Starting a Family at Your Parent's House: Multigenerational Households and Below Replacement Fertility in Bulgaria

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Abstract

In societies with strong multigenerational links, economic uncertainty results in choosing to stay with one child, sometimes in association with postponement of fort births (i.e. Italy) and sometimes in early childbearing (i.e. Bulgaria). Accounting for differences in these timing outcomes means better understanding the interaction between intergenerational family practices in lowest-low fertility contexts? In this paper, we focus in on the phenomenon of women who have one child in their early twenties and then choose not to have a second child. We argue that the key to this process is the persistence of extended multigenerational households in the Bulgarian context and their effect on young couples' fertility decision making. We use semistructured interview data from the project *Fertility Choices in Central and Eastern Europe* and ethnographic fieldnotes. The interviews were collected from a sample of 22 couples resident in Sofia and representing different permutations of educational level, marital status and number of children (0 or 1). The four-year ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in both rural and urban Bulgaria between 1997 and 2009. Results suggest that as long as the economic situation remains dire, and young Bulgarians hopes for the future remain cynical, multigenerational households seems to represent the accepted practice of entering into parenthood for young Bulgarian families.

Introduction

Although the nuclear family has always been a social ideal for young Bulgarians (Todorova 1996), it is an ideal which has been imported from Western Europe (Todorova 2000; Merdjanska and Panova 1995), the result of the strong influence of developmental idealism (Thornton 2001). These Western family forms are often in conflict with the traditional prevalence of extended households. Although scholars recognize that multigenerational households are still quite common in the rural areas of Bulgaria (Todorova 2000), we expected that urban households would be less traditional and composed of smaller, independent units, with young couples living apart from their parents and siblings. Our research, however, has found the continued persistence of multigenerational extended family units among couples between the ages of 20-33 in the capital of Sofia as late as 2004-2005.

Many young couples, whether married or cohabiting, will live for a period of time in the household of one of their parents (usually the parents of the male partner) at the beginning of their union (Pamporov 2008), the remnants of a longstanding patrilocal tradition whereby an engaged woman moves into the household of her future mother and father-in-law before the wedding (Kaser 1996). In rural areas, the newlywed couple would then move into a flat built one floor above the parents' residence or move into an adjoining or adjacent house or apartment. In the larger cities, however, cohabitation with parents usually entails living in one room of a shared apartment due to lack of space and lack of resources. During this period of cohabitation, both the parents and the young couple are saving funds in order to purchase an independent dwelling for the new family.

Very often, however, it is during this period of multigenerational cohabitation that a first child is born. There is a strong social expectation in Bulgaria that grandparents (and grandmothers in particular) will be heavily involved in the care and upbringing of their grandchildren (Botcheva and Feldman 2004; Todorova 2000). Because there are few alternatives, young women rely heavily on their mothers-in-law (or mothers) to help with childcare during the first six or seven years of the child's life, and this usually extends the period of necessary

cohabitation with parents. Independence from parents ideally occurs after the child is old enough to go to school, and it is hoped that by this time the parents and the couple will have the resources to purchase a separate apartment. In Ukraine, Brienna Perelli-Harris (2005) found that while economic uncertainty and unemployment do not affect the decision to have a first child, these factors are taken into account when making the decision to have a second. In Bulgaria, the birth of a second child will inevitable delay the ability of the young couple to move out of a parental household for both financial and childcare related issues. Many couples therefore prefer to delay the birth of a second child until there are able to move out into their own dwelling. The unstable economic situation in Bulgaria since the early 1990s, however, has made it very difficult for young couples to live independently. The decision to have a second child will very likely require a renewed dependence on the grandmothers, and perhaps require some new form of multigenerational co-habitation where the mother-in-law moves into the independent apartment of the young couple. Although 71.8% of Bulgarians believe that a person should have two children (Alpha Research 2006), fewer and fewer Bulgarians can attain this ideal goal. With their first child already well into its school years, many couples will forgo the second child in order to maintain independence from their parents and achieve the Western social ideal of the autonomous nuclear family model.

The research for this paper is derived from over four years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in both rural and urban Bulgaria between 1997 and 2009 by Dr. Kristen Ghodsee. Additionally, the findings are derived from interviews conducted under the auspices of an international research team headed by Dr. Laura Bernardi at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany. The research project, "Fertility Choices in Central and Eastern Europe," endeavored to make a qualitative examination of the fertility consequences of the social, political and economic transitions that followed the collapse of communism in 1989. In the Bulgarian case, interview respondents were chosen from a sample of the Gender and Generations Panel Survey (GGS), a project of the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations' Economic Commission of Europe. From these data, a stratified subsample of Sofia residents was chosen, and interviews were carried out with 22 GGS respondents, 18 of their partners and three of their mothers, for a total of 43 in-depth interviews. During the interview process, it became apparent that staring a family in the household of your parents was considered a normal situation for most young Bulgarians, and that the persistence of these extended household arrangements may have important implications for understanding the unique characteristics of Bulgaria's below replacement fertility.

Bulgaria in the European Context

The Bulgarian experience with low fertility rates is part of a wider European trend (Dimitrova 2008). The United Nations Population Division (2000) estimates significant declines in populations for most of the European Union countries. For the EU as a whole, the UN projected that the population would begin decreasing in 2005, and that the Union stood to lose between 40 and 45 million people. This loss would be equivalent to the combined 2000 population of the EU's seven smallest members (Austria, Finland, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden and Portugal). Eurostat (1999) more optimistically estimated that the overall population of the EU15 would not begin to decline until 2026, due to higher projected birth rates in some member states. Even so, the losses for individual EU countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece are worrying trends. The UN predicts that these countries will lose 28 percent, 24 percent and 23 percent of their populations respectively by 2050 (UN 2000). The total fertility ratio for the EU15 stood at 1.5 children per woman in the period 1990-1995 – well below replacement level, although this number hid significant variations among member states. After the accession of the Eastern European countries in 2004, the EU25 had the same TFR of 1.5 (Eurostat 2005), meaning that the new member states had not contributed to increased fertility rates.

