Chapter 4

Gender and Social Reproduction:
Reallocating Rights and Responsibilities

In the previous chapter we have explored the dynamics and processes of neo-liberal political economy which was ushered in post-Soviet Russian society and its resultant macro economic impact on the participation and status of women in the sphere of production. While it was important to look into these processes in the realm of production to understand the reconfigurations of power and production, especially as they relate to the transformations occurring within and between state and market structures, in the following chapter we will explore the correlation between these shifts and corresponding transformations in the mechanisms, fundamental social processes and institutions of social reproduction.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union also meant an end of the gender contract by the erstwhile socialist regime which had afforded women and men to negotiate the twin responsibilities of performing paid and unpaid labour. The particular nature of Russian transition from a socialist to a free-market neo-liberal social and economic order was such that it suddenly radically transformed the basis of the existing gender contract and the organization of gender relations and laid the grounds of their integration with global capital’s priorities and interests. The newly emerging neo-liberal gender contract entailed withdrawal of state support from social reproduction. It has meant privatisation and a consistent reduction in welfare provisions. This withdrawal of support by state, capital and even civil society from social reproduction has been based on the assumption that it will be borne to whatever extent possible, by households, familial or individual efforts. The people have been pushed to drastic limits of their resilience by more than willing capitalists that have drawn upon this resilience for their own ends.
Social reproduction includes procreation and all activities associated with the regeneration and maintenance of life on a daily basis. Brenner and Laslett (1989: 382-83) have elaborated the concept of social reproduction and refer to it as, "...activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kinds of work-mental, manual, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation. And the organization of social reproduction refers to the varying institutions within which this work is performed, the varying strategies for accomplishing these tasks, and the varying ideologies that both shape and are shaped by them.” The comprehensive definition of social reproduction outlines the scope of activities that lie in this ‘private’ realm of unpaid domestic work. Addressing the ‘production/reproduction’ debate and the relationship between the two, socialist feminists expand and explain the nature of activities that fall within this sphere. These are not neatly separated from those ‘economic activities’ that fall in the realm of paid work or ‘production.’ The two spheres and their activities intermingle with each other with the market increasingly delving deeper into packaging and providing the ‘familial’ services for their profits.

Katz (2001: 710) explores the connections between social reproduction and various and vastly different sites of production. She argues that globalised capitalism has changed the face of social reproduction worldwide over the last three decades. She defines the realm of social reproduction as, “…the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life. It is also a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension. Social reproduction encompasses daily and long term reproduction, both of the means of production and the labour power to make them work. At its most basic, it hinges upon the biological reproduction of the labour force, both generationally and on a daily basis, through the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing, and health care. According to Marxist theory, social
reproduction is much more than this; it also encompasses the reproduction of the labour force at a certain (and fluid) level of differentiation and expertise. This differentiated and skilled labour force is socially constituted. Not only are the material social practices associated with its production historically and geographically specific, but its contours and requirements are the outcome of ongoing struggle. Apart from the need to secure the means of existence, the production and reproduction of the labour force calls forth a range of cultural forms and practices that are also geographically and historically specific, including those associated with knowledge and learning, social justice and its apparatus, and the media.” It is in the context of such a relationship between ‘production’ and ‘social reproduction’ that we will attempt to correlate the changes brought in by the transition to a neo-liberal capitalist order in Russia.

**Concept of Social Reproduction**

Historically, in most societies all activities related to sexual and reproductive work is considered as women’s work and all activities related to paid work, politics, government, culture, war and so on are considered as the male sphere of work. Women’s work falls in the ‘private’ realm and men’s work constitutes the ‘public’ realm.

Ortner (1974: 382) has remarked on the association made between women and nature on the one hand and men and culture on the other. She explains the concept guiding this binary and says that women’s work is identified with the nurturing and procreative functions of nature while men’s work is attributed with a conscious agency of purposeful activity upon nature in the process of creating culture. This framework draws upon the exclusive capacity of women to conceive and procreate to associate women’s ‘natural roles’ with nature. The extension of this logic is that reproduction is a natural and biological function of the female body and therefore her body is a product of nature. The process of reproduction is the central bases of understanding sexual difference between men and women. Women’s ability to conceive and bear children marks the crucial sexual difference between both sexes.
The feminist demand for reproductive rights draws upon the understanding of woman as a biological being. The understanding of traditional and ‘natural’ rights of women in terms of control of women over their bodies and autonomy to decide to give birth to a child or not, emphasizes the individual dimension of reproductive rights. Without undermining the relevance of this demand, Petchesky (1980: 662) also stresses the social dimension of reproduction. She points that, “...Two essential ideas underlie a feminist view of reproductive freedom, ideas that have recurrently been implicit in all historical situations in which abortion, birth control, child care, maternity care, and the status of unmarried mothers and their children have become objects of political conflict. On the broadest level, these two ideas reflect the long-standing tension in feminist theory between an emphasis on equality and an emphasis on women’s autonomy. The first is derived from the biological connection between women’s bodies, sexuality, and reproduction. It is an extension of the general principle of “bodily integrity,” or “bodily self-determination,” to the notion that women must be able to control their own bodies and procreative capacities—that is, the reproductive and sexual uses to which their bodies are put. The second is a “historical and moral argument” based on the social position of women and the socially determined needs which that position generates. It states that, insofar as women, under the existing division of labour between the sexes, are the ones most affected by pregnancy, since they are still the ones responsible for the care and rearing of children, it is women who must decide about contraception, abortion, and childbearing”. Framing the debate on reproductive rights and freedoms and the tension between the two is another significant continuing strand of tension in liberal feminist theory. This conflict became visible when abortion debates raged in Eastern Europe as reproductive rights were severely curbed under pressure from a religious conservative backlash.

Lukaes (1978: 5-7) suggests that to dichotomize “nature” and “society” as the objects of two different sciences is, false; and, by inference, it is also false to assume a split between women’s “biological” functions and her “social” ones. Scott (1974: 159) similarly reflects this view when she says, “Marx’s observation suggests looking for the dialectical relationship between the natural and social sides of reproduction, instead of regarding them as two parallel but independent processes. In this view,
women obscures the social dimension of procreation. By relegating women’s work i.e. reproduction of life, its regeneration and its maintenance in the private realm, the social cost and responsibilities of this labour to be borne by the state, market and civil society are shunned or treated as private burden of households, families and more specifically, women.

Jagger (1988) has pointed that it is more accurate to look at the procreative labor performed by women as socially necessary labor and not a natural necessity. Technological and social conditions have limited sexual and procreative activities performed by women in the realm of necessity. This makes it clearer as to why women’s procreative labor is socially and not naturally necessary labor. In male dominant societies women are required to perform sexual activities not just to produce children but to cater to a variety of sexual needs. The prevailing system of social relations shapes the decisions regarding sexual and procreative activities. Any attempt to promote women’s sexual and reproductive freedom has to contextualized in the concrete political, social and economic circumstances of the society in which women live. Decisions to bear children or not are taken by women keeping in mind their health and well being.

However, in times of war, nation building or sweeping transformation such decisions can assume a wider symbolic dimension and can get transformed into key political resources. In such situations these decisions do not remain in the hands of women alone rather, many institutions like the family, religious order, markets and emergent nation-states shape them. The power struggle unfolding in the political arena also draws women in but they are deployed only symbolically and majority of women are marginalized from actual power and resources. Issues related to reproductive health have often been situated on the intersections between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ domains. Einhorn (1993: 74) remarks that reproductive health issues lie on the borderline between public and private domains, pointing both towards the extent of women’s capacity as individuals to exercise choice and control in relation to their own bodies and towards the collective responsibility of the state for the health of its members.

Discussing women’s reproductive roles within any ethnic or national discourse, Yuval-Davis (1996) demonstrates that concerns about nationhood, whether
in terms of the quantity and the quality or the racial origins of a population, frequently shape policy and legislation in a way which foregrounds collectivist goals at the cost of individual women’s health. A symbol does not just stand for something else in a straightforward and unambiguous way (Cohen, 1985). Rather, the meaning of symbols is imprecise and incomplete. Individuals supply part of the meaning of the symbols they hold in common, a collective value or ideal thus encompassing a diversity of meanings. It is by this means that a sense of belonging is engendered among individuals whose actual experience is disparate.

Yet as Yuval-Davis (1996: 23) notes, “...‘culture’ is never an essentialist and homogeneous body of traditions and customs, but a rich resource, usually full of internal contradictions, which is always used selectively in ethnic cultural and religious projects within specific power relations and political discourse”. In the particular context of Central and East European women’s reproductive and sexual rights and freedom, Cohen’s (1985) work illuminates the way ‘shared’ symbols – such as, ‘motherhood’ and ‘choice’ have absorbed a whole variety of meanings and have played a part in catering to particular sets of interests at the costs of others. Alongside ‘choice’, ‘the value of life’ and ‘mother of the nation’ provide additional symbolic resources that have been used to exert ideological pressure. Symbols such as these have the necessary qualities of incompleteness and ambiguity that allow them to be allied to both religious and secular agendas.

Gender contract during Soviet regime entailed an ideological commitment of the socialist state to ensure and maximise participation of women in paid labour force. Simultaneously, the reproductive role and functions of men and women also had to be ensured. This twin commitment of the Soviet state was reflected in its policies in the form of Family Code which laid out a broad set of pro-natalist measures thereby expanding the role of socialist state in areas like social housing, expanded public health services, cultural and physical development, public education, and the institution of social welfare programs. Most of the countries formed after the disintegration of Soviet Union and socialist regimes in Eastern Europe had in the past provided a broad range of social benefits and maternity support including prenatal and maternity allowances, paid maternity leave, and allowances for the care of sick children. However, while the ways in which households secured their reproduction
was altered tremendously, it did not substantially affect the gender division of labour within the household. The gender division of labour within the household continued to presume women’s responsibility for most of the work of reproduction, including child-rearing, food provisioning and preparation, cleaning, laundering, and other tasks of homemaking. The contours of the tension existing in the paradoxical nature of empowering and restricting women’s agency in former socialist countries were realigned dramatically with the advent of the transition as social reproduction was put directly into servicing the interests of global capital.

Globalised capitalism has changed the face of social reproduction worldwide over the past three decades, enabling intensification of capital accumulation and exacerbating differences in wealth and poverty. The demise of the social contract as a result of neo-liberalism, privatization, and the fraying of the welfare state is a crucial aspect of this shift (Katz 2001: 709).

The shift from state socialism to free-market neo-liberal capitalism has not merely compounded the unresolved problems of gender regime in former Soviet Union. *It has brought about an irreversible radical rupture in the polity, society and economy of Russian people and the subsequent gender order.* The very ideological and political framework in which policies were formulated has and continues to undergo a profound shift with increasingly detrimental impact on people, particularly vulnerable groups like old and retired people, children and women. The shift from socialist welfare policies to individual responsibilities and privileges has a sound grounding in the neo-liberal understanding of prioritising the interests of global capital over and above any other.

**Global Capitalism and Social Reproduction- a Feminist Critique**

As we argued in the previous chapter the fundamental restructuring of economy and labour market was a result of making society subservient to the market economy rather than the other way around. Its consequences for the labour force, in particular, participation of women in it, have been far from desirable. In the following chapter we will look into the impact on women, in particular working mothers, to
observe the shifts in the ideological, cultural and economic environment which has brought about sweeping changes in the reproductive roles and function of women.

Polanyi (1957: 111, 129) argued that unlike during capitalism, in pre-capitalist societies the formal sphere of economy was not separate from society and were enmeshed and interlinked with social activities. The split between spheres of formal economy and society was a capitalist phenomenon in which the markets were disembedded from society. Capitalism commodifies the relationship between human beings and nature as that between labour and land. The self-regulating system of market has subordinated society to it and converted various places into market societies. In these market societies social relations have been embedded in the economy instead of being the other way round. Along with these processes market mediation of human re (production) leads to alienation and commodification in society. This shift has forced individuals to earn their livelihood from wages earned in the market rather than themselves producing the needful through collective activities. To accomplish this various coercive measures have been taken up by capitalist regimes. At a general level of abstraction, we can understand capitalism as a system of social property relations in which survival and social reproduction are dependent on the market.

Marx (1978: 118) described the process in which delinking of market from society brought about a metamorphosis in social relations because ‘labour power found itself in a state of separation from its means of production.’ In the context of accumulation, the separation of producers and means of production essentially means that the “objective conditions of living labour appear as separated, independent values opposite living labour capacity as subjective being, which therefore appears to them only as a value of another kind.” He tells us that ‘a new social soul has entered into the body.’ As De Angelis (2007) explains, ‘through enclosures, in other words, objects rule subjects, deeds command the doing, and the doing of human activity is channeled into forms that are compatible with the priority of capital’s accumulation.’ This aspect of Marx’s argument has been recently expanded in the realm of reproduction by Federici (2004) who documents in Caliban and the Witch that the ‘enclosure’ of women’s bodies ensured the separation of the processes of production from those of social reproduction. This was done literally by limiting them at home.
where they were required to produce a new workforce and figuratively by devising such policies and disciplinary measures which would compromise their autonomy over reproductive processes.

Wood (1995: 15) talks about capitalism’s unique mode of surplus extraction which retains the space for reconfiguring production and social reproduction. During feudalism family or household was treated as a unit whereas under capitalism social property relations are based on the separation of the individual from his family and household.

LeBaron (2007: 8) introduced a new concept called ‘new constitutionalism’ which can be defined as the overall structural framework of governance. Two fundamental dynamics have been responsible for the consolidation of neo-liberal world order. First is ‘new constitutioanalism’ according to which political and judicial framework is being constructed at a macro level for global capitalism. Second is ‘disciplinary neo-liberalism’ which is the concrete form of power over neo-liberal social relations exercised by markets through market based structures to ensure social discipline. Bakker and Gill (2003) explain how ‘new constitutionalism’ has utilized national constitutions and international legal measures to institutionalize neo-liberal reforms and discipline as a fundamental economic policy in the last 20-30 years. This has enabled the consolidation of the rights of global capital and has weakened democratic control over key aspects of public economy. These processes, according to Elson (2004: 633), have undermined “…the capacity of governments to use public expenditure to combat poverty, inequality and insecurity…” and have therefore in many senses been a “…political project of attempting to make transnational liberalism, and if possible liberal democratic capitalism, the sole model for future development.” Brown (2005: 43) describes how under neo-liberalism ‘the body politic ceases to be a body but is rather a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers.’

A paradox of the neo-liberal gender order is that women appear to be more free and equal to men through their increasing participation in the public realm of wage-labour, and are treated accordingly in state policies. However, as the shifts in Russian Family Code, Labour Code and Private Property Rights have revealed state policies essentially functioned to dispossess women of their labour rights and assets.
that previously under the Soviet regime had alleviated their burden in relation to the social reproductive realm by providing non-wage forms of benefits through welfare policies and social provisioning. The current policies are increasingly individualizing responsibility under the ideological rhetoric of ‘individual freedom’ for dealing with the results of this dispossession. The new economic order has entailed economic restructuring, privatization and the downloading of care work onto individuals and households, as well as the erosion of adequate and affordable social services like childcare, health care, and care for the elderly.

Theoretically speaking the liberal assumption guiding state policies is that the most marginalized and oppressed woman is free and equal, in principle, to the wealthiest man. This assumption is premised on a rational and calculating individual whose moral autonomy can be measured by his capacity for self-care and his ability to fulfil his needs and ambitions (Brown 2005: 43). Only those who are incapable of working like children, old people or handicapped cannot be held directly responsible for their state of poverty and only they can be the legitimate claimants of social assistance (Bakker and Brodie 2007).

Dispossession of women from resources and labour and the capitalist control and regimentation of time has increased women’s wage work and enhanced their exploitation in relation to the realm of social reproduction. Women are now compelled to work a greater number of hours, take up multiple jobs tying them even more firmly to the capitalist control. Bezanson and Luxton (2006) explain how social reproductive activities which were formerly in the public realm such as hospitals, schools, elderly homes and day care centres have now been relocated in the services provided by women in the private domain of households. This has tied women disproportionately to the household and embedded social reproductive realm into capitalist social relations.

An influential example of this process is commodification of care work traditionally performed by women. Where women have the ability they have subcontracted the newly re-privatized socially reproductive labour. Alongside the comodification of care work, markets have mediated food production, other forms of domestic work, female bodies and social relationships. LeBaron (2007: 11) has pointed that the opening up of domestic sphere to capital has had the consequence of
increasing the role and presence of capital in our daily lives and it has re-structured our life practices and the reproduction of livelihoods in tune with the imperatives and reproduction of capitalism. This has meant a cooption of non-capitalist relations and life practices in the service of capitalist system of production.

Bezanson (2006: 25-26) elaborated upon a consequence of expansion of capital into commodification of social relations. She explains how neo-liberal market order has given rise to a paradox which is that gender is both eroded and intensified. This paradox is revealed in the processes of familialization that infiltrate neo-liberal restructuring. In the context of Canada she argues that although Canadian women participate in the labour market much like men do, they continue to retain responsibility for the private and “invisible” work of social reproduction. So while social policy tends to view women as autonomous workers (defamilialization), the very practices and decisions in policy transfer the work of social reproduction onto women (re-familialization). In prioritizing individuals’ market capacity as well as withdrawing from social commitments (e.g. social policies and programs), neo-liberalism shifts the costs of social reproduction away from the state and onto families. The tensions and stresses created by new market and state relationships were increasingly assumed to be absorbed by families and households.

Feminist scholars have often pointed out that the private/public distinction is not merely a description of social domains rather it is an ideological dichotomy that produces the appearance of separation between activities that are otherwise closely linked. Feminists such as Petchesky (1980), Jagger (1988) and Brenner (2000) have attempted to account for the gender division of labour in capitalism. They have explored the relationship between class and gender hierarchies asking and analysing questions like are there two separate systems, one governing ‘production’ and the other ‘reproduction’, or is there a single system that accounts for both? Brenner argues with the ‘dual system’ theorists and asserts, “...production and reproduction are two domains of an integrated domain of species reproduction”. The marginalization of women from wage work and assigning the work of reproduction to them is a result of the reluctance of capitalism to accommodate the needs and costs of biological reproduction into the realm of production. In the contemporary context of globalization and withdrawal of welfare state, more stringent work requirement have
been introduced for single mothers on the pretext of ‘weaning’ away dependent citizens and making them independent. This logic obscures the ‘dependence’ of ‘unencumbered’ men on women’s domestic labour. While analysing American labour history Brenner points how the trade unions did not just resist the entry of women into the workforce – they equally resisted the entry of unskilled men as well. Capitalist competition spurred male workers in the organized unions to resist the capitalists’ moves to employ cheaper labour at their cost. The history of labour struggles shows that the earliest and most consistent demand of trade unions was that of a reduction of the working day for all. In the face of adamant opposition to this demand, trade unions evolved the strategy of demanding protective restrictions for women and children, knowing that this would also effectively result in a reduction of the working day for men too.

This dichotomy of ‘separate spheres’ meant for men to be the ‘breadwinners’ and women as primarily responsible for reproduction, household labour and giving emotional support against the harshness and impersonality of the market and industrial work. Gal and Kligman (2000: 44-45) point out that despite uneven and weak industrialization in the Habsburg lands, the Balkans and Russia, where mechanization and capitalization of agriculture was given an impetus by the food demands of western industrialization, these ideological patterns were very much evident. They say that, “... in broad strokes, then, public and private were linked to ideas about masculinity and femininity; fundamental legal and economic arrangements fixed the boundary itself and assured the dependence of women upon husbands, fathers, and sometimes sons in a range of gender regimes across nineteenth- and early- twentieth-century capitalist Europe. Even when the state intervened through early welfare schemes, it supported these arrangements.” In their work on the politics of gender after socialism, they explore the reconfigurations of this dichotomy which the Soviet socialist regimes tried to alter. They say that, “...The “gender regimes” of state socialism in East Central Europe were built out of these ideological critiques and failed utopias, as well as out of the pre-existing arrangements of capitalist gender relations that structured male dominance in households, politics and workplaces. ...Many of the distinctive characteristics of state socialism derive from this ideological rejection....however, new and subtle configurations of public/private emerged in the course of four decades, as state socialism succeeded in producing
another system that, though quite different in institutional organization from capitalist gender regimes nevertheless was equally effective in securing an altered form of male privilege” (Gal and Kligman 2000: 47).

The writings of feminist theorists like Rich (1995) and Chodorow (1978) unveil the deeply rooted cultural and psychic bases of traditional child-rearing arrangements, explaining why it is this aspect of pre-socialist patriarchy that seems most intractable in post-revolutionary societies.

In her authoritative work on social reforms in Russia, in particular the ideological orientation and implications of welfare state restructuring in Russia, Teplova (2004: 17) argues that, “...the emerging welfare regime in Russia possesses neofamilist elements...and represents a sui generis welfare system, which evolved as a result of the complex interactions of traditional, deeply embedded patterns of traditional policymaking in Russia and neoliberal policies aimed at structural adjustment...” She explores the changing nature and organizations of livelihood and reproduction. The state’s changing role in mediating conflicts created by paid work and/or capitalist accumulation and social reproduction is a central organizing theme throughout her work.

The present understandings of gender order do not match the earlier bourgeois ideals of separate spheres and nor do they mirror gender relations of contemporary Western Europe or the United States. Yet, the changeover from socialist to free market economy and culture has very specifically altered the ideological framework in which Russian State’s commitment and policies, mediated by an enhanced role of the market, are being framed which has a direct and profound impact on the processes of social reproduction and the lives of women. In the following sections of this chapter, we will explore major trends that are discernible in post-Soviet transition Russia in an environment of a neo-liberal understanding of the processes of social reproduction.
Social Reproduction and Emerging Gender Order in Russia

Perestroika unfolded the ideological grounds on which future debates regarding the changing role of state and citizens would be battled out and it was in this terrain that debates over reproductive roles and freedom were grounded as being integral to the impending changeover. As Gal and Kligman (2000: 21) pointed out, “...discursive battles are unavoidable in periods of political rupture, such as the events of 1989, when new and old elites negotiate and struggle over state forms. At such junctures, not only are the political players reshuffled, but the rules of the political project are being re-thought, reorganized, bringing into question the legitimacy of political action and identities of political actors...it is for this reason, as grounding for constituting authority, that reproductive policy and ideology are crucial features of such political processes.”

High inflation and a firm ideological orientation towards dismantling the former socialist legacy and consolidating capitalist market democracy severely circumscribed attempts by the state to preserve the real value of family benefits and other child-care benefits payment and have till date remained wholly or partially unsuccessful. Expenditure in family allowance as a percentage of GDP dropped from 2% in 1991 to 0.36% in 2000; family allowance as a percentage of total household income decreased from 5.6% to 1.2%, respectively (A Decade of Transition 2001: 43). In 2004 these indicators fell even lower – 0.28% and 0.4% (Zakharov 2008: 929). This drastic drop in social reproductive state spending had a profound impact on reorganizing gender relations in Russia.

Zhurzhenko (2001: 36) elaborates on the complex process of identity formation of former Soviet women and notes the changing dynamics of the organization of social reproduction and the emergence of a new gender order. She says, “...One of the main consequences of the free market ideology has been the destruction of the ‘working mother’ gender contract...This gender contract assumed, in particular, the combination of family and work functions by women for which the state provided the necessary support (health care, benefits for working mothers, childcare) and guaranteed the preservation of their jobs. The politics of paternalism, which provided full employment and social benefits for working mothers, was subject
to criticism in the beginning of perestroika from the standpoint of economic efficiency and also because of the ‘lack of freedom of choice’ for women. Under increasing economic hardship, the decline of socialist paternalism was not replaced by an alternative social policy (particularly in relation to women and families) in response to the needs of the transition economy. The increase of social problems is viewed in contemporary literature as an inevitable side-effect of market reforms.”

Talking about former Soviet bloc and the particular context of Ukraine, she points out that despite the valorisation of the ‘individual initiative/entrepreneur’, “…‘in practice the unit of self-support is not the individual, but the family’. The real gender policy places the main difficulties of the transition economy firmly on the backs of families. The destruction of social welfare system, increased cost of social services, deterioration in the quality of medical care and the commercialization of education has forced women to accept the burden of additional social responsibilities which earlier had been managed by the state. The radical reorganization of social reproduction tied to the destruction of the working mother gender contract and the privatization of most functions which were previously provided for by the government mediated by state enterprises have today led to an increased burden on the family and, above all, on women. It is particularly female labour, both paid and unpaid, which was, and remains, the main economic support in Ukrainian society in the last years of reform, when male entrepreneurs were mainly preoccupied with the redistribution of state property” (Zhurzhenko 2001: 37).

The labor market and demographic pressures led to the creation of a broader political agenda aimed at “returning women to homes.” Increasing advocacy of familial values, including opposition to female and especially maternal employment, became a point of convergence for Russian policy-makers and various political leaders for divergent reasons. Liberals, who vehemently embraced a neoliberal culture and rejected everything associated with the Communist past, emphasized individual rights by assigning women back to their homes (a right which women were deprived of during the Soviet period). Another political force, the Russian nationalist opposition, saw the reproductive function as key to the future development of the nation, and used falling birth rates as a weapon to attack “emancipated women” (Goven 2000: 288). Falling standards of morality, breakdowns of families, juvenile
delinquency, even other social evils like alcoholism in men were all attributed to the lack of attention by ‘over masculinized and pampered’ Soviet women to their families. Thus, at the beginning of 1990s, as a result of joint action of these forces, women were openly called upon to return to their homes, in order to benefit society as a whole, via their increased involvement in family life.

Posadskaya (1994: 53) called perestroika a ‘male project’ while reviewing The Programme for Improving the Position of Women and Protection of the Family, Motherhood and Childhood- a programme intended for the 1990s. This programme set for itself the task of ‘linking together the interests of women, family and society’. The first section is devoted to the fundamentals of state’s family policy. The second section focuses on state policy on improving the position of women with its emphasis on ‘protecting’ women through various entitlements and allowances so that it is easier for them to look after their family and children. The third part states the main points of state policy for safeguarding the health of mothers and children. Posadskaya points that there are no measures to liberate women from traditional gender stereotypes or substantial measures to ensure the participation of women in the upper echelons of power and decision making. She recounted how during the discussion of this programme in the Russian parliament, the then Prime Minister, Valentin Pavlov stressed that ‘This programme will help to fortify the nation’s physical and moral health and enhance the stabilizing role of the family as society’s primary unit and the family’s importance in people’s spiritual development’ (Posadskaya 1994: 54). Posadskaya questions why this programme claims to address the problem of improving the position of women when it clearly spells out that women are simply an appendage to the family and they are not independent individuals.

Gorbachev (1987: 103) clearly spelled out the gender orientation of the changes that were soon to follow and culminate in the formal disintegration of the USSR. He said, “...Over the years...we failed to pay attention to women’s specific rights and needs arising from their role as mother and home-maker, and their indispensible education function as regards children. Engaged in scientific research, working on construction sites, in production and in services, and involved in creative activities, women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties at home- housework and upbringing of children and the creation of a good family
atmosphere. We have discovered that many of our problems— in children’s and young people’s behaviour, in our morals, culture … are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and slack attitudes to family responsibilities. This is a paradoxical result of our services and politically justified desire to make women equal with men in everything. Now, in the course of perestroika, we begin to overcome this shortcoming. That is why we are now holding heated debates in the press, in public organizations, at work and at home, about the question of what we should do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission”.

The most quoted phrase ‘returning women to their purely womanly mission’ was however no mere rhetoric.

In keeping with this ideological orientation supported by economic and cultural backlash at the tradition of ‘over emancipated, pampered and protected Soviet women;’ the policies in the form of decrees in the years immediately following the transition, took measures to enable women’s withdrawal from paid formal labour sector. Towards this end the Russian state continued and in fact extended maternity leave provisions (Teplova 2005) on the one hand and on the other did not take any step, like upgrading women’s skills, to integrate them better into the new market conditions. Teplova (2005: 6) cites data which suggests the preference of the newly emerging private sector for single young males in the newly created jobs. She says, “…A 1999 survey carried out by the Centre for Labour Market Studies in Moscow that interviewed 278 managers found 88 percent of employers preferred to hire men (when asked about specific positions, for example, receptionist, more employers had a preference for women). Of that 88 percent, 23.4 cited higher productivity and 11.4 percent fewer associated costs as the reason for their preference. Women’s child care leave was singled out as particularly costly”. Becoming a less ‘productive’ labour force in a market economy which refuses to bear any non-profit yielding burden hit women particularly hard.

Amongst the new opportunities which were immediately made available were commodification of women’s bodies in numerous beauty contests, cosmetics industry and sex trade. Posadskaya (1994: 4) pointed to the trend of intensification of patriarchal propaganda reasserting the ‘natural mission’ of women and men as
‘breadwinners’ alongside massive exploitation of sexuality through the commercialization of the female body.

Teplova (2007: 8) calls the shift in family policies as a shift towards ‘neo-familial’ model of family policies, she says, “…Familial policies have been introduced to encourage women to have children and stay home with them. There has been a movement from Soviet-style enterprise-level provision of services to a more Western European, social insurance model, where the government collects social insurance or social security premiums and pays out maternity or parental or other benefits.” However the harshness and uncertainty about their future made more and more women choose in favour of not having more children. The economic and political changes in transition Russia were accompanied by extremely high abortion rates and very low fertility rates, which accounted for one of the factors leading to the demographic crisis in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s. The country’s total fertility rate, which was around two lifetime births per woman from the late 1960s through the early 1980s dropped steeply since 1987, falling to 1.3 births per woman in 2005. In 1992, the abortion rate was 98 per 1,000 women aged 15–49, and the abortions outnumbered births by more than two to one (Hollander 1997). The number of abortions, while declining, has remained high during the transformation period: 69 abortions per 1,000 in 1996 and 55 in 2000 (Wites 2004). Subjected to not only the vagaries of the market forces which made future very uncertain, women increasingly are not finding themselves in an adequately secure position to bear and rear children.

The deepening demographic crisis and an immediate impact on the children were the most pressing reasons which somewhat halted, in the immediate sense, the neo-liberal drive of transition states of former Soviet Bloc from making severe cuts in social welfare. Instead, the reductions in social benefits were manifested in the decreasing quality of services, restricted access to free services, monetization of benefits, or simply shortages of supplies. A number of facilities, however, were closed due to the lack of funding, leased as office space or used for other profit-making purposes. Many facilities raised the cost of keeping children so that most women could not afford them and existing services have remained inaccessible to them. The cost of social security was also increasingly being transferred from the state to the household, in part by the partial commercialization of services such as childcare,
education, and health care. The hardest hit area has been that in child-support benefits and to childcare infrastructure. The real value of child welfare support has been falling rapidly in most countries of the region as the ideological underpinning of the reforms rejects such ‘dependency’ of its citizens on the state.

In Russia, for example, allowances for children less than 18 months old decreased from 14.2 percent to 1.5 percent of the average wage between January 1992 and September 1993. At the same time, the state-supported system of childcare facilities, including crèches and kindergartens, has been so badly affected by the lack of funding that many of them have closed. In Poland, the number of crèches and kindergartens fell by more than 20 percent in the years 1989-93. In 35 regions of Russia, between 2 percent and 8 percent of children's pre-school institutions have closed, primarily for lack of funding. This erosion of family benefits and of childcare infrastructure has significantly increased the responsibilities of women as caregivers, and thus their workload within the family (Lazreg, 1999: 69).

The subsistence minimum was calculated as a temporary definition formulated as a survival measure in situation of acute economic crisis. However, the official subsistence minimum understates the actual condition of poverty in Russia. While it was expected to be in use for about one year to help to overcome the most difficult initial stage of transition; it has continued for much longer as the economic situation did not show signs of any significant improvement. Since then, it has remained as both a statistical and a political instrument for the political forces. “This subsistence was exactly what it claimed i.e. the bare minimum. It was at no stage enough to cover the essential basic needs of food, medicine, clothing and shelter. It allowed only one-third of personal income for clothes, footwear, medicines and services, and virtually nothing for consumer durables. It was totally inadequate, especially in a situation when prices for those goods were soaring. People affected by poverty were forced to give up purchases of most non-food consumer items. If they were able to survive through the first reform year of 1992, perpetuation of this situation throughout 1993-94 made their position much worse as the need for warm clothes and other essential goods became more acute. Moreover, marketisation of housing and public utilities raised the share of rent as well as that of the water, electricity and telephone bill in an
average family budget from the current 3-5% to 15-20%, with particularly adverse effects on the poor” (Mikhalev 1996: 15).

Restructuring of labor market affected men and women disproportionately. The change from industrial manufacturing and military sector to service sectors affected women in more ways than it did the men. Dismantling the entire detailed and decentralized system of micro welfare states, where enterprises were the main providers of services to women and families had an immediate impact on women. Micro welfare states were a system of childcare facilities (kindergartens and nurseries), transportation, schools, food provision, pioneer camps, and rest houses. Maternity leaves and other benefits were also paid via social insurance funds at the enterprises. As the enterprises folded or were unable to pay wages, such elaborate measure came to an end. It was particularly harsh for women especially since they received a lot of support from interpersonal networks they had evolved all through their working lives in their work enterprises.

The importance of such workplaces can hardly be over emphasized for women during Soviet times. These places were characterized by warmth and cooperation and an inclusive atmosphere, recounted by many women in post-collapse Russia. The shortages and hardships of their daily lives were greatly mitigated by women exchanging shifts, celebrating occasions, lending and procuring hard to find daily commodities for each other. Many enterprises with crèches and bakeries saved women from many problems and indeed the workplace held great significance for women. Bereft of this entire infrastructure women found themselves facing a market where private players, vying for better profits, found their skills invaluable and outdated and expensive to bear. They were left to take care of their children and dependent parents on the meager resources of their own.

The types of enterprises which used to offer benefits as part of the compensation package; large and well-established, steadily declined in Russia. The current understanding of who will bear the responsibility of care work precludes the possibility of privately provided subsidized or free child care replacing Soviet era enterprise system. Newly-emerging private enterprises frequently offer informal contracts and shadow wages, and leave benefit provision to the government, making the minimum possible contribution to familial policies at the state level. Teplova
suggests that this is in accordance with the familial neo-liberal theory that the enterprises which do not provide excessive benefit packages would be more competitive and would retain their workers. This pattern might slacken a little bit perhaps because of the volatility of the new private sector, the competition for jobs within that sector and high turnover. Despite the fact that during the transition period, it became possible to obtain social benefit-type services in the market, low wages and general poverty of the population kept the importance of benefits to employees high (Teplova 2005: 22).

Some enterprises attempted to keep such services going despite strong recommendations from Western advisers and international organizations to do otherwise. In the mid-1990s Russian enterprises, especially those that were the only significant employer in a community, continued to provide such benefits as housing and healthcare to their employees. According to a study carried out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), however, enterprises were less likely to continue to provide childcare services (Jacques Le Cacheux 1996: 20). By the end of the decade this is what happened. Since municipal governments generally lacked the funds to take over these facilities, many were closed.

Stringent regulations on government spending and budget deficits by international monetary organizations in return for giving much needed foreign loans to the Russian government directly and severely undermined the abilities of the people to cope with the shock of the transition. As Mikhalev (1996: 11) pointed out that, “...Prompted by acute budget problems in 1994, the government opted for a more flexible relationship between the off-budget funds and state budget resources. Budget allocations became a regular source of supplementary funding for the off-budget funds. At the same time the government gained access to the funds’ resources. Such access helps the government to avoid a formal increase in the state budget deficit which is under close watch by the international financial institutions, particularly the IMF. This actually has produced a fiscal illusion. By taking social services off the budget, the government reduces the share of the state in GDP as well as the size of the budget deficit. Nevertheless it does not diminish the state's responsibility for social policy, regardless of the existence of such off-budget funds.
The state still retains the duty to finance social programmes adequately. Thus the existence of the off-budget funds makes no difference regarding the public sector deficit in general. It is the overall public sector financial requirements, in which social expenditures form an important part, not the state budget deficit narrowly defined, that affect the economy as a whole.

The disintegration of socialist centralized command economy and restructuring of the economy as per the policies of Structural Adjustment formulated and overseen by IMF/WB in effect meant a systematic dismantling of state benefits and social security which has radically altered the gender order in post-Soviet Russia.

**Shifts in Family Policy**

The public discussion of a wide range of social ills during perestroika and glasnost was simultaneously accompanied by an increased attention to economic efficiency. Since a key element of the reforms was the deliberate privatization of a larger share of all state property, except for a few, most social groups like pensioners, children and women could not be protected. However, the lengthening shadows of acute demographic crisis resulted in a widespread agreement among government officials that “families with children” should not be harmed. At the same time, officials agreed that family assistance policies needed to be overhauled. In a roundtable discussion of the family published in the journal Nedelya in 1987, for example, M. Kravchenko, Vice Chair of the USSR State Committee on Labor and Social Questions, noted that the 6 billion rubles paid out annually in family assistance were paid in the form of benefits that had been “established in different years and for the solution of different problems. Some of them no longer play the role they were intended to play” (Nedelya 1987: 17 – 18). Gorbachev (1987: 1-2) reiterated the priority to streamline the economy and make it more efficient in his speech to the Congress of People’s Deputies in May of 1989 when he called for an “audit” of all social benefits and privileges.

In late summer of 1990 the newspaper Izvestiia reported that the Council of Ministers had “adopted a resolution on additional measures to provide social
safeguards for families with children in connection with the changeover to a regulated market economy” (Izvestiia 1990: 1). The monthly allowance for single mothers was increased from a fixed rate of 20 rubles to an amount equal to half the minimum wage (that is, to half of 70 rubles) (Izvestiia 1990: 1; Government of the Russian Federation 1994: 41).

There was some attempt to distinguish between those who genuinely needed this assistance and those who did not (McKinney 2004: 46). For example, the resolution “On Urgent Measures for Improving the Position of Women, Safeguarding Mother and Child and Strengthening the Family,” adopted by the Supreme Soviet in the spring of 1990, called for monthly allowances for children living in families with a per capita income of no more than twice the minimum wage. On the other hand, that same resolution also called for a one-time payment on the birth of every child, without regard to family income (Moskoff 1993: 105). Overall, social transfers constituted 16.7 percent of total monetary income of the population in 1995, up from 14.0 percent in 1992 (Aslund 1997: 139).

The system of social insurance benefits in Russia has also been reorganised along lines similar to those of the pension system. In August 1992 the Social Insurance Fund was created to take care of funding for sick, maternity and child care benefits. Like the Pension Fund, the Social Insurance Fund derives its revenue from a payroll contribution of 5.4% applying to every business or enterprise regardless of form of property. Both contributions and benefits are wage-related. As a rule, 74% of the contributions raised are left at the disposal of the enterprise to administer payment of benefits to its employees. The remaining 26% is transferred to the Fund to finance centrally administered benefits (Mikhalev 1996: 7).

Revision in the provision and structure of social benefits system has also meant that the responsibility is shifted to regional and other lower levels which usually are deprived of funds. Mikhalev (1996: 8) pointed out that local funds only offer limited emergency relief in the form of free meals, distribution of food and second-hand clothes, and provision of shelter for the homeless.

The system of family allowances was introduced in 1990 and has existed since then with a few minor revisions. The core of the system is formed by child
allowances, which differ for children aged under 6 and between 6 and 16. Children under six years old are eligible for a benefit at the rate of 70% of the minimum wage. For children of single mothers or divorced mothers who are unable to get alimony this benefit is 1.5 times higher, i.e. 105% of the minimum wage. Children aged 6 to 16 get a benefit of 60% of the minimum wage or 90% of it if in a single mother's family. This variation in the level of child benefit depending on age was criticised on the grounds that it costs more to support a child aged 6 to 16 than under 6, and in any case funds were insufficient in both cases. In a situation where subsistence minimum is not adequate for all basic needs, women, married or single, are forced to go and look for exploitative jobs.

In December 1993 a presidential decree introduced a universal child benefit regardless of age. It had not, however, come into effect by autumn 1994. In October 1994 the benefits for a child under 6 were 14,350 rubles a month or only 15.9% of the subsistence minimum which for children equalled 90,000 rubles (Mikhaelev 1996: 17). Even the amounts decided and revised by the governments put a severe strain on women who in the interim periods faced acute crisis of feeding their children and were surviving in near destitution.

In a decree on social benefits issued in the spring of 1993, Yeltsin raised the one-time payment for the birth of every child, the monthly and quarterly payments to families with children, and the monthly food allowance for all children enrolled in school (Khudyakova 1993: 29). It was not until July of 1998 that the law “On State Benefits for Citizens with Children” was amended to restrict payment of such allowances to those families considered ‘most needy’.

Traditionally, entitlement to maternity leave has been linked to employment. In 1993, the leave was extended to women who are laid off during pregnancy; in 1995, it was extended to full-time students; and in 1997 it was extended to 156 days for multiple births. There were two major types of leaves: maternity and “parental” leave. Maternity leaves normally last 140 days (70 days before and 70 days after the delivery). Mothers with at least one year of employment receive 100 percent of their regular salary during their maternity leave with a maximum total monthly payment of 85 times the minimum monthly wage (set at 450 rubles or about $14 per month in 2002. Maternity leave is still linked to employment except for the self-employed,
farmers, and students (Gusov 2003). Whereas the leave benefits previously had a fixed amount, they now constitute a proportion of the legally established minimum wage in the country. Such changes which gave the appearance of continuation with old policies was in fact a process of ideological training to wean away ‘dependents’ and make them more independent. Soviet regime tied the benefits to enterprises but then it did indeed cover almost the entire net of women. The above provisions in post-collapse Russia translated in ways to exclude a majority of women. As we noted before, the number of women in formal paid employment shrunk drastically and most women work in informal, part-time or casual jobs.

In 2002 parental leave replaced child care leave and, while the name changed, the length of time people could claim benefits remained unchanged. While on leave, a parent will receive a leave payment of 500 rubles (about $17) per month until the child reaches 1.5 years old and 50 rubles (about $1.7) per month during the age of a child from 1.5 to 3 years old (Teplova 2004).

Teplova explains that decentralizing or devolving child care facilities and the funding meant relief which was erratic and which eventually mostly trickled to a stop. There were two main forms of child care in Russia: nurseries for children up to the age of 3, and kindergartens for 4 to 6 year olds. Children started school at age seven. During the Soviet era, there was only a very minimal taxpayer-funded government run kindergarten system which was considered as a part of education system. With monetization of the benefits system such institutions have subsequently been either shut down or are accessible for children who can pay the fees. The 1999 law on the foundations of obligatory social insurance shifted the responsibility for paying child benefits, family allowances, maternity and other leaves away from the enterprises to regional social insurance funds. In 2000 the responsibility for providing preschool and kindergarten education shifted to local governments (Teplova 2004: 7).

All benefits were tied to the enterprises and were provided by employer. According to the new labour code, benefits are paid out of regional “social insurance funds” until the child reaches 1.5 years old. The leave benefits for children who are 1.5 to 3 years old are still paid by the employer from the payroll funds. Employers, instead of paying benefits directly, were required to pay a new, “single social tax,” or “unified social tax” amounting to 35.6 percent of an employee’s earnings up to
100,000 rubles (around $3,500 US), 20 percent of earnings between 100,000 and 300,000 rubles, and lower amounts on higher earnings. In turn, the social insurance fund pays for employees' maternity, parental and other leaves, as well as pension and other benefits. This accounted for the open reluctance of private enterprises to hire women and also led to a rise in shadow wages being paid in the form of informal contracts (Teplova 2005: 8-10).

In general, parental leave is substantially less generous than maternity leave. While on parental leave, a parent is entitled to 50 rubles (about US$1.7) per month in so-called “compensation payments,” paid by the employer from the payroll funds, until the child is three years old, which is yet another legacy inherited from the Soviet period. While this system of “compensation payments” has been retained in Russia its contents were revised. Removed from all other infrastructural benefits, it remained insufficient and made women, who mainly availed of this leave, an unattractive labor force. This “compensation” allowance is a direct cost to the enterprise, and paid from the general pool of money. In addition to this, a monthly in-home care giving allowance, with a payment of 500 rubles (about US$17) from the social insurance funds, is available to parents every month until the child reaches eighteen months of age. It is also often referred to as a “parental leave benefit”. A parent is entitled to this allowance while on leave, or working part time. As such, this allowance is a part of a package, along with the employer's compensation, allowing women to take care of a child at home (Teplova 2005). But this system of allowance is also routed through the employer and formal paid work which excluded a majority of women who do not work in these sectors.

Since becoming president, Vladimir Putin has devoted his energies more to tightening control than to fundamentally changing economic or social policies. Despite considerable discussion of the importance of implementing state assistance more rigorously, there has been very little change in practice. Putin has called for “transition to the principle of paying for medical care through insurance,” while recognizing the need to increase government spending on healthcare (McKinney 2004: 52-53). Mixing socialist rhetoric with a resolute restructuring of the economy, culture and ideology in a neo-liberal market economy frame have resulted in many such partial policies. Mostly, as in India, where any benefits to working population,
including women, are tied largely with their position in formal paid employment effectively excludes a majority of women existing on the margins of the formal economy.

The impact of the transition and its effect on women particularly along with acute demographic crisis has forced post-Soviet to change its orientation towards a strongly natalist direction. The end of year 2006 has seen an entire package of strongly natalist policies aimed at increasing the dwindling birthrate. This was facilitated also as result of a stronger economy flushed with petro dollars. However, despite the welfarist thrust in this arena the benefits remain structured in monetized forms, isolated from the larger structures of oppression and increasingly come with conditionalities and scrutiny by the state.

Putin’s annual address in May 2006 outlined Russian state’s gender policy clearly for the first time. Zakharov (2008: 929) has elaborated on the provisions made by the recent government in Russia in response to demographic crisis. He elaborates that, “First of all, there were significant increases in the size of the basic forms of benefits: The maximum size of pregnancy and childbirth benefits came to 16,125 rubles in 2007, as compared with 11,700 in the period 2003–2006. In general, maternity leave is paid for 70 days at 100% of the woman’s monthly salary (the average nominal salary in Russia in 2006 was about 11,000 rubles)... The one-off payment at the birth of a child was set at 6000 rubles from 1 January 2006, paid out of federal sources (between 1997 and 2000, it was 1,250 and in the period 2002–2005, it was 4,500 rubles). However, at the regional level, starting in 2005, an additional benefit was paid, determined by the regional administration (for example, Moscow has the maximum benefit for Russia, which is tied to the annually determined official subsistence minimum in that city: for the first child, it is five times this minimum (25,000 rubles in 2007) and for the second, a multiple of seven, and for the third and subsequent children, ten times this minimum.”

In a comprehensive way, Zakharov has given the details of child support payment being made in contemporary Russia. He (2008: 930) elaborates that, “From 1 January 2007, the monthly maternity leave benefit for up to 1.5 years was established at 40% of the recipient’s average wages, but not less than 1,500 rubles for the first child and 3,000 for the second and subsequent children, payable also where the
mother was unemployed, but not more than 6,000 rubles a month (in 2000, 167 rubles; in 2002, 500 and in 2006, 700 rubles, independent of birth parity but on condition of employment history)...The monthly federal benefit for children from 1.5 to 16 years of age (for those remaining in studies up to the age of 18) was repealed in 2005 (at that time, it was 70 rubles). From 2006, this is the prerogative of the regional authorities, who set differing levels (usually 100 –200 rubles) and some regions established the size of the benefit depending on birth parity and/or family income. In 2007, there was a recommendation to increase this benefit, which in fact occurred. For example, in Moscow the benefit, initiated on 1 January 2007, is paid only to families with a per capita income lower than the subsistence minimum (5,100 rubles in January 2007), and is 300 rubles (in 2006, it was 150 rubles), and for single mothers, 750 rubles (in 2006, it was 300 rubles).”

The shift in policy from comprehensive infrastructural benefits to monetary benefits has continued in Putin’s time. Acute demographic worries notwithstanding, all incentives towards increasing birthrates have been in the direction of cash amounts. This was the basic cornerstone of the concept of ‘maternal capital’ unveiled in Putin’s policy. This specified that 250,000 rubles ($9,600 or 7,200 Euros at the exchange rate of March 2007) be paid to a special individual account for mothers who gave birth or adopted a second child starting in January 2007. The measure also includes mothers who have not previously made use of this benefit and who have a third or subsequent child. The non-cash benefit is paid once in a mother’s life and may be spent only three years after the birth of the child, via an account and for one of the following purposes: private education for a child of any parity; obtaining housing in the Russian Federation; or, the formation of the investment part of a pension. Partial expenditure of “maternal capital” is allowed per calendar year and in any proportion for the established purposes” (Zakharov 2008: 930). While year 2007 did indeed prove to be more conducive and enhanced the birth rate but it remains to be seen if this can be sustained in the long term, at least enough to impact long-term demographic trends.

Feminist critics of Putin’s family policy share some concerns with liberal democratic opinion. Liberals are skeptical about the effect such measures will have on increasing the birth rate actually. The amount is too small in inflation ridden
contemporary Russia with basic health, education, housing out of reach for the middle class even with the benefits of ‘maternal capital.’ Families stand to loose more with the loss of income from one parent compared to the compensation offered by the state. Only women at the threshold of poverty might be induced to avail this measure. However, unlike the nationalists who demand virtually an institutionalization of women’s roles as mothers and wives in the family, feminists have pointed out that, “Monetary policies deflect attention from such urgent issues as the reform of maternal healthcare, where institutional trust is very low, or educational reforms. Feminists have also criticized the proposed programme for its shallow understanding of family types and arrangements and a focus on a certain type of family. Family benefits have to be more diversified; the programme’s focus on families with two children is not justified, they claim. Social policy should also address other types of families, such as single-parent households and families with more than two children. This argument has been put forth, for example, by Deputy Ekaterina Lakhova, representing the political movement Women of Russia (Rotkirch et al. 2007: 355).

In fact, year 2007 is being seen as ‘Baby Boom’ period. But apart from allocating a much larger share of the budget to deal with this ‘national crisis’, and strengthening the size of the benefit the basic system of measures did not undergo any significant change, if one does not consider the continuing tendency to strengthen the role of regional authorities and their financial responsibility for family policy. More than anything else, this policy shift has yet again reiterated the ideological orientation laid down by Gorbachev. Women have received state support at the cost of their economic rights and independence and a reinforcing of the neo-liberal male breadwinner model.

Feminists like Rotkirch, Temkina and Zdravomyslova (Rotkirch et al 2007: 354) have commented upon the traditional role assigned to fathers in Putin’s speech, which did not present any understanding of shared parenthood and pointed that, “These policies would strengthen the inferior positions of women on the labour market and reproduce gender polarization and gender imbalances on the symbolic level.” Elaborating their critique and suggesting the appropriate orientation of family policy in contemporary Russia they said, “We believe that priority should be given to policies fostering the growth of qualities and qualifications of parents, gender-equal
parenthood, improvement of childcare, family-friendly working conditions and maternity care systems. The symbolic appeal of the new presidential programme of fertility growth should not be underestimated, however. Russian women’s citizenship has once again been defined in terms of the working-mother contract. There is no longer any discussion of sending women ‘back home’. Instead, there is some recognition of the dilemma of child-rearing for educated women in contemporary Russia (to stay at home and quit work, or to prefer career over children), and of the forms of discrimination experienced by economically dependent housewives in their families. The state is viewed as the agent that should fight against family patriarchy. Even if parenthood is still defined in terms of motherhood only, gender issues are once more visibly at the centre of Russian national politics (Rotkirch et al. 2007: 356).

What has changed is the state’s attitude toward employment. It has abandoned its commitment to full employment and its desire to ensure high labor force participation rates for women. For some married women in Russia this may have provided welcome encouragement to stay at home and escape the dual burden; for the increasing number of single mothers it has made the burden that much heavier (McKinney 2004: 55) as they do not have the choice of not working.

Women-maintained Households: Shifting Burdens

So far, we have elaborated on the neo-liberal basis of gender regimes which can be observed in advanced capitalist countries. Neo-liberal framework constitutes a broad framework in which we have attempted to locate the shift in state policies regarding tasks of social reproduction in post-Soviet Russia. Shifts in state policies and the mechanisms of free market economy which continue to take shape in Russia are pointing towards the consolidation of interests and priorities of global capital at the cost of needs of people. Amongst various social groups that are being affected by this shift, women-maintained households are emerging as another very vulnerable group, apart from single mothers, which has to employ diverse survival strategies to cope with the transition.
A fundamental reorganization of the processes of social reproduction have left these women with having to manage with not only the dual responsibilities of taking care of their dependent families along with being forced to look for work that will pay to make ends meet; they are also encountering a growing reluctance of the state, private enterprises and other institutions to accommodate their needs. In such a situation, they are fast falling into the category of Russia's 'new poor'. In the following section we will look into the impact that such shifts in policy and popular attitudes is having on women who are solely responsible for maintaining their household and bringing up their children.

We have chosen the term 'women-maintained households' instead of 'single mother' or female headed households to avoid the exclusion of a vast section of women with children who might be divorced, widowed or estranged from their husbands. As Kiblitskaya (1999: 35) points, "...The phrase 'single mother' also appears to have a double meaning in Russia: in the wider sense it is sometimes applied to all mothers who are bringing up children without a husband or partner for any particular reason". While their situation varies from that of unmarried single mothers, they still share similar obstacles and difficulties in their situation. Increasingly, it may be better conceptualized as a stage in some women's lives. This is particularly the case in Russia, where the average ages of first marriage and of having a first child are fairly young and divorce rates are high (Kanji 2004: 211). In some countries, the term 'single motherhood' is used to encompass all the women who are bringing up children without a partner. It is this definition of women that we will allude to wherever we have used the term 'single mother'.

Many experts of the area have pointed to the high rate of adolescent motherhood in Russia, which rose alarmingly in the 1990s during which there was a record rise in teenage pregnancies. According to the noted Russian sexologist Kon, this amongst other trends, could be due to the 'new sexual revolution' during 1985-90, unleashed by perestroika. By early 2000, young people’s fertility rates dropped to the level observed in 1970s. The birth rate among 15-to 19-years-old girls more than doubled from 23 births per 1,000 girls in the mid 1960s to 56 births per 1,000 girls in 1990. The percentage of births outside marriage for women aged 15-19 years reached
47.2% in 2004 as compared with 18.7% in 1980 (Daguerre 2006: 185, 189 and McKinney 2004: 51).

The alarming trend towards increasing numbers of very young single mothers is accompanied by increasing cases of premature births, high mortality rate and many other health problems. These problems are more common for this group of women contributing to their vulnerability since as Lokshin et al (2000: 10) pointed out that such young women’s educational achievement is below that of other women in their age group, they have fewer employment opportunities and lower incomes; with sicker children, they need more health care, and are likely to need more leave time, which makes them unattractive to potential employers.

Citing the reason of women’s increasing absence from full time paid work in the formal and private sector, McKinney (2004: 38) says that, “…What has made life harder for lone mothers in the post-Soviet period, beyond the sharp drop in GDP spending in social security is not retreat from the commitment to women as mothers but retreat from the commitment to women as workers”. The number of women-maintained households that are facing destitution confirms the fears that women of this social group are indeed Russia’s new poor. Despite the skilled and high education background, this large group of women is almost always a part of the population sinking below poverty line.

In the third quarter of 1999, when the poverty rate for all households was 41.9 percent, that for families with children up to the age of 16 was 57.8 percent, and that for single-parent families, which are overwhelmingly female-headed, was 62.7 percent (Cook 2002: 119). McKinney (2004) attributes this both to the smaller number of wage earners in the family and to the generally poorer earning opportunities for women.

The lower wages are in large measure a result of the vertical and horizontal job segregation. This employment pattern results both in lower wages – official statistics put average earnings of women at 56 percent of the average for men in 2000, down from 70 percent for much of the Soviet period and in a much more serious problem with wage arrears (McKinney 2004: 49). Kanji (2004: 215) also reports that, “…Two-parent households clearly derive a much higher proportion of their income
from cash earnings than lone-mother households. The high proportion of income derived from cash earnings in woman-maintained households is those in which a woman’s cash earnings contribute 70 percent or more of total household income...Reported earnings still make up only 41.1 percent of total household income for all households, including those without children. Such earnings comprise 54.9 percent of total income for all households with children; 60 percent for households with two parents; and 46.7 percent of total income for all lone-mother households.”

In a poignant and illuminating ethnographic study of the condition of single mothers, Kiblitskaya (1999: 48) draws upon the testimonies of many such women to observe that, “...It should therefore be noted that, on the whole, the living standards of the single mothers of today compared with their position during the Soviet period, have fallen significantly. While single mothers used to have a stable income, in the present conditions of chronic unemployment, particularly in mono-industrial towns, which were based on one branch of industry now in decline, they now have almost no chance of finding jobs”. Poverty ridden women with dependent children resort to desperate strategies to live life one day to the next.

Demographic concerns and a rising hostility to women’s employment combined with the primary incentive of profit in the market operation have had a profound impact on women’s participation in formal paid work. This difficulty is compounded for single mothers who are preferred even less due to the possibility of them taking leaves for caring for sick or young children and attendant costs of accommodating their reproductive roles. Teplova (2005: 12) cites data to say, “...More than 50 per cent of employers surveyed by the Centre for Labour Market Studies in 1999 indicated that the parental leave would decrease women's attractiveness as employees”. She indicates towards a trend observed in most capitalist market economies where private enterprises prefer ‘no-frills attached’ young male employees. If they do take mothers in then various evasion tactics are used to avoid benefits. She says, “...The most common evasion mechanism is the practice of "informal contracts," when employees (both men and women), in return for declining legally-stipulated social benefits, are promised and paid “shadow” salaries...quite often an employee has only a very blurry idea of the amount of the compensation to be received every month. ...The reason why enterprises would offer informal
contracts are obvious: paying salary for employees on leave (under the old system) or paying 35.6 percent of payroll into a social insurance fund (under the new system), as well as providing a host of other employment rights, is expensive” (Teplova 2005: 11).

A growing female workforce is concentrated in the low paid spheres, such as light industry and healthcare and education. Working in the private sector brings the highest rewards in terms of wages, but also requires the longest hours. Single mothers are disadvantaged in obtaining private-sector jobs because of their need for work flexibility and the long hours such jobs require. In the workplace they may face a subtle form of discrimination or be overburdened with work. Tartakovskaya (2000) has suggested that such women may be pressed to work exceptionally long hours. The prejudice against single mothers as social failures tarnishes their bargaining position in the workplace and vis-à-vis potential employers, exposing them to exploitation. In addition to financing expenditures out of current income, single mothers, who have the option, are also forced to live out of their savings. Divorced mothers are able to finance a significant amount of their expenditures through savings, whereas other single mothers, in particular those who have never married, have few savings to draw upon (McKinney 2004: 215-16).

Single mothers face many problems in the job market due to additional economic pressures and much greater insecurity mothers. They work longer hours than women in two parent families and also have to make up for the pay discrimination. If they have second jobs, they work the longest hours of all workers in secondary employment (McKinney 2004: 221). Clarke (2002) has observed that the nature of jobs in secondary employment have shown a trend of being episodic or unstable rather than providing a regular activity and steady source of income. The apparent willingness of such mothers to seize any and all labor market opportunities to supplement their incomes reveals their near destitute condition and need for additional resources. Wage arrears, wage delays and unlawful redundancies compound the stress of mothers maintaining their households.

The natalist shift very recently witnessed in Russia has yet to be implemented to reach this category of mothers who are finding it difficult to find a job in the labour market to suit their need. Faced with unfavourable attitudes, they are going to be
subject to even a greater scrutiny by a state and society that is increasingly relegating women back into traditional hierarchies. Working single mothers' needs form the intersection between production and reproduction roles of women and responsibilities of the state. It can be seen that the unwillingness of state and market to accommodate the reproductive processes into capitalist production for profits makes this dilemma even harder for working mothers.

**Shift from ‘Welfare Culture’ to a ‘Culture of Work’**

When the Russian government undertook a thorough revamping of the ‘wasteful, inefficient and unnecessary’ universal welfare system, it was sought to be legitimised by the neo-liberal rhetoric of a need to shift from a ‘culture of dependency’ to ‘independent individual initiative’. It was to be a shift from entitlements to responsibility or mutual obligation. In times of such hardships the logic that the government should consider giving tax payers money to those who were ‘genuinely needy and deserving’ gained much greater legitimacy and suited the new regime.

Similarly, women as sole parents, constituting the greatest ‘moral hazard’ to neo-liberals, are increasingly becoming particular targets of the Government’s reformulated welfare policies. Whilst married women who stayed at home to care for children were ‘normal’ and encouraged, women as sole parents, who rely upon social security for income must enter / re-enter the labour market or engage in re-training to barely stay afloat. Research conducted by O. Zdravomyslova (2003) between 1992 and 1994 showed that public opinion remains unenlightened in relation to unmarried women and tends to support only a ‘normal’ family way of life. Lone parent families are still not considered ‘normal’ by the Russian public and are included in the Goskomstat as ‘incomplete families’.

While the government wins considerable political capital at the expense of recipients who are portrayed as ‘idle’, ‘irresponsible’, ‘dependent’, it also hides the realities of globalisation and labour market deregulation. In a telling incident that Kiblitskaya (1999: 53) encountered during her research in Kaluga she recounts the
callous and harsh attitudes of the people employed in social welfare centre in Kaluga. She says, “While taking part in a telephone call-in with local people, the person responsible for social welfare in the town of Kaluga, for example, noted that during the following year (1999) the social welfare department was planning to ‘begin work with the ‘truly’ ‘socially dependent’ in society. There is a category of people who do not want to work. Society cannot feed all these ‘parasites’. During an interview with a female representative of one of the social welfare centres, it also became clear that her attitude towards single mothers was the same - that they were social dependants. Her position was clear: those who want to survive survive, while the lazy and the slackers all come to the social welfare centre for help. This is particularly disconcerting given that many single mothers visit these centres not by choice: the situation with work in the town is very difficult and there are simply no opportunities to find jobs.”

The unemployment problem, for example, is more complex than simply one of supply. Feminist critiques have questioned demand side whereby labour markets consistently fail to produce new jobs, particularly new full-time jobs. The current government’s macroeconomic policy is more concerned with the problem of inflation than job creation. Viewed from this critical perspective, the economic and social costs of globalisation, labour market deregulation and social security reform are inhumane and are disproportionately borne by most vulnerable social groups.

Whilst the flexibility of casual / part-time work arrangements can provide women with increased work opportunities and a better way of managing the work / family balance, Pascal and Kwak (2005) reminds us that ‘freeing up the labour market is intended to enhance the profits of capital rather than to liberate women’.

Kiblitskaya (1999: 37) points that mothers who are maintaining their households and are also single mothers, when forced to go to welfare centres to claim benefits, often encounter, “a very widespread attitude amongst the employees of social welfare centres that single mothers are ‘social dependants’.” Whilst disputing the accusation of the casual worker / women as the typical welfare cheat, this finding, comes as no surprise considering that the absence of a regular and predictable income from employment (a feature of casual jobs) necessitates additional income generating/income support arrangement, such as that provided through social security allowances. Although in actuality, apart from some thriving cities like Moscow it is
very difficult to come by any job at all. Kiblitskaya has recorded the desperation of single mothers who are willing to take any income generating jobs. As she points, "While single mothers used to have a stable income, in the present conditions of chronic unemployment, particularly in mono-industrial towns, which were based on one branch of industry now in decline, they now have almost no chance of finding jobs. Moreover, violations of labour legislation are leading to a situation where the population's rights (including single mothers) are increasingly being violated" (Kiblitskaya 1999: 48).

McKinney points to another tendency that contributes to this discourse. She says, "...Lone mothers and their households are often presented as a homogeneous group, sharing similar disadvantages and existing as a group distinct from other women and from two-parent households. The crude conflation of all lone-mother households, despite their varying histories and experiences, facilitates the social construction of lone motherhood as a social problem" (McKinney 2004: 221-22).

In such a situation, even enhanced cash benefits, distributed by the will of these very agencies can keep desperate single mothers at their mercy and scrutiny and give a much greater measure of control over such women. Accompanied with changes in the provision of childcare services and the lack of private childcare women maintaining households will have to either become largely dependent on this aid or they risk loosing the benefit if they 'deviate' from the set expectations.

Commodification of Care Work

Withdrawal of state subsidies to various institutions that had been created to socialize the tasks of reproduction and their subsequently increasing commodification has as its aim sending women back into their home. Monetization of benefits without the provision of institutions and socialization of the tasks of care will force women to put all their energy and time into privately providing these services or else loose the benefits. By drafting policies that make labour market unfriendly and unaccountable to women, in particular, single mothers, with a simultaneous marketisation of domestic services and care work, women are being forced into a total dependence on
men. Women who are single mothers, for any reason, face worse hardships than any other social group. Crèches, kindergartens, childcare institutions like state nurseries were seen as a part of the overall education system. With the transition this framework completely changed and the majority of Russian families who could not afford private childcare facilities had to devise various strategies to perform these functions within their home.

Teplova (2005: 8) states that, “…According to the official Goskomstat data, the number of childcare institutions declined from 87.9 thousand in 1990 to 53.3 thousand in 2000, a practical collapse of the system of nurseries. The number of communities with state nurseries declined from 55.2 percent in 1994 to only 34 percent in 2000, and the proportion of children over three years old in those facilities dropped by more than 50 percent from 9,009 thousand in 1990 to 4,263 thousand in 2000. Less than one percent of Russian children are cared for in a privately-owned child care centre.” And she further states that, “…The data shows that the bulk of care is provided at home: in the middle of the 1990s, more than 60 percent of all preschool children were cared for at home. For preschool children over three years old, this number is 47 percent. About seven percent of children were cared for by relatives living outside of the household. In most cases, grandparents head the list of relatives caring for a child outside of the household”.

Now large public enterprises are almost extinct that earlier used to function like micro welfare state. As we mentioned earlier, almost all child care services and benefits were routed through women’s employment. The enterprises were responsible not only for providing with highly subsidized child care institutions but also provided other domestic services like free meals to children in kindergartens and nurseries, transport, cheap and available food provisions, schools and sanatoriums for rest and recovery. With monetization of benefits, not only services have ceased to be provided, the benefits themselves are pegged to subsistence minimum which constitutes half and in case of children a very small percentage of actual expenditure. Because, gender patterns remained substantially unaltered even in the Soviet time, i.e. domestic responsibilities were shouldered by women primarily, stereotypes regarding gender roles have been intensified rather than being eroded in the midst of the rhetoric of choice and opportunities for women.
Mikhalev (1996: 17) pointed towards the fact of significant insufficiency of the very concept of subsistence minimum. He says, "...the subsistence minimum allowed only one-third of personal income for clothes, footwear, medicines and services, and virtually nothing for consumer durables. Of course it was totally inadequate, especially in a situation when prices for those goods were soaring... Child allowances accounted for only 5% or less of the family budget in half of all households. In 80% of families it was 10% or less of their budget. Such a level of child benefit is clearly insufficient even for low-income households; 59% of the poorest 20% of families consider the level of child support insignificant. At the same time 57% of them declared that they would not be ready to give up this form of support voluntarily". Such low levels of benefits have undermined the possibility of any real choice for women and have been responsible for single parent family's poverty. Considering the rising cost of rents and utilities, scarcity of housing and soaring prices of essential commodities practically it became compulsory for women maintaining households or bringing up children alone to look for jobs on any terms.

Kiblitskaya recounts the daily struggles of single mothers to provide for basic needs like education and health for their children. "Many single mothers face the problem of not having their children accepted into pre-school education. According to Svetlana, a single mother in Kaluga, 'the situation with places at kindergarten is also very tense. Single mothers only pay half the fees but the kindergartens need real money, so they don't really want to accept the children of single mothers'". She further documents the problems of single mothers. She recounts that, "...In recent years, schools have begun to collect money from parents for all sorts of different reasons, including the payment of wages for cleaners and security guards. In most cases, this is compulsory, and there have even been cases of teachers shaming those parents who are unable to collect the necessary sum of money in front of their children, embarrassing them. Some single mothers try to talk to the head teachers about this, but, as a rule, school management is insistent and demand to be paid" (Kiblitskaya 1999:101-02).

In such a situation women have evolved drastic strategies to cope with this stress. Pine and Bridger (1998: 11) have pointed out that, "...By stressing local-level survival strategies we do not for a moment intend to minimise the very real power
exercised by the dominant structures of state and market economy; rather, we wish to show that individuals respond to those external structures, and are neither victims of outside forces nor themselves totally in control of their own fates." Wider family networks have played a particularly important role in helping Russian families cope with adversity. Household structure is not simply determined by partnerships or the marital status of parents. Historically also, women have often given great importance to the kin networks to enable them to cope with their multiple tasks. Kandiyoti (1999) points out that the boundaries of families can be redrawn to include wider kin, if their inclusion is mutually beneficial and facilitates collective survival.

Such family networks have been a lifeline for a very large number of women headed households. Other kin can provide benefits in the forms of additional earnings, pension income, or potential childcare services. It is not surprising that 27 percent of children from lone-mother households live with one or two grandparents, compared to only 17 percent of children in two-parent households (McKinney 2004: 212). Divorced lone-mother households benefit from much higher contributions from family and friends (16.4 percent) than do still-married lone-mother households (9.7 percent). This difference probably accounts for the low proportion of divorced lone mothers living in extended family arrangements. Instead of helping by sharing housing, family members send money. Widowed lone mothers and women who maintain their households economically receive a very low proportion (2.8 percent and 1.0 percent) of total household income from family and friends.

The impact of shifting policies and changes brought about by the transition are not always visible. But they are equally drastic and contribute in fundamental ways towards exacerbating long term trends of deterioration. Most single mothers recognised to one extent or another that they had reacted to deterioration in their position by cutting their consumption levels. Almost all of them noted that they had begun to eat less and had significantly reduced the range of foodstuffs in their diet. Most had almost stopped buying themselves clothes and shoes altogether, had stopped visiting people and also inviting people to visit them (Kiblitskaya 1999: 112).

For those single mothers who had parents in their families on whom it was possible to rely, their survival strategy was to rely on their parent’s pension income. Faced with conditions of permanent wage delays and arrears, in addition to child
benefit arrears and unemployment benefit arrears, many respondents were living on the pensions received by their parents. Although pensions are themselves not very high, they are paid more regularly and are sometimes the only possible source of money. In answer to the question put by Kiblitskaya (1999: 112) during her survey, "...who in your family would you call the breadwinner?" The results of the research showed that the breadwinner was usually between the age of 55 and 75: 70% of all breadwinners belonged to this age group."

Dachas or family plots also are a part of survival for such households although women maintained households face the problem not only of shortage of funds to meet even small expenditures to get the farming going, they are also constrained by a lack of working hands.

The impact of the recent shift in policies of cash benefits has yet to be seen on this category of single mothers but undoubtedly, this group constitutes the greatest loosers from the transition. The struggle to maintain their autonomy and dignity in the face of harsh conditions, their battle for daily survival is indeed remarkable.

Reproductive Health and Demographic Concerns

In his address to the Federal Assembly (May 2006), President Putin centrally focused on the acute demographic crisis faced by Russia. Depleting ranks in defense forces and productive labour pool of the country was making the country vulnerable, both internally and externally. Increasing the birth rate was an imminent priority of the coming years.

This speech was in the spotlight internationally for its emphasis on foreign policy and attention to demographic issues. Russian feminists have critiqued Putin for linking the ‘preservation of the nation’ with ‘love and preservation of the family’ citing Dmitrii Likhachev, first citizen of St. Petersburg, a liberal nationalist. He said that ‘love for one’s country starts from love for one’s family.’ Conflating the two, Putin’s speech however, outlined the subordinate role of the family in the service of the nation. “Putin positioned himself as an adherent of the Russian traditions of a
strong state, traditional patriotic values and gender polarization, and distanced himself from the Soviet past (Rotkirch et al. 2007). He suggested that three factors directly affected the 'most acute problem facing the country', which were mortality, migration and fertility. To address this problem he unraveled the concept of state support to women bearing a second child and called it an innovative concept of 'maternal capital' which would compensate the mother with the losses that she will incur by loosing her career momentum.

This presidential address came in a context of the alarming trend of a demographic transition in post-Soviet Russia. Zakharov (2008: 908), in a most recent study, cites twin phenomena which contributed to the demographic crisis. “On the one hand death rate is steadily rising and birth rates are decreasing which now have come to below replacement levels, and on the other the overall profile of the population is falling into ageing category. The overall population decrease for 2004 was 694 thousands or −4.8 per 1000 of the mid-year population. This decrease took place because of a surplus of deaths (2,295,000) over births (1,502,000), amounting to 793,000 which was not compensated by the positive international migration balance of 100 thousand or 0.7 per 1000 (including all official corrections for underreporting of immigrants). The population has been decreasing since 1993; the natural increase has been negative since 1992, making up −6.6 per 1000 in 2000–2002. In 1993–2004, Russia’s population decreased by 5,087,000. In 1970, the median age was 30.5; in 2005 it was 37.3. In 1990, the population aged 65+ made up 9.9% and the youth aged 0–19 accounted for 29.9%.

By comparison, in 2005, the population aged 65+ made up 13.7% and 23.8% were youth aged 0–19. The single cause of the ageing population is low fertility of an under replacement level.” Vassin (1995: 176) had pointed in a discussion of determinants and implications of aging population in Russia that after World War II, for the first time a negative growth (-0.2 percent in 1993) was registered after the turmoil of the transition. The trend of increasing cohort of elderly people in the Russian population is unfavorable for adapting to market reforms imposed in the post-collapse labor market and it makes the transition a particularly more painful process for the people. Increasing fertility has been cited as the most important factors in securing the demographic balance in Russia.
Accordingly, the orientation of the Presidential address set the tone for the upcoming ‘baby boom’ year. Taking cue from the Presidential address all legislative and executive preparations were made by the end of 2006 so that all new measures to stimulate birthrate could come into force from the beginning of 2007. A very strongly pro-natalist policy was worked out which took up from 1990-1991 when such natalist policies were almost stopped. Rising inflation and international pressures combined to reduce previous benefit policies to ineffective and delayed implementation. But a shifting balance of power, externally- the threat of building strong defenses against NATO expansion and aggression and internally- increasing influence of Orthodox Church and nationalist forces and labour shortage impelled Putin’s regime to come up with such policies.

President Putin had also spoken about replacement external migration and improving public health as important measure but no clear policy regarding these two components of the state’s efforts to meet with the demographic challenge has been articulated till date. In the current situation the levels of external migration are insufficient to meet the required replacement.

Reproductive health issues are intimately connected with fertility levels of a country. One consequence of Russian poverty has been the high incidence of nutritional deficiencies and of various infectious diseases associated with low income. Recent studies have found that significant numbers of Russian women are deficient in such nutrients as folic acid, iron, calcium, and some of the B vitamins, and nearly half of pregnant women are malnourished. During the 1990s, there was a decline in the average weight, height, chest size, and muscle strength of Russian children (Malakhova 1999: 1, 5; Zouev 1999: 24; Massey 2002: 2).

According to the Russian Ministry of Health, drug use rose by almost 400 percent in the 1990s (Mereu 2002). This trend has lend itself to not only the increasing phenomenon of prostitution and pornography but also in turning the attention towards debates on sexual purity and morality. Some experts claim that a sharp rise in the mortality rate for children and young women since 1997 is due in large measure to increased prostitution (BBC Monitoring 2001). It is not often that connections are made between these health problems, drug use or sexually transmitted diseases and inadequate diet, economic hardships and social dislocations arising from the transition

The instrumental view of the estate of women's sexual rights and control over their bodies is revealed in the shifts currently being made in social policies. For instance, the minimum age for marriage was reduced in the Family Code from 18 years to 16 years. Similarly, in 1997 age of sexual consent was decreased from 16 to 14 years. The rising rate of violence against teenage girls and increasing infections among them indicated the detrimental effect these policies are having on women. The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation says that a sexual relationship with a teenager above 14 years of age is only an offence in the case of rape. (Daguerre 2006: 197) This was to encourage sexual activity to boost birthrates but as we can see, it not only has not led to change in fertility rates in fact it has led to an increased vulnerability of adolescents to sexual exploitation and exposure to diseases.

The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (1999: 5) brought out alarming data on syphilis morbidity. In 1997, 6% of Russian teenagers between 15 and 17 were infected with syphilis. This rate represents a 70-fold increase from 1990. In 1993, the government adopted a family planning policy under the Presidential program entitled "Children of Russia." This federal program was financed out of the state budget which was no longer funded after a few years. Syphilis among young girls reached a peak in 1996 where 596 per 1000 girls in the age group of 15-17 years and 1,302 per 1000 girls in the age group of 18-19 years were infected. By 2003 this rate had sharply come down but it remained very high compared to the 1980s (Daguerre 2006: 191).

The sickness rate among Russian newborns climbed from 82.4 per 1,000 in 1981 to 173.7 per 1,000 in 1991, while the incidence of birth defects in the early 1990s was about 15 percent (Nezavisimaya gazeta 1992: 6; Yelena Shafran 1994). Deaths per 1,000 members of the Russian population rose from 7.4 in 1960 to 10.4 in 1986, then, much more rapidly, to 15.7 in 1994 (Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po statistike 1987: 407; Boris Gorzev 1996: 35). Life expectancy at birth for males in Russia fell from 63.1 years in 1969–70 to 61.5 in 1979–80, then rose to 63.9 in 1990, before falling sharply to 57.7 in 1994 (Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR Po statistike 1987: 409; 1991: 94).
As of January 1, 1999, there were 10,758 reported cases of HIV in Russia, including 449 children. Among the 345 individuals reportedly diagnosed with AIDS to date, 115 are children and 225 were adults; 92 children have died of AIDS. Experts estimate that the actual number of HIV-positive individuals is somewhere between 12,000 and 60,000. (1999 The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy 1999: 9) Since 2000, Daguerre and Corrin (2006: 191) contend, it has reached epidemic proportions. As of September 30, 2005 the number of infected people rose to 318,794 of which 20% are women out of whom 30% are teenagers.

These indicators of falling health and diseases have only managed to catch the attention of the media, both nationally and internationally, to further stereotype women in Russia as sexually promiscuous. The political and religious discourse manipulates this into further reasons for exercising greater control over women’s bodies and sexual behaviour. The linkages between market inroads in the health sector and falling health are seldom made. What is happening in post-collapse Russian society is that because of a shortage of pharmacists, people without the necessary training prepare medicines, and there is a growing problem with fraudulent production (RFE/RL Newsline 2001a). Medicines for children are particularly hard to find. According to Aleksandr Baranov, chair of the executive committee of the Russian Pediatricians’ Union, few Russian medicines are available except in adult doses, and foreign medicines, which do come in appropriate doses, are at least twice as expensive; less than 5 percent of the medicines needed for Russian children are currently available (McKinney 2004: 51).

The proportion of young mothers who died during childbirth showed a slight increase from 3.5% in 1994 to 4% in 1995 (The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy 1999: 6). Zakharov (2008: 915) has pointed towards the equal, if not more, importance of health maintenance from the point of view of fulfilling the goal of stimulating birthrates. He says, “At the end of the day, what is important for family and society is not the number of children to which an average woman can and actually does give birth, but how many of them survive to socially significant ages, are socialized and come to replace their parents (that is effective fertility). A decrease in inefficient fertility is the essence of the first demographic transition.” The need is to look at the alarming trends of falling reproductive health of women and the children.
born in such situation in order to also improve the demographic imbalance faced by Russia.

The issues of reproductive health and demographic concerns often coincide. But equally often the latter are prioritized to the exclusion of the former. While in Russia, falling birthrate, changing patterns of fertility and norms of marriage are inextricably linked with drastic changes in socio-economic circumstances and individual reproductive choices of women and men; the state and market are reflexively going for cosmetic commitments and patriarchal reorganization of sexual labour. The debates surrounding abortions are revealing in this instance.

Many political and social groups are articulating their interests and claiming legitimacy by being vocal on women’s right to choose for an abortion. The state’s ministry of Health is no longer the only legitimate claimant of representing the nation’s health. Many newly established organizations are now involved in this area with competing claims on representing women’s interests. Among them are the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian Association of Family Planning, various women’s political organizations, and nationalist political movements. There is also active participation by various religious groups and religion-related public movements, such as the Roman Catholic Church and, associated with it, the “Pro-Life Movement” and “Right-to-Life International.” The Russian Orthodox Church became very active in anti-abortion propaganda by publishing miscellaneous pamphlets, leaflets, and articles in early 1990s (Albanese 2003).

The market has also been very active on this issue. Legal commercialization of induced abortion and contraceptive services abounds in Russia now. The price for oral contraceptives varies from 90 rubles to 200 rubles; the minimum monthly wage in Russia in 1999 was 83.52 rubles (USD 3.30) (The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy 1999: 8). As part of withdrawal of state from social sectors under the supervision of international monetary agencies like the IMF/WB, decentralization and legal commercialization has occurred in all arenas of health services and is fastest in mostly larger cities and economically advanced regions of Russia. In March 1994 the Russian government issued bureaucratic directives to increase birth rates and reduce abortions. One of the directives was to remove most abortions from medical insurance.
coverage and introducing fees for them (Sargeant 1996: 281). This came at a time of chronic unemployment and uncertain future.

According to Popov (1994), this abortion industry has developed new, advanced techniques for performing induced abortions, "...including magnetic cervical cups, manual massