenomenon. Jokes about living with in-laws are abundant in Soviet popular culture.

parent's generation and which still has relevance for a large proportion of Russia's citizenry clashes with the objectified ideals about normative relations among generations. It is not that Elena's interpretation necessarily upsets or overturns the discourse about the normative, but rather, it shows both the discrepancy between normative expectations (independent living) and actual living situations. It is this identification with the past and the focus on knowing and researching the other that Elena learned in *Rodologia* that allows her to reflect on her own relations in her family as well as on the normative discourses about family circulating in Russia today.

Changing values and norms were also something that Elena mentioned when she told me a story of her and her siblings' inheritance. Elena has one older and one younger brother who are effectively estranged from one another. Elena's mom, many years after her husband (Elena's father) died, re-married and moved out of her apartment, where she used to live with her youngest child Peter. Peter would reside in the apartment along with his wife, while Elena and her older brother would be compensated for their share of the apartment. The older brother, Pavel, was not satisfied with the arrangement as he thought that one of the other siblings might get a larger share of the place. Elena explained to me: "it is all because of privatization. So, to resolve this problem I went to Nina (*Rodologia* consultant) and we recently resolved this problem." The apartment her mother owned, Elena's childhood home, was part of a Soviet public housing complex that her parents received from the state when they began their career as young specialists at a local factory. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people had the option to privatize their apartments and it was often the case that these private dwellings became objects of contestation among relatives. Elena turned to the therapeutic language of *Rodologia* to

resolve this issue. She was researching her past as it is related to family and property. The question that she asked was what prevents her from resolving this conflict. She found her answer in the generation that suffered through collectivization and lost their property during the campaign. In the therapeutic language of *Rodologia*, the tension between an objectified ideal of the peaceful relationships between siblings and the conflicts caused by new changing social conditions turns into a psychological problem that could be resolved using therapeutic techniques.

Marriage, Childbearing, and Gender Ideologies

Another example of the gap between normative expectations and lived experiences occurred when Valery Dokuchaev was explaining to a group of *Rodologists* the meaning of the fundamental laws of procreation. As I mentioned above, to illustrate his point he used an example of “happy couples” with no children that only deceive themselves in thinking they do not desire children but in reality live in the state of perpetual dissonance between natural laws and social norms. To illustrate his contention that a decision not to have children is a form of self-deception, Valery used a somewhat sarcastic tone, indicating the false sense of happiness. It is not the first time that Valery was using this same example of people who think that they are happy but, in fact, live under tremendous psychological pressure that militates against their authentic self-realization.

In several instances, Valery called this basic law of procreation “a gold that has been sullied with historical catastrophes and fear.” I did not often hear people challenge Valery’s argument about the fundamentality of procreation. This time, a young *Rodologist*, Olesia, who works as a journalist and a copy-writer at one the marketing

companies in the city, turned to Valery and asked: “If you say that the law of human reproduction is so fundamental to our existence, how is it possible that people reject having children?” Valery repeated his argument about human bodies being under enormous psychological pressure inherited from the past: “When people feel comfortable with themselves, they reproduce themselves. But as long as they are not in harmony...Look at Russian women, for example, they carry on their shoulders much more than they could. During the war it was a necessity but now it’s almost a habit, they continue doing all the work and men continue lying on their backs doing nothing.” Someone interrupted: “I know, men are lying on a couch all day long. Don’t even want to get up. My son is ready to get up but my husband refuses.” Olesia countered: “But people who don’t have children, they are happy, you said so yourself.” “They think,” Valery replied, “they are happy but they carry fear inside. And this fear expresses itself on a somatic level. I mean, infertility and so on. I recently met a couple with ten children, there is no physical tension at all in their bodies.” “But what motivation do they have to have children?” was Olesia’s next question. She answered her own question: “No, I think from what I see is that it is not just that people who are happy can’t, but also that they don’t want to reproduce.”

Olesia, in her late twenties, was still single when I was doing my fieldwork. (I met Olesia again a year after that and by that time she got married and was expecting a child.) The theme of marriage and childbearing was often on her mind when I came to know her. Olesia would challenge other *Rodologists* about most of what they had to say. Every time someone would mention a trope of Russian men who either lie on a couch doing nothing or drinking themselves to death, Olesia would say something like: “You see, and after

relating this, you tell me to get married.” Olesia, aside from being a devoted *Rodologist*, had also participated in a variety of other popular psychological seminars, most notably the Russian version of the US based self-help enterprise Landmark.⁶⁶ As she put it: “It’s a mild version of the American enterprise. Landmark-lite.”

Olesia questioned Valery’s ideas about procreation being fundamental to one’s wellbeing. Valery’s example with which he chose to illustrate the idea of procreation as fundamental to one’s being was a story of Russian women who for different historical reasons had to perform “unnatural” social roles. While during certain periods it was necessary (e.g., during the war), when it subsequently became knitted into the social fabric of post-war society, it became destructive to the normative gender dynamics that led to male weakness and women overpowering men in today’s society. From his example, it is clear that Valery associated procreation with a certain female emotional experience, the lack of which might cause women a psychological impairment. Valery’s ideas resonate with a national discourse about the crisis of underpopulation that assigns fertility and women a particularly salient role in saving the nation.

It has been the case in both socialist and postsocialist contexts that ideas about gender differences and sexuality are recruited by the state to gain political authority (Gal and Kligman 2000). However, the meanings and practices encompassed by gender ideologies have changed drastically between presocialist, socialist and postsocialist periods. For example, while socialism challenged the association of women with the

⁶⁶ Landmark Forum is a self-help enterprise oriented towards large groups. Usually, up to 150 people participate in a seminar aimed at helping them realize their personal potential. It emphasizes effective communication skills and productivity:
<http://www.landmarkeducation.com/>

private and men with the public, the distinction between public and private itself did not disappear but had been reshaped and reconfigured. The “regendering” of professional occupations and social roles under postsocialism is at least partly related to changing market forces and the changing significance of professional occupations in a market economy. This, in turn, created new semiotic codes for the private/public opposition (e.g. regular and secure jobs coded as male, and part-time and multiple jobs coded as female) (ibid: 61). This discourse also signifies the need for a form of social control or disciplinary practice, the objective of which would be the restoration of normative and naturalized gender roles (Lutz 1990).

As I mentioned above, the eclectic psychological foundation of *Rodologia* is built around the idea that the disharmony that people experience in their lives is caused by historical and political developments that previous generations experienced in their lifetime. We inherit this disharmony and without being aware of what caused it, we continue to perpetuate destructive patterns of behavior that we cannot consciously control. The first question that people in *Rodologia* ask is: “why do I behave like this?” To answer this question, people look into their genealogical charts. What they usually discover is that it was either the Revolution, the civil war, collectivization, Stalin’s terror, or WWII that affected their ancestors and is responsible for their patterns of behavior in the present. This disharmony between desires and expectations, in turn, leads to destructive behaviors: alcoholism, divorce, conflicts with children, etc. In one of the instances in which the idea of harmonious persons was discussed, Olesia raised her hand and said: “I know that I live in disharmony. I do want children but I know that with my line of work, I can’t do both, not right now. Not for 100%. So what? So, I know now that

I'm not a harmonious person. What's next?" The answer Valery gave to her surprised me. I expected him to start talking about kinship and genealogical connections to her grandmothers who had to save their husbands during the war. Instead he simply said: "Give birth as soon as possible (*bistro*) and then go and continue your career." One of the women laughed: "What do you mean as soon as possible, like in 2-3 months." After all the giggling passed, Valery composed himself and said: "We need to understand that we live in a system, in a kinship system (*v rodovoi sisteme*) and this system has a basic need of reproduction. On top of it, we have all the gender problems and it is confusing. Your desire to have a career is not a basic need, it's an addition to the basic need. You need to fulfill the basic needs first."

In the case of Russia's pronatalist ideology and policies, the state clearly acknowledges the burden of childbearing on women and therefore offers a set of policies aimed at alleviating it. Yet, the state is ready to help women only if they fulfill their roles as defined by the state needs, i.e., childbearing (Rivkin-Fish 2010). In the therapeutic discourse of *Rodologia* this need turns out to be a psychological necessity. Olesia's reluctance to accept the idea of reproduction as fundamental to one's wellbeing and to a women's psychological health was framed in the idioms characteristic of the same therapeutic language. She rejected the idea offered by Valery that happiness is equal to procreation and offered another explanation, that in which happiness equals self-fulfillment, self-expression, and autonomy, idioms popular in the flourishing therapeutic and popular psychological discourses. Although Olesia did not question the basic premise of *Rodologia* to make people more harmonious, she did pose counter-arguments and questioned *Rodologia's* ideas about harmony as grounded in rigid gender roles. In her

objections to Valery's psychological explanations she exposed the contradictions between normative gender expectations and her own living experiences of being a working woman in pursuit of career.

Gender ideologies were a focus of many discussions in *Rodologia*. At a seminar devoted exclusively to the relationships between men and women, a young working woman, Natasha, asked Valery if he means that because procreation is a law of nature, it is necessarily better than laws created by humans. Valery countered: "Not better, but it is important to have harmony between different laws – biological and social." The first assignment in this seminar, regardless of the participant's gender, was to create a stream of consciousness in continuing the following: "I am a woman. It means..." The next assignment was to write: "I am a man. It means..." After these two assignments were completed, we were asked to analyze what we wrote about these images, indicating how we felt about these gender roles. People's answers were then discussed in small groups of four to five people. I joined a small group of three women, all of them in their late twenties. One of the young women, Natasha, had a five-year-old child from her previous marriage. She now has a new partner, she told us, and they were thinking about having a child soon (in fact, when I visited the field a year later, Natasha gave birth to a baby boy and officially married her new partner). During our discussion, we mostly talked about what is expected from women. Natasha said: "Our society doesn't allow women to be women anymore. Women should always play a game according to men's rules." As I was frantically taking field notes, I wrote next to this sentence: "feminist?" Indeed, it is a form of political commentary on the state gender ideologies that are not conscious of women's double burden of work and motherhood. Yet, the rest of this sentence did not

seem as feminist as it might have been at first glance: “Women’s power lies in their beauty. Their roles are different from that of men. For many years, I was behaving like a man, taking responsibility for my family. I’m tired of it. Now, I want to take care of myself and to pay more attention to myself as a woman.” This statement is not unique to Natasha; it is an ideology that finds its bearings in popular culture and its artifacts.

We spent the rest of our time in a small group discussing the role of women as housewives. Another woman said: “The Soviet society weaned women off their role of being housewives, because everyone had to work for the good of the society. There is still this negative connotation to being a housewife. It is even called “sitting at home” (sitet’ doma).” Natasha seconded her: “Yes, it is not seating at home. It is a hard work, sometimes 24 hours a day. Sometimes, it seems like even if it is possible to be housewives nowadays, the legacy of our country does not allow women to do it.” After a general agreement about the legacy of the Soviet state that does not allow women to do what is often expected of them in the objectified discourse about ideal women and wives, Natasha concluded: “I’ve been ‘seating’ at home for a year now, after I was fired from my job as a medical administrator.” She stressed the verb ‘sit’ to illustrate the negative connotation that it has in people’s minds. “I can afford it but I felt uncomfortable about it, until I found through research that my great-grandmother was a head of a big household and of a farm and that she was very successful at it. I discovered that I have this enormous power in my familial history and I can use it.” Using the genealogical imagination of *Rodologia*, Natasha tried to reconcile between the normative gender expectations in which women are expected to fulfill certain roles (“women are...”) and real experiences of gender roles that she saw in the family in which she grew up, where

being a housewife was not a culturally acceptable thing and not an object of aspiration. Genealogical research involved in *Rodologia* (Natasha's search for precedents in her familial history) makes it possible to both articulate and reconcile the contradiction between objectified gender images and actual subjective experiences of gender.

Kinship with the State

Until now, I discussed how people render the contradictions between normative expectations and their own actual experiences with specific kin meaningful. The last example that illustrates how people use therapeutic discourses in order to articulate their relationships with others focuses on the relationship between the self and the state. The relationship between the self and the state could also be seen as a form of kinship, if we accept that in modern societies "individualism has become increasingly incorporated within kinship to form a category of kinship" (Miller 2001: 41). The therapeutic discourses offer a variety of techniques and models of how one should relate to the self and how one should and might transform it. Within this discourse about normative expectations of how one should take care of the self (Matza 2009), the following example illustrates how the relationship between the state and the self is also built around the contradiction between the objectified idea about the relationship between the state and the self and the particularity of this experience.

I used this example in the previous chapter, but it is worth repeating here. Nastya, a young woman in her early forties, told me that her assignment for the next several months is to overcome her anger with the state and in particular with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I met Nastya relatively late in the program. She lives in a small town

outside of Yekaterinburg and cannot afford commuting there very often. She became interested in *Rodologia* when Nina (from the family club), along with some of her colleagues came to her hometown and presented *Rodologia* to a group of working youth there. She has been interested in it since then. Nastya did not come to all the seminars and her presence always added a spirit of argument and disagreement. She often interrupted the Dokuchaevs, posing difficult questions and arguing with other participants. During one of the seminars, Valery Dokuchaev asked us to write down in a table several significant events in our lives, our emotional reactions to them, our rational thoughts about these events, what patterns of behavior we followed, and how our bodies physically reacted to these events. We were supposed to fill the table gradually based on the themes that we were discussing during the seminar. When Nastya's turn to speak came, she first said: "In the 1990s, when all hell broke loose, I don't know what I did wrong. I didn't do anything wrong, the state (*gosudarstvo*) did." I was intrigued as it was the first time that someone broke the pattern of indicating the self as the core of any development. Nastya continued:

When the 1990s came they began laying off and firing people. They also eliminated job positions, not like today when they fire you, but the whole damn job position. I thought I'd be working at this place until my retirement and then here we go, my job is no more. And there were no jobs in general then. The only job I could find was working at a public park, selling tickets. I was angry at the state. Not only because I was fired but because of other things too.

Someone interrupted: "We all lost something in the 1990s. Some people didn't survive and some did. Your job was eliminated and I almost sold my apartment for nothing. I almost signed the contract. If I did, I would be living in the street today but I didn't. Life put you in this situation and you need to understand why you reacted the way you did."

Nastya continued to express her dissatisfaction with the approach that made her responsible for the failures of the state: “But I wasn’t the cause of these events. The state was responsible for that.”

Throughout the debate, Valery stood aside listening to other people trying to convince Nastya that she should take responsibility for what happened to her. As for why it happened the way it did she needed to look at her familial history. One of the *Rodologists* asked: “Who among your ancestors was denied income and opportunity to work?” Nastya rolled her eyes: “Well, my grandmother was stripped of her farm (*raskulachena*) and deported to Siberia.” The choir of voices replied: “You see.” One of them suggested: “My husband, when the financial crisis hit last year, was very upset. But then he looked at his kinship chart and said: ‘my grandfather was fighting the war and he survived, I can survive too.’” Someone else said: “You should accept life as it is but you still resent it.” Nastya replied: “That’s true. I resent it, because my life changed completely after that.” “You need to forgive,” was another suggestion. “Who should I forgive? The state?” Nastya genuinely asked the rest of the participants. “Yes, exactly,” they responded, raising their voices.

It is not that people rejected the idea of crisis as affecting patterns of behavior. On the contrary, some suggested that if very recently most people were highlighting wars, revolutions, and other catastrophes that happened before the dissolution of the Soviet Union on their kinship charts, it is about time that they began concentrating on the privatization of the early 1990s, the devaluation of 1998, and the last financial crisis with little black rectangles on these charts. One of the women in this contingent suggested said the following: “It is also history and it affects our descendants.” The focus of the debate

about Nastya's anger at the state rather evolved around the question of responsibility that defines the relationships between the self and the state. *Rodologia* does not reject the fact that the state should be responsible for its citizens. On the contrary, people's relations with the state and people's suffering from the state is often discussed during seminars. Political decisions and subsequent policies are often discussed as causing human suffering and destroying people's ideas about right and wrong. In these discussions, the Soviet state is often identified as breaking either biological or spiritual norms and thus participating in the traumatic experiences that people endure. Instead of being completely and violently damaged by the state, people often tell their family stories as stories of endurance and perseverance: "My great-grandparents were stripped of their property, deported to Siberia with no money and ten small children but they managed to rebuilt their house and raise all their children."

Rodologists would tell you that because of the Soviet legacy, people's relationship with the state is built upon fear and efforts to conceal things from it. Instead of fighting the state or hiding from it, Valery often would say, people need to learn to collaborate with it. It is not always easy to change people's perspective on the state, he would remind us, because for many people in the Soviet Union, being acknowledged by the state literally meant death. There are two messages about how people should relate to the state. First, there is a statement that *Rodologists* often repeated to me, especially people who were talking about new job or business opportunities: "I learned that it is possible to collaborate with the state, not only to hide from it." On the other hand, there is a strong message of self-reliance and self-regulation that is characteristic of conversation I had heard in *Rodologia* forums as well as in other popular psychological media (Matza 2009).

The same logic of two opposite forces, collaboration with the state verses self-reliance defines the concept of “happy families” that I discussed earlier.

As Rogers (2006) points out, relationships with the state are always historically situated and in the case of post-Soviet Russia, they are “fraught with moral quandaries and intricately caught up in political and economic transformations” extending beyond the boundaries of any particular locale (p.916). Nastya’s anger with the state, as she defined it, put a question mark next to this growing normative expectation of self-management and self-reliance. The debate that Nastya’s story about the early 1990s generated sheds light on the normative expectations of individual autonomy and assertiveness that resonate in popular psychological discourse of the self-help market in contemporary Russia. To illustrate this ideology, Valery concluded this debate by saying: “There are people who prefer not to respond to what happens to them. And we have a lot of descendents of these people. Take men, for instance, who spend their lives on the couch drinking.” In this example, the passivity of one generation comes at a high price for the current generations of women and men in Russia. To understand what causes one to be passive or aggressive vis-à-vis the state *Rodologia* utilizes the genealogical imagination.

The therapeutic language of *Rodologia* makes a story of economic hardship a psychological tale that with a little help from the professional community of psychologists might be resolved and translated into a spirit of collaboration and appreciation for the state. The debate about whether or not Nastya should forgive the state, built around changing ideas about obligation and responsibility, exposed the contradiction between the normative discourse of self-reliance and autonomy and

Nastya's actual tangible relationships with the state that betrayed her trust and broke its own promises. The framing of Nastya's relationship with the state also presumes that all the mistakes made by the state are in the past too and should be left there. Using the genealogical imagination and reconstructing one's narrative using family research aim at the reconciliation between the ideal of the relationship between the self and the state and the actual experience of this relationship.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on two separate yet interrelated processes. First, it explored the process and different mechanisms of the institutionalization of psychological expertise insofar as it is related to the crisis of underpopulation and family in contemporary Russia. To explore the mechanisms of its institutionalization, the chapter followed psychological expertise as it was applied in two different educational programs sponsored by a local social foundation. Through retelling the narrative of the chair of this foundation and through examining the content of these educational projects, the chapter argued that new cultural ideas about normative family behaviors emerge. The idea of *blagopoluchnaia semia* (a problem-free family) that emerges in the process draws on concepts popular in a flourishing psychological market in Russia that make family an object of therapeutic discourse and intervention. Healing society through healing families is a motive that appears to be especially salient and popular in the debates about the crisis of population in contemporary Russia. However, the concept of *blagopoluchnaia semia* that emerges in these debates offers no answer to what constitutes such a "happy family." This ambiguity

offers people immersed in therapeutic discourse opportunities to fill it with unanticipated and creative content.

Second, this chapter also argued that the same language that narrows down possibilities to define family and that makes family an object of therapeutic discourse, also offers opportunities to articulate and reconcile contradictions between normative expectations and discourses about appropriate family relations and actual quotidian experiences of kinship. The new market economy and changing regimes of property transformed people's perceptions and beliefs. New normative discourses about private property and family relations coincide, in the case of Elena, with her actual experiences of the privatization of her mother's apartment. In order to become meaningful, ownership needs to be exercised in practice. As this example demonstrates, social and cultural dimensions of a new property regime defeats the simply legal definition of a property owner (Verdery 2003; see also Rogers 2006). In Elena's case, the therapeutic language of *Rodologia* along with its genealogical logic helps her reconcile the objectified ideal of an individual property owner with her actual experiences of passing on property from one sibling to another.

The therapeutic discourse is also used to articulate conflicts between emerging gender ideologies and the ways people experience gender in their everyday lives. Olesia, ever a rebellious soul, found it hard to accept the popular notion of women being happy only when they fulfill their role as mothers. In challenging Valery's suggestion that people deceive themselves if they think that they do not want to have children, Olesia exposes the dominant ideology of the state. That is, although the state is ready to help women to alleviate the burden of motherhood, it is only amenable to doing so if women

fulfill the role that corresponds to the state needs. Women's occupations were often the focus of the discussions in *Rodologia* forums. Changing occupations, the lack of jobs, and so on were all preoccupations for the participants in the seminars that I attended. The language of *Rodologia*, for instance, helped Natasha to reconcile her uneasiness with her new role as a housewife. She became a housewife partly out of necessity (she was fired) and partly voluntarily (I could afford it). Using her own familial history and the legacy of the Soviet history, she found a way to justify normative reactions to her new role. She found a way to reconcile the objectified ideal with the subjective experience.

Finally, the therapeutic language, it seems from my ethnography, defines the relationships between the self and the state. As in the case of Nastya, who found it hard both to forgive the state for the havoc it caused in the 1990s and to identify herself as being somehow responsible for this havoc, the language of therapy serves as a tool in the process of the transformations of ideas about culpability and obligation. As her story demonstrates, psychological expertise is deemed to be something that can help create responsible and self-reliable subjects of the new state.

Psychological expertise is not simply an extremely popular form of knowledge in contemporary Russia. As this chapter demonstrates, it has actual institutional bearings that turn the therapeutic language into the tool of governance (Rose 1996). At the same time, it also produces unexpected effects, making it a powerful language through which people in Russia articulate and try to reconfigure the relationship between the dominant discourses about normative relationships with others and the actual relationships with others as they are experienced in their day-to-day lives.

CONCLUSION

In Russia, “the demographic crisis” is on everyone’s minds. Even as the government continues to report on the growing birthrate following the introduction of the new pronatalist policy, other state agencies warn the public that the next population decline is imminent as a smaller cohort born during the first decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union enters its reproductive period. Such fluctuations constitute an integral part of the demographic history of the Soviet Union and Russia over the last hundred years. How, then, did these fluctuations gain prominence and become a pressing national concern dramatically represented as “the Russian Cross” and as heralding the potential death of the nation? What in contemporary Russian society created the environment for the production of the problem of population as such a pressing issue? How do these concerns gain legitimacy and generate such widespread fears about the threat of depopulation? How did it affect the ways people think about themselves and others?

In the preceding pages I have attempted to address these questions by reconstructing the scientific, political, cultural, and social contexts in which the population debate emerged. To reveal the complexity of the discourse on population and to show ideas and categories that it produces, my study connected processes occurring in social sciences (demography), politics (bureaucracy), and popular culture (popular psychology). It demonstrated how knowledge produced in the population debate creates cultural categories that inform the ways people think about themselves and their society.

The debate, I suggested, offers Russian citizens a means to think about their social worlds and to orient themselves within them. Furthermore, by creating the intellectual map of the population debate and by showing what stakes different social actors have therein, this debate has demonstrated how people in Russia often relate to new political and social realities using their common socialist experiences. Thus, it showed how different communities of experts utilize their historical trajectories of their professions in order to gain material and symbolic resources in the current political conditions. The population debate is saturated with ideas about belonging to both Soviet and post-Soviet states and the preceding pages have shown how people in Russia use knowledge produced in the population discourse in order to rearticulate their socialist past.

My discussion has taken us to three communities of experts taking part in the debate. As the study demonstrated, overlapping sets of experts – social scientists involved in the processes of the production and circulation of knowledge about population, biomedical professionals in the field of reproductive health, and psychologists concerned with the therapeutic aspects of the problem – participate in the production of social and cultural meanings of the population problem, offering citizens a means to comprehend their social worlds and to relate to themselves and others. I showed how through the knowledge and practices of these experts as well as through the professional and political goals that they pursue, the problem of low fertility and family values has become the central concern circumscribing the population debate. Framing the population problem as the problem of moral values and family disintegration makes it nearly impossible to conceive of the problem in different terms. Making moral issues the only legitimate object of discussion precludes the debate from being framed as the problem of inequality

and redistribution of wealth. Thus, as the preceding chapters demonstrated, family, intergenerational succession, and morality constitute the parameters that circumscribe the population debate through an interactive process in which social scientists, psychologists, government officials, and biomedical professionals take part.

The conflation of the problem of underpopulation with individual morality is part of a larger social phenomenon in contemporary Russia in which moral values are often used to comment on and even determine social problems and political structures. The recent Pussy Riot show-trial is a case in point. Throughout the trial itself, it seemed as if the prosecution could not clearly delineate the boundaries between two different concepts – the rule of law on the one hand and the moral underpinnings of society (*npravstvennie osnovi obshestva*) that the band allegedly disturbed on the other. The social moral underpinnings, as this dissertation demonstrated, became the common foundation that links different forms of knowledge expertise produced around the population problem. Morality has also become an effective means for communicating state ideas about population interventions.

Following knowledge produced in this debate further, the preceding pages demonstrated how citizens appropriate the discourse of the population crisis in order to negotiate contradictions between normative discourses about appropriate demographic and reproductive behavior and their actual experiences of specific relations with kin. As the therapeutic language makes its way to the population debate contributing to the exclusion of other issues outside of family and moral values, the same therapeutic language serves Russian citizens as they make efforts to contest and negotiate the normative social meanings of the crisis of underpopulation. Borrowing concepts from

psychology and introducing them to the population debate creates new categories that provide means to speak about these contradictions. Two examples that this study focused on are that of *dukhovnost*’ and *blagopoluchnaia semia* – both are constructed as a semantic amalgam of concepts traditionally used in the debate such as morality and values and new concepts borrowed from the thriving in Russia self-help culture such as happiness, self-reliance, and self-regulation. Both concepts create a communicative link, which renders the ideas about the moral foundations of the population problems so widespread and dominant.

Finally, a central topic of this study was the question of the cultural construction of the new Russian state. The preceding pages demonstrated cultural practices and complex networks of interactions and links that constitute the state as a source of authority and normative ideologies. By representing the state as having a special capacity to alter demographic trends and to affect the reproductive behaviors of its citizens, social actors contributing to the population debate constitute the new Russian state as an ultimate yet unstable source of power. What this study revealed is that in postsocialist politics, the representation of the state as an independent entity is not simply a theoretical bias but a social strategy that social actors utilize in order to gain symbolic and material resources and in order to manage their reputation.

While literature on population politics in postsocialist societies often remains at the level of the analysis of ideological tactics that make population concerns a legitimate state priority, my study also showed the cultural practices and stakes through which population concerns gain legitimacy among the country’s inhabitants and get incorporated into people’s narratives of themselves and others. One of my central

concerns was to situate the current population debate within its proper historical context. Revealing ruptures and continuities with the socialist past, my work demonstrated how the current population debate bears the legacy of the both political and demographic history of the Soviet Union. It showed how, in the context of Russia's changing political circumstances, population experts use this legacy in their interactions with the state in order to valorize their expertise and to gain resources, both material and symbolic. Demographers do this by exploiting their complex relations with the Soviet state by virtue of having an exclusive access to and ability to interpret confidential data (and thus being a potential threat to the state), while biomedical professionals participate in the struggle for recognition by using their Soviet legacy as *de facto* experts on population. Psychologists, as an emerging professional community, cannot compete with more traditional forms of expertise and therefore use different tactics to achieve status and legitimacy. Thus, the founder of *Rodologia*, lacking similar status and connections, chose to communicate with the state agencies through different channels and founded her own non-profit foundation, thus enacting an entirely different set of relations with the state. The concept of generational succession that *Rodologia* both consciously and inadvertently promotes fits the dominant pronatalist discourse that at its core is interested in descent more than in anything else.

While Chapter I focused on the changes and continuities in the ways the problem of population has been conceived and framed in the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, Chapters II and III were concerned with the theoretical questions of expertise in the research-policy nexus and the practices through which knowledge produced by social actors is defined as “policy expert knowledge.” It showed that demographers at the social

research institute employ a variety of tactics through which they manage their reputations as experts. Managing their reputation involves various styles of boundary-work through which social scientists gain access to resources and produce knowledge in the research-policy nexus. This boundary-work, in turn, produces a demand for a new social type that I called “scientific brokers,” through which networks between political and scientific worlds are established and maintained. In the context of the profound transformations in the state-science relationships over the last twenty years, this new social type became an important actor in the production and circulation of scientific knowledge.

Chapter III also considered the question of the circulation of policy-relevant knowledge as it analyzed the interactions between demographers and bureaucrats in a variety of social and political contexts. It argued that it is in this interactive process that the problem of underpopulation is constructed as one of low fertility and family and moral values. It showed the circular nature of this discourse, into which bureaucrats get socialized through their interactions with social scientists. Bureaucrats then present these ideas as the only possible way to conceive the problem of underpopulation and critique social scientists for thinking otherwise. By providing bureaucrats with a set of assumptions with which to read social and demographic reality, some social scientists contribute to the ideological misrecognition that excludes other possible ways to speak about demographic reality.

Chapter IV focused on the community of OB/GYN professionals who take an active role in the population debate. In response to the transformations in state support to medical institutions, these biomedical professionals borrow concepts such as family values, culture change, and happiness and infuse them with biomedical ways of thinking.

They do so in order to reestablish their status as important experts in matters of population. This chapter focused on the theoretical questions of the medicalization of the population debate, showing how different political, economic, and social forces work together in order to instill the concepts of population and reproduction with a biomedical significance. It was also concerned with the theoretical conceptualizations of “culture” as it gets embedded in and shapes the concept of population in the biomedical debates about the crisis.

The last two chapters were concerned with the growing popularity of the therapeutic discourse and its role in the population debate. As I argued in these chapters, the therapeutic discourse effectively reinforces the basis for communicating ideas about morality and the problem of population. In the popular representations of the problem of underpopulation, it is often described as a deeply psychological problem. The major premise of the psychological framing of the problem is that only if people became psychologically healthy will the problem of low fertility (and high mortality) be solved and the population problem be overcome. To illustrate this widespread framing of the problem, the last two chapters of the dissertation focused on a particular form of a self-help enterprise that combines ideas borrowed both from popular psychology (e.g., self-reliance, and the pursuit of happiness) and from popular genealogy (i.e., creating family trees and recording familial histories). It is its focus on genealogy that made *Rodologia* and its founders particularly important figures in the population debate. Because the population debate is accompanied by alarmist concerns about depopulation, it is characterized by pronatalist ideology and desire for descendents. It is the fear of not having descendents that animates the debate. Therefore, *Rodologia* with its explicit focus

on succession not only fits the discourse about underpopulation but also feeds and fuels its focus on family values as the object of state intervention.

While Chapter V situated *Rodologia* within a broader field of popular psychology flourishing in Russia, Chapter VI focused on the institutionalization of the therapeutic discourse as an important component of the population debate. It showed both Soviet institutional settings of family clubs and newly emerged settings of non-profit social foundations through which the language of popular psychology is validated as an educational tool in the state's attempts to overcome the problem of underpopulation. This chapter demonstrated that the power of therapeutic language does not emanate from the state dominant discourses about population but makes its way to the center of the population debate through its focus on generational succession. It also showed how by using the very same therapeutic language people contest dominant normative expectations by articulating the contradictions between them and what they experience as kin and family relations in their everyday lives. Finally, it demonstrated that the therapeutic language also offers them an opportunity to articulate their relationship with state using the idioms of genealogy and kinship.

This study considered the everyday politics of the production and circulation of population-related knowledge in the context of postsocialist transformations. It showed how population politics mold the formation of the new and shape the continuity of the old in postsocialist Russia. It mapped the debate and demonstrated how the everyday practices of knowledge experts create possibilities for political arrangements and power mechanisms. Finally, I have attempted to show how the population debate in contemporary Russia through its categories and ideas provides Russian citizens with

means for self-understanding and for defining their relations with others and with their state.

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