Although demographers have been grappling with questions of below replacement fertility in Europe since the 1980s, it is fairly recently that ethnographers have turned their attention to these debates, trying to understand the underlying cultural processes that inform family formation in the post-modern context. In a recent edited collection of critical essays on

"Barren States" (Douglass 2005), cultural anthropologists and ethnographers have tried to come to grips with the social factors underlying this "second demographic transition" which first appeared in Europe (Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa 1986; van de Kaa 1987). In this edited volume, the authors explore the phenomenon of below replacement fertility from the bottom-up, examining the discourses and small histories of ordinary citizens. The editors argue that: "If in postmodernity, rational control of fertility means fewer children than needed for population replacement are produced, it behooves us to look at the society these women live in, to look at the meaning of children, and to look at exactly what is being reproduced and replaced, in order to understand this phenomenon" (Douglass 2005: 3). These cultural analyses have yielded rich results. In Spain, Germany, Norway, France, and Ireland, for instance, contributors found fascinating cultural dynamics at play as a sort of hyper individualism takes hold of young Western European men and women who want to develop and educate their own selves before embarking on the precarious seas of parenthood. In Italy (Krause 2005), the culture of middle class motherhood is so demanding that the high social expectations of what women *should* provide for their children are a powerful incentive to limit fertility to only one child. In Greece, although motherhood is required to "complete a woman," Heather Paxson (2005) finds that urban Athenians prefer to meet this locally defined construction of appropriate femininity by having only one child.

Similar to the Greek case, there is little social acceptance of voluntary childlessness for women, and most Bulgarian women have at least one child. However, unlike the situation in many Western European countries the preponderance of the single child model is not due to the fertility postponement that results from the increased individualism and value changes that underpin the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe 1995; van de Kaa 2001). Whereas young Western Europeans focus on education and self-actualization throughout their twenties and wait to start families in their 30s, we have found the obverse of this pattern in Bulgaria. In countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain, young people will continue to live with their parents through their twenties, postponing adulthood while they work, travel, study, and otherwise build up the necessary social, economic, and cultural capital that will be needed to thrive in their respective societies. Only once the intellectual and material means are available do these young people branch out on their own. In the Bulgarian context many young people will also continue to live with their parents throughout their twenties, but instead of postponing serious relationships and childbearing, they combine first marriage/cohabitation and parenthood with education and early career formation by relying heavily on their own parents for financial and logistical support. Material independence is an ideal that is also to be achieved the 30s, but in the Bulgarian case this independence is imagined more achievable not because fertility has been postponed, but because the most difficult years of parenting are already in the past.

The Bulgarian family in historical perspective

This unique view of the appropriate timing of life events is deeply rooted in the historically patrivirilocal family tradition in Bulgaria and its persistence throughout the 45-year communist era up through the present day (Spasovska 2000). Although there are ongoing debates about the predominance of the extended family model in Bulgarian history and some scholars have argued for the recognition of early neolocal nuclear families where newly-weds establish their own households (Todorova 1993), Bulgaria is typically associated with the patrivirilocal family where a young married couple lives in one household with the parents of the groom, the married brothers of the groom and the groom's unmarried siblings (De Vos and Sandefur 2002). Although inheritance was partible, it was only to be distributed to sons, as it was assumed that daughters would join the patrilocal households of their eventual husbands. Although Bulgarians tried to introduce French and Italian family law after their liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, the new family codes were often in stark contradiction to existing Bulgarian custom, and were generally ignored (Todorova 2000). Therefore, as early as the nineteenth century Bulgarian politicians tried to introduce "modern" Western family norms, only to find their efforts rebuffed by the persistence of local traditions.

In particular, the convention of the multigenerational extended family in Bulgaria was difficult to challenge (Spasovka 2000). When a couple got engaged, the young woman would move to the residence of her partner's parents and live with them until the time of the official marriage. Once married, the parents of the young groom would provide the couple with an independent dwelling, usually in an adjacent or adjoining residence to the husband's parents' household. In rural areas of Bulgaria, the parents would often build an addition floor onto the family dwelling for each of their sons so that a typical rural household might consist of grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, siblings and cousins all in one multi-storey dwelling. The new wife became a member of her husband's extended family, referring to her new in-laws as mother (*maiko*) and father (*tatko*).

Conversely, her mother-in-law had customary obligations to look after any grandchildren produced by this union, freeing the mother up for other agricultural or household responsibilities. In return for this grandmother (*baba*) service, the young couple (and particularly the young daughter-in-law) were traditionally expected to look after the husband's parents in their old age. Parents therefore expected their sons' wives to provide elder care and expected that their own daughters would have to look after the parents of their husbands. In some cases, however, where the bride had no brothers or where the parents of the bride were economically much better off, the young groom would be expected to live with the parents of his wife, a situation which was never considered ideal for the man.

Resisting the Balkan stereotype, the demographic historian Maria Todorova (1993) has argued that there were also many circumstances wherein young Bulgarian couples moved to their own independent dwellings after marriage and formed European-style nuclear families, although she also admits that the historiographic sources examining the Bulgarian family are sparse. The legal scholar, Velina Todorova (2000), also argues that nuclear families were more prevalent in the urban areas where European values and ideals held more sway, although she attests to the persistence of extended families throughout the rural areas of Bulgaria. Whatever the historical truth of the traditional Bulgarian family form, many Bulgarians believe today that the multigenerational household is a fundamental part of their cultural heritage, and more importantly, as a key strategy for surviving times of economic uncertainly (Botcheva and Feldman 2004; Barova 2008; Ahmed and Emigh 2004). During the fieldwork and the interviews conducted for the present study, even urban Bulgarians living in the capital city of Sofia viewed extended co-residence with parents as an accepted norm for young families in their early twenties.

These traditional family patterns were reinforced during the communist era: from 1946 to 1989. Communist housing policy before 1989 gave preference to co-residential arrangements. The chances of acquiring a private dwelling were increased if three generations shared one household: the grandparents, their adult married children and their grandchildren. The 1978 Bulgarian Ordinance on the Sale of Housing Facilities encouraged the cohabitation of parents and their adult children by giving preference to multigenerational households (Ibid. 2000). According to Article 11(5) of the ordinance, "The children who have reached the majority shall be taken into account (as members of the family) if they live with their parents and sign a declaration that they accept not to be included in the list of the citizens in need for five years after the acquisition by their parent of their home" (cited in Todorova 2000: 165). Thus, adult children who agreed to cohabit with their parents for the purposes of securing a larger apartment were subsequently precluded from having their own apartment for a minimum of five years.

In our interviews in Sofia in 2004 and 2005, we also found that the communists made it very difficult for young families to move out on their own. One 57-year-old mother of a GGS respondent explained that she lived for 17 years with her parents and raised her two children in their household. The woman, who we call Evdokia,[1] explained that there was a five year and three month difference between her two children because her husband felt that their living space was too small and was reluctant to have a second child. Even after the second child, they continued to cohabit with her parents and relentlessly petitioned the communist government for their own apartment to no avail. After waiting many years to be put on the lists for an apartment, Evdokia and her husband finally agreed to pay a 600 *leva* bribe to the local communist officials in order to have a home of their own. Her two sons were almost fully-grown when she finally had an independent flat. Soon after the death of her mother, however, her father came to live with her

in this new flat and she found herself "cooking for four men": her father, her husband and her two sons. At the time of the interview in 2005, both her father and husband had passed away, but Evdokia was now cohabiting with one of her grown sons, his wife and their newborn baby. Thus, for almost her entire life, she lived in a traditional Bulgarian multigenerational household even while she was fully engaged in the modern socialist economy as a full time employee and agronomist.

In fact, Bulgarian women like Evdokia had long been incorporated into the formal labor force. Despite the many drawbacks of the communist era there were many benefits for women who were trying to combine career and family. In 1989, on the eve of the communist collapse, 84.7 % of women were employed as waged workers outside of the home (Ghodsee 2004). These women benefited from a variety of social policies designed to ease their dual responsibilities of productive and reproductive work. Under communism, they were guaranteed maternity leave, which began 45 days before delivery with the possibility of continuing until the child reached the age of three. For a woman's first three children, this leave was fully paid by the state until the child was two and the woman's job was held through the whole duration of her absence. Employers could not refuse to grant this leave if it was requested, and the leave was recognized as labor service to the state and counted toward her pension. In addition to the paid maternity leave, new parents also received monthly child allowances until a child was 16 (or 18 if the child was still in school), the amount of which was adjusted to encourage the birth of second and third children.

Rather than taking all of the leave herself, the woman could also grant permission to the father or to his or her parents to take any unused portion of her maternity leave. It was through this mechanism that many grandmothers took labor leaves in order to look after their grandchildren, allowing their daughters-in-law to return to work. If for some reason the grandmothers were not available, however, the communists provided other options. Heavily subsidized childcare facilities were guaranteed to working women by the state (Staikova-Alexandrova 1992, Meurs and Giddings 2006). In some cases, particularly in the rural areas, there were weekly kindergartens where mothers dropped off their children on Monday morning and did not pick them up until Friday afternoon. For teenage children attending secondary school, many small cities had dormitories where the children also spent the week, only returning to their mothers for the weekend. Individual enterprises often had onsite crèches and kindergartens, so that women could bring their children to work. Although many felt that the state-provided childcare facilities were substandard and preferred to rely on their mothers and mothers-in-law, the facilities were both available and affordable to all women.

After the economic changes in 1989, the once extensive state system of kindergartens and maternity supports imploded. In 1980, there were 1,151 public crèches (called *detski yasli* in Bulgarian) offering 77,369 places for children under the age of three. By 2003, there were only 637 crèches offering 21,542 places, a 45 percent decrease in the number of facilities (Mihova 2007: 225). For kindergartens (called *detski gradini*), there were 6,185 public facilities offering 420,804 places for children between 3 and 6-years-old in 1980, and only 3,278 facilities offering 201,145 in 2003, a 47 percent decrease. As the public facilities closed across the country, there were not replaced by private kindergartens. By 1997, there were only 14 private facilities offering 235 places. In 2004, this number had only risen to 26, offering places for 708 children (Ibid. 2007: 226). Indeed, the dire lack of urban crèches and kindergartens has been a longstanding complaint of many women in Bulgaria after 1989, and was the subject of occasional popular protests in Sofia and Varna. On the other hand, Meurs and Giddings (2006) have found that high unemployment among women particularly in rural areas had led to a severe decrease in demand for facilities and falling enrollments as women rely more heavily on family members for care.

Indeed, after what Bulgarians refer to as "the Changes" in 1989, the childcare provided by grandmothers became more important than ever before as young women struggled to remain competitive in newly formed labor markets. Ironically, this newfound dependence on mothers and mothers-in-law coincided with the abolition of housing ordinances (Tsenkova 1996). Bulgarians were now free to buy and sell property at will and to move anywhere they wanted throughout the country, theoretically increasing the opportunities for the formation of neolocal nuclear families. These newfound freedoms, however, were combined with newfound economic

hardships in a period of social and political uncertainty. Although the introduction of free markets and liberal democracy should have theoretically ushered in a new era of individualism, the chaos of the transition period rendered the institution of the extended family more important than ever (Botcheva and Feldman 2004, Barova 2008, Ahmed and Emigh 2004). In the face of banking collapses, hyperinflation and rampant unemployment, grandparents' homes and vegetable gardens provided a much need bulwark against the uncertainties of the new capitalist economy (Creed 1997).

Accurate statistics on present levels of multigenerational co-residence in Bulgaria are difficult to find. On the one hand, the data may overestimate the amount of cohabitation bcause all Bulgarians are required to be registered at a certain address on their personal identity card (*lichna carta*). Adult children will often continued to be registered at their parents' home long after they have moved away to the city or started their own household. On the other hand, census figures may vastly underestimate intergenerational cohabitation because they do not account for proximity. Furthermore, there is the problem of how to classify the nuclear family. A married couple living with primary school age children would be considered a nuclear family, but what about a married couple living with their 30-year-old daughter and 26-year-old son? The latter case would be a case of multigenerational cohabitation which might show up as a nuclear family in the data.

Velina Todorova (2000) claims that extended households account for 17 percent of all Bulgarian households, but this figure may be misleading because it probably does not include adult married children who are living in an apartment just above, adjacent to or adjoining that of their parents or for parents living with their adult children. A 2004 study of household composition in five Eastern European countries (Ahmed and Emigh 2004) based on survey data collected from a national representative sample of the population found that 37 percent of Bulgarian households were vertically extended, a higher percentage than that in Romania, Poland, Hungary or Russia. In their study of elderly living arrangements in Bulgaria, De Vos and Sandefur (2002) found that 42 percent of unmarried (single, divorced or widowed) 65-year-old individuals lived with their adult children and that a full 24 percent of married 65-year-olds shared a household with an adult child in 1992. The figures for older women were even more striking. In the early 1990s, only 49 percent of single, widowed, or divorced women over 65 lived alone in private households, meaning that 51 percent of this population cohabited with their adult children. Given the "graying" of the Bulgarin population (the UN projects that 30 percent of the population will be over 65 by 2050) and the lack of institutional elder care possibilities, it is reasonable to assume that intergeneration cohabitation further increased throughout the tumultuous decade of the 1990s, as once generous social safety nets were dismantled and both child and elder care was devolved onto the shoulders of individual Bulgarian women.

In Ghodsee's extensive fieldwork in both rural and urban Bulgaria, she found many examples of intergenerational cohabitation even among the most educated and Western-oriented populations in Bulgaria. In the Smolyan oblast, in the south central Rhodope mountain region, new parents would start saving after the birth of each son in order to build an additional floor onto their house where the boy and his future family were expected to live. In urban areas, parents usually tried to purchase apartments for their children as close to their own apartment as possible. Urban parents also saved an additional sum of money to help with the purchase of an apartment for their daughters as well. During this period of saving resources for the purchase of a new home, it is considered wasteful for the young couple to pay rent for their own independent lodgings when this rent could be put toward their own mortgage. Instead, the young couple would have their own room, but shared the kitchen, bathroom and common living areas with the male's parents and often his younger siblings (although in a few cases it might be the woman's parents). Furthermore, once an apartment was purchased, it often needed extensive renovations before it was ready for the new family. During this period of *remont*, adult children would also continue to reside in the parental home.

Although most of the urban young are well aware of the Western norm to live separately from your parents, they often accept the traditional Bulgarian tendency toward cohabitation out of financial and logistical necessity. During the 1990s, the economic chaos introduced a whole new set of incentives to continue cohabitation with one's parents or in-laws. In Sofia, the crisis was

particularly acute and even those couples who owned their apartments outright found themselves short of funds to pay for the basic utility bills. In the winter months, just the bill for central heating (referred to as *parno*) often exceeded a family's monthly wages. Even if you turned your own radiators off, the now private central heating company would still charge you for the ambient heat you received from the apartments around your own. In the late 1998 and 1999, Ghodsee met several young couples that had been living independently, but had decided to return to their parents' home because neither they nor their parents could afford their heating bills. The young couple's apartment was put up for rent, and the money generated from the rent payments was used to heat the parental dwelling where they all lived together.

Concomitant with all of these events was a massive out migration of young, educated Bulgarians hoping to seek better fortunes in the West (Stoilkova 2005). Those who stayed behind faced unemployment and economic instability. Private companies could not create enough jobs to replace the public sector jobs that were being slashed by the austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Ghodsee 2005). More women limited their families to just one child. But rather than delaying childbearing until one could attained personal material security, young women continued to begin their families at a relatively early age by having the first (and often their only child) while living in a multigenerational household. It was this unique family dynamic that we hoped to understand through a series of in-depth interviews with a small sample of young Sofia residents in 2004 and 2005.

Methodology

Dr. Laura Bernardi and her international research team began their investigation of fertility choices in Eastern Europe in 2004, with the explicit goal of studying the culture of reproduction rather than merely analyzing macro level quantitative data about fertility trends in the three focus countries of their study. Focusing narrowly on a small sample population inevitably limits the generalizability of the research findings, but it allows for a much more detailed understanding of individual motivations with regard to family formation and fertility decision making. Although the larger project included Poland and Hungary, this paper focuses specifically on Bulgaria. Because the country is a relatively unique case within the European context, it seemed especially important to explore the cultural meanings of parenthood and family relations at the micro level through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The Gender and Generations Panel Survey (GGS) included a national representative sample of 12,886 Bulgarians between the ages of 18 and 79. Because it was assumed that demographic changes would be most pronounced among residents in the capital city of Sofia, our interview sample was chosen from among the 2,012 individuals in the GGS survey who were born in Sofia or who had moved to Sofia before the age of 15. A post-doctoral researcher at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences was then employed to create a stratified sub-sample of these individuals based on three core criteria.

The first criterion was the number of children born to the women in the sample and their median age. We were only interested in interviewing childless women and women who only had one child. The childless women were chosen based on the median age for having a first child in Bulgaria, and the one-child women were chosen based on the median age for having the second child. Since our main goal was to understand why individuals and couples postponed having children, we chose the median age of women in these two categories because this meant that approximately 50 percent of the women at the same age had already had their first or second child.

Once these women were selected from the sample, they were further sorted according to marital status. There were three categories: married, cohabiting and Living Apart Together (LAT). Empirical research in social demography has identified LAT relationships as those between men and women reporting a stable relationship, but maintaining independent households (Villeneuve-Gokalp 1997, Levin 2004, Haskey 2006). Sofia-based couples with no children and couples with only one child were then sorted into these categories. A final criterion was that of educational level. Since many city residents have relatively high levels of education, this

category consisted of only two levels: high education (university education and above) and low education (primary and secondary school).

After all of the Sofia couples were sorted using these categories there were 157 couples left. Of these, there were 27 childless cohabiting couples, 22 childless married couples, 7 cohabiting couples with one child and 101 married couples with one child. Finally, there were 155 individuals that claimed that they were in long-term, committed relationships with a partner with whom they did not reside, and it was from this sample that the LAT couples were drawn. The final interview sample consisted of 22 couples representing different permutations of educational level, marital status and number of children (0 or 1).

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were then conducted with 22 of the original GGS respondents, 18 of their partners and 3 of their mothers. These interviews were conducted by Alexey Pamporov, a Bulgarian postdoctoral researcher based in Sofia, using a open-ended interview protocol which focused on five key areas: 1) family background and memories of childhood, 2) the history of the respondents' past romantic relationship and the background of the present union, 3) the decision making process surrounding fertility intentions and expectations/experiences of parenthood, 4) opinions about raising children before 1989 compared to the present day, and 5) hopes, fears and expectations for the future. Each of these interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, loosely following the protocol to allow for the individual respondents to take control of the conversation and speak more expansively on topics that were of more interest to them. The 43 interviews were digitally recorded and 30 of them were subsequently transcribed in Bulgarian. We then analyzed the audio recordings and transcriptions of these 43 interviews with an eye to understanding the dynamics of fertility postponement among urban Bulgarians in the first decade of the 21st century.

Multigenerational Cohabitation

During the process of reading through the interview transcriptions and listening to the audio files, we were both surprised to find the prevalence of multigenerational co-residence among these urban households whether the couples were married, cohabiting or living apart together (LAT) and regardless of their educational level. Of the 22 couples interviewed, there were three married couples, four cohabiting couples and six LAT couples cohabiting with their parents. In the married and cohabiting cases, all of the couples but one lived with the parents of the male partner. For the LAT couples, the two partners individually lived at their respective parents' house. In addition to these 13 couples, there were two couples which lived very near to their parents' house, and two more couples that had just recently moved out of a multigenerational household. In our sample, there were only five truly independent households. In one case, however, the mother-in-law came to stay with the couple every day in order to provide childcare. In the remaining four cases, the all of the parents of the couples lived outside of Sofia (in one case outside of Bulgaria), and three of the four couples were childless.

Among the 6 LAT couples, individuals rarely lived only with their own parents, but were also part of extended and multigenerational households. One interesting case is that of Lyubomir (age 25) and Maria (age 24), a pair of University-educated high school sweethearts that had been together for nine years at the time of the interview. Maria had been raised in an intergenerational household with her mother, father and grandmother. Lyubomir lived in an apartment with his mother, his father, his older brother, his brother's wife and their child. It was the lack of space at Lyubomir's parent's home that prevented Lyubomir and Maria from cohabiting. To remedy this situation, his parents had recently bought him a small apartment near their own so that he and Maria could move in together. Interestingly, there was no mention of his brother's family moving into the new apartment even though they were already married and had a child.

A second case was that of Vassilka, a 28-year-old divorcee with a secondary education. She had been married and had a child with her ex-husband, briefly living with him in his independent apartment. They had separated for several months, and during this time she moved in to his parents' house with her child. Shortly thereafter, she reconciled with her husband and moved back into his apartment. In the end, her husband fell in love with another woman and kicked Vassilka and the child out of his home. At the time of the interview, Vassilka was living

with her mother, her invalid grandmother, her sister, her sister's child and her own child – a four generational household. She is now in a new LAT relationship, and her new partner briefly came to live with her at her mother's house, but there was not enough space so he moved back to his own parents' house.

The ubiquity of these multigenerational households was relatively surprising in the urban context. What was more striking, however, was that the Bulgarian researcher conducting the interviews evinced no surprise at the prevalence of these living arrangements. There was no discussion of whether or not it was appropriate for a young couple to start their family in a parental household. Even more interesting was that respondents were rarely asked when they thought they would be moving out, and it was clear in at least three cases that the multigenerational co-residence was considered a permanent arrangement. The very lack of discussion around the issue attested to the complete normalcy of the arrangement, particularly when the couple had recently become parents.

Childcare and the Importance of Grandmothers

It was the existence of small children in the household that seemed to at least partially necessitate the multigenerational cohabitation. Sikya Kovacheva (2008) qualitatively examined young Bulgarians transitions to adulthood, and also found similar patterns to the ones we found in our own interviews. In two of her three in-depth case studies, the young adults she followed depended heavily on their parents to help them with childcare responsibilities. In one case, a 29-year-old man, his wife, and two young children were forced to leave their rented apartment at move back into the household of his wife's parents because they could not afford to pay rent and utilities on his salary. Kovacheva found that young men and women in Bulgaria delayed independence precisely because they needed their parents to survive in the new economic climate.

Most of the women with children in our study also said they relied heavily on their mothers-in-law (or mothers) for child care, and there were young children in six of the 11 households where married or cohabiting couples were living with or near one set of parents or where the couple had just recently moved out of the parental home at the time of the interview. One interesting case was that of Konstantin (age 30) and Elena (age 27), two university graduates who had been living together with Konstantin's widowed mother for four years at the time of the interview. Elena was pregnant with their first child and spoke kindly about her mother-in-law:

> She is cool, a very modern woman. She is a grandmother in principal, but she is not old. She is 54 or 57 years old… Although we live together we have not started to irritate each other or to have serious differences. But I am also a very patient person and I suppose she is very patient too.

Kostantin worried that Elena's new mothering responsibilities would make her feel isolated and could take a toll on their relationship. The support of his mother and her own mother was what he counted on to mitigate the stresses of new parenthood. "Thank God," Kostantin explained, "that we have two grannies that we can leave the child with. They will be very happy to help, and then we can have some time for ourselves as well."

A second case was that of Pavel (age 29) and Gergana (age 29), cohabiting university graduates. They lived in an apartment adjoining the apartment of Pavel's parents, and had been cohabiting for about a year. Gergana was now pregnant, and they were planning to get married in the near future. When asked about how Pavel's parents treated her, Gergana reflected:

> Well, they are very nice people. I am simply very lucky in all respects…[b]ecause they live in the apartment next to ours. Now, especially because I am pregnant, they bring food for me here, and his mother cooks me some special things. In general, her attitude [is good] and his father is very nice, and his brother, too.

Another example of the acceptability of these multigenerational households was that was that of Hana (age 24), a young married woman living with her in-laws and trying to get pregnant. When asked how she got along with her husband's parents she explained:

> We definitely get along well. Still there are always compromises from our side or from theirs, because it is not possible for four people who live in one place to get along perfectly. After all, we each have four different characters…but our relations are definitely good. Either we will compromise or they will compromise. In general, we find some balance between us and we get along.

A final case was that of Dimitar (age 34) and Desislava (age 29), two married secondary school graduates with one six-year-old son. They had a very traditional engagement where Dimitar's parents brought bread to Desislava's parents and officially asked permission for her to be engaged. Desislava then went to live with Dimitar and his parents for a year before their wedding. She was already four months pregnant when they had a church wedding, and they have been living together with his parents for about seven years as a married couple. Although the son now attends a kindergarten, Dimitar and Desislava have shared childcare responsibilities with his parents. Now that their son is about to start school, they are hoping to move out into an apartment of their own. Desislava's relations with her husband's parents were not nearly as rosy as Elena's, Hana's or Gergana's experience. When asked how she got along with her in-laws, Desislava discussed the challenges she faced living in a multigenerational household for so long.

> They are decent people. I cannot can that they are bad people, but there are things which I don't like. This is normal for a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. There are some insignificant things that annoy me… The overpopulation in our house annoys me. I am not too sociable, and I like to be alone. I don't like sharing a kitchen with someone who is always standing there and judging me… Those things annoy me.

In the five cases where the young couples did not have children, none of the reasons given had to do with the desire to postpone childbearing until the couple could have an apartment independent of their parents. In two cases, the couples were actively trying to have a baby, but there were fertility problems which prevented conception. In a third case, the couple had only been living together at his parents' house for a few months, and they were planning to start trying to have a baby after they had the chance to go together for just one holiday at the seaside. In a fourth case, the couple lived with the male partner's mother but they were not on speaking terms with her. There was a lot of tension in the household. Furthermore, since the interviews with the individuals were held separately, the male partner in this couple confided to the interviewer and he was not sure that his partner was the woman with whom he wanted to start a family. The final case was the university educated couple Petar (age 27) and Magdalena (age 30). Petar's parents lived outside of Sofia and so they cohabited in Magdalena's family home for three years before moving into their own place just six months before the interview. Magdalena explained:

> We were all living together then. We were living in a two-room apartment, let me tell you how many people were there. [Counting on her fingers] One, two, three, four, five, six, seven… Myself, [Petar], my grandmother… my mother, my brother, my sister-in-law, and their child. How many were we? Yes, seven people! And so it was like the Grandfather's Glove![2]

During the discussion of whether or not she wanted children, Magdalena reflected on the difficult conditions of her own childhood. Her mother was only 18 when she had Magdalena's brother and 22 when she had Magdalena. Their father had abandoned the family just after Magdalena's birth. Her brother was raised by her grandparents and Magdalena had gone to live in a weekly kindergarten where her mother worked as a teacher. She was raised in a dormitory and

claimed that her mother had a very difficult time raising a child on her own after she had been abandoned by the father:

> I grew up only with my mother. The two of us together… Our whole life was a struggle, for an apartment, for education, for clothes, for everything. She brought me up all alone. We are still alone to this day… We still take care of each other. We help each other.

At the time of the interview, Magdalena explained that both her mother and grandmother were now too sick with heart disease to help look after children, and that she did not have enough money to raise a child on her own. Because Petar's parents lived outside Sofia, they would have to bear the full responsibility for childcare without help from any grandparents. The lack of expected external support was a major factor in Magdalena's decision never to have children at all. In this case, it is the lack of parental support (rather than the wish for independence) that inhibits fertility.

The Necessity of Grandmothers

The expectation that grandparents would be the primary caregivers for younger children was rooted in the fact that many of the interviewees had themselves been raised by their own grandparents, a practice rooted in a long history in Bulgaria of mutual aid between immediate kin (Barova 2008). Indeed, Evdokia fondly remembered how her own parents had been primarily responsible for the raising of both her sons while she finished school during the communist era, and suggests that it was their availability that allowed her to have the second child.

> Concerning the [decision to have a] second child, he [her husband] was worried because we were still living at home with my parents… But [we had the second child] because we were living with my parents who were already retired, but still young and able. My dad would do the shopping, my mother would do the cooking and look after the child, while I was mostly the child's friend. I came home and just played with it.

Among the younger interviewees, Dimitar was raised by his grandmother and grandfather in their village until he was seven years old, only moving to live with his mother and father in Sofia when he started the first grade. Petar also spent his childhood living with his grandmother and grandfather in their village because his parents were laborers in the Kremikovtsi steel factory and worked long shifts. In the case of Krassen (age 35) and Dora (age 31), Krassen's parents had emigrated to Israel, and he had lived in an extended family household with his grandmother, his brother and his brother's wife until he married Dora and they moved into their own apartment in Sofia.

During her fieldwork in Bulgaria, Ghodsee found that women of all socio-economic classes sent their school-age children to spend the summer months with their grandparents in the village so they could continue to work in the city. Most Bulgarians have ties to their ancestral villages and maintain summer houses where they have small gardens for vegetables and herbs. The majority of permanent residents in these villages are retirees; there are always adults around to help look after children. One 30-year-old manicurist in Sofia told Ghodsee in 2009, "With the grandmothers in the village in the summer, how could Bulgarian women live!?!"

Not having grandparents to help look after a young child was not only considered a logistical problem for a young family, but was also considered an emotional loss for the child as well. Several of the interviewees spoke about their grandparents with great fondness when they were asked to reflect on their own childhoods. Petar, raised by his grandmother, explained, "I had a very happy childhood. I don't have a single unpleasant memory from my childhood." Gergana declared, "Well, I had a fine childhood because… when I was really young, [my older sister] and I were raised with our grandmothers and grandfathers around." Iolanta (age 33) had a brother and a twin sister, and all three were raised in the village by their paternal grandparents outside of the big city.

> Well, I grew up in a village. It was at the peak of socialism. I was born in 1971. Until 1978 or 1979, I had a boring [laughter] and carefree childhood… There was something overwhelming about it, the fascination of getting to know the world around you. There were these wonderful country fields that I found fascinating. The bees and the flowers gave me a feeling of wild joy.

Bogomil (age 28) was the child of actors and his parents were too busy working in the theatre to raise Bogomil and his brother in Sofia, particularly during the long school vacations. He, too, was very attached to his grandmother who raised him until her death.

> My best [childhood] memories are from my village…I was spending all of my vacations there and in fact the interesting thing about me is that my childhood memories are mostly from my village and not from Sofia, where I actually lived longer. My village played a more important role when I was growing up… First, my grandmother was taking care of me there, but she died in 1985. And after that it was my uncle, who is really something like a grandfather to me, but I had to call him "uncle" because I had to call my grandmother "mother…" [S]he was a restaurant singer and she was jealously keeping her age a secret. She did not want us to call her "granny" so we called her "mom."

Indeed, the emotional ties to both parents and grandparents came out quite clearly in the interviews, and, as mentioned previously, there were only four couples out of the 22 we interviewed that lived totally independent of their parents. Of these four neolocal couples, all had higher education (one was pursuing a doctoral degree) and most had moved to Sofia to attend the university, leaving their parents' home at a relatively early age. Of these couples, two of them were cohabiting and childless. The woman in the third cohabiting couple, Liliana, had 19-year old daughter from a previous marriage which she had raised in household of her ex-husband's parents. The daughter was already a university student and did not live with the couple. At age 38, Liliana doubted that she would have another child but explained that if she did it would be much more difficult now without all of the "grandmothers, grandfathers and aunts and uncles" around to help her.

The final couple, Andrei (age 31) and Pandora (age 24), were married and had a two-year-old daughter. Andrei had been married and divorced when he met Pandora, but had no children from his first marriage. Both sets of parents were outside of Sofia, and the couple lived in a one-room flat with a small kitchen that Andrei had inherited from his grandmother, so that they could "live independently, like a real family." The space was very small and all three of them slept together in the one room. Pandora worried about the effect this would have on her daughter, Anastasia:

> Only one room and a kitchen. This is not enough by any means. For two people, it's normal. For three, maybe tolerable. But later, when Anastasia grows up and become a grown person – a young woman – she can't sleep with us! It is better for a child to have its own room even when it is younger, so she will learn to be independent… I've been reading this literature for new mothers. …It is better for a child to sleep separately from its parents early in life. Otherwise, it will get much more attached to its parents and will become overly dependent. The child will lack full independence.

It was these discussions of economic uncertainty and housing arrangements and their relationship to fertility intentions that began to attract our attention, and we searched the demographic literature for a case similar to the Bulgarian one. In Ukraine, Brienna Perelli-Harris (2005) also tried to understand the puzzles of the universality of childbearing, a relatively low age of first birth and lowest-low fertility. She found that:

> …when faced with such hardships as unemployment or lack of housing, couples do not usually delay first births, although they may delay or forgo additional childbearing. Because they do not believe that their economic situation will improve later, Ukrainian

> women decide to give birth close to the optimal physiological age. On the other hand, economic factors may make a second child prohibitively expensive for the average family (68).

Upon closer analysis of the interviews, a similar pattern seemed to be emerging in the Bulgarian case, whereby economic uncertainty did not seem to have an affect of the decision to bear a first child, but played a much more significant role in the decision to have a second. It is upon this hypothesis that we now focus our attention.

Economic Uncertainty and Nuclear Family Ideals

Despite the prevalence of multigenerational cohabitation among our interviewees, most couples expressed a fair amount of anxiety about their collective financial insecurity. Worries about money and the lack of stable employment often manifested themselves in discussions about whether or not young couples would ever be able to achieve the nuclear family ideal and live independently from their parents after their child(ren) were school age. In a 2008 article using our same data, the Bulgarian postdoctoral researcher who conducted the original interviews (Pamporov 2008) found that having an independent house was very important to a plurality of the interviewees. In their ideal sequencing of life events, the independent home often came before marriage and childbearing. Elitsa Dimitrova (2008) also finds that living apart from in-laws is a key criterion for young urbanites who display more post-modern tendencies toward marriage and family relations. What became clear from the interviews, however, is that although the neolocal nuclear family is an ideal for many urban Bulgarians, it is an ideal imported from Western Europe and one that is far from being a common reality.

In our interview sample, most of the couples had various degrees of financial difficulties. Andrei, a married 31-year-old father of one living in a one-room studio apartment, complained that it was almost impossible for young Bulgarians to become independent without their parents' help:

> It's very hard, especially for us, for us Bulgarians. For example, I don't know what you have to do in order to be able to buy you're an apartment at the age of 25. Or a car, or whatever. If your parents don't support you, just forget about it.

Iolanta, the thirty-three year old mother of one, described how her family often had to decide between food and books:

> It's difficult to live on this income… but you could say that we manage well, since we have not starved to death. But we can't afford any entertainment such as going to the cinema or the theatre. Whenever we buy a new book…we have to starve. [We have to starve] to compensate for each cultural thing we allow ourselves to have.

Despite the varied financial circumstances and the necessity of living with parents, the economic uncertainty did not seem to have an overwhelming effect on the decision to have a first child. Although housing arrangements and finances were discussed in the interviews, it was most often in relation to the decision to have a second child. Couples were perfectly willing to have one child in a small house or in a shared house with parents under difficult financial circumstances, but in our interviews it became clear that many were unwilling to live in such conditions with two children.

Vassilka, the 28-year-old divorcee living in a four-generational household, also considered her housing situation a key impediment to having a second child. Although she was in an LAT relationship with a man that wanted to marry her, she did not want to commit to a second relationship if it meant continued dependence on parents.

> …Even if I wanted another child, the first problem is that there is no place for it to live. To get pregnant with a second child, I have to live with my mother and bring my husband

> here or else go live at the home of a mother-in-law and father-in-law. I cannot afford to live in a rented apartment, to live on my own with anyone. It's very complicated. I don't know.

Elena, who has been living with her mother-in-law for the last five years also complained that housing was the key factor limiting her fertility:

> Well, I always say that I want to have 3 kids. But, of course, the moment will come [to make a decision] and I will have to take into account where we live…. If we can afford it. Because it's not fair to make children if you can't even provide a home for them. It's very sad that we have to restrain ourselves from having children because we don't have a place to live. It's very unpleasant.

Dimitar and Desislava were planning to move out of his parents' house in the next year. They also did not want to have another child until their had their own apartment, what Dimitar referred to as the "housing problem." Since Desislava's mother died three years earlier, Desislava also claimed that she would have no one to help her if she had another child once she moves out of her in-laws apartment.

Even for those who manage to live independently, housing plays a key role in people decision making about future children. Andrei's 24-year old wife was asked when they would consider having a second child, but worried that their apartment was simply not big enough to hold a family of four:

> Well, the appropriate time in principle would be in three or four years. But it will depend on the housing situation. Because we have discussed the option of getting a mortgage. You know, so we can buy something bigger than this. More than one room.

In a few cases, it is the presence of the child or children of an older sibling that makes it difficult for young couples to even have a first child, particularly when there is already overcrowding in the parental home. Indeed, it was the presence of his older brother's family in his parents' house that made Lyubomir desperate for an apartment of his own. Maria was quite eager to start a family, but she explained:

> I want to have a baby… I repeat that I want to have a baby all of the time. But he wants us desperately to live on our own. He does not want to live with a mother-in-law because he sees his brother…who lives with his wife, his mother and his father. They all live together in their [his parents'] apartment. And he [Lyubomir] sees that there are problems, you know, young people and old people living in the same place. It's definitely not good

<u>Discussion</u>

Adult children's heavy reliance on their parents to provide housing and childcare for delays the transition to adulthood and perpetuates intergenerational dependence. The results in what has been called "yo-yo" tendencies (de Bois-Reymond & Lopez Blasco 2003), a state in which young adults alternate between dependence and independence over a long period of time before making the transition to adulthood and finally achieving full independence from their own parents. Kovacheva (2008) argues that:

> Young, first-time parents not only lack experience with childcare, but are also disadvantaged when trying to reconcile childcare responsibilities with employment. Turning to support from their own parents, a strategy that Bulgarian youth has widely relied upon, also means delaying or reversing the process of gaining independence and falling back into dependence upon the family of origin (176).

What is interesting here is the extent to which "adulthood" is presumed to be a state of full independence, an ideal of adulthood that is clearly being imported from the West since adult Bulgarians have always shown a high degree of interdependency between parents and adult children. Certainly from our own interviews, young Bulgarians in their twenties to not feel the need to establish their independence before starting their own families, and in fact, explicitly rely on the support from their parents to do so. Whereas in countries such as Italy, young adults will delay marriage and childbearing until they can be sure that they will have independent lives and will not have to revert to the financial support of their parents (Bernardi 2009), in Bulgaria, young men and women will choose to have their children younger so they can get over with what they perceive as a necessary period of dependency before they attempt to strike out on the own.

One explanation for this pattern may lie in the perceptions of future success in the respective countries. Whereas young Italians may experience the same economic insecurity as their young Bulgarian counterparts, it may be that the Italians are more optimistic about their future prospects in society. As in Ukraine (Perelli-Harris 2005), Bulgarians may have no hopes for a better future and so decide to have their children when their own parents are young and healthy enough to help take care of them. Indeed, comparative survey data from the European Values Study demonstrates that Bulgarians are the most pessimistic European country and that young people have few ideas that things will improve in their country in their lifetimes. As long as the economic situation remains dire, and young Bulgarians hopes for the future remain cynical, it is unlikely that young Bulgarian families will consider having a second child. Instead, with the increasing developmental idealism emanating from the West, it may be that young Bulgarians will begin postponing childbearing later and later in hopes of scraping together enough resources to achieve the Western neolocal nuclear family ideal, or that some will inevitably give up on childbearing altogether.

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[1] All names have been changed to protect the identity of our informants.

[2] The Grandfather's Glove is children's story by the Bulgarian writer Elin Pelin about many animals who try to fit into a lost glove. In colloquial Bulgaria, this is a metaphor for a very small space inhabited by too many people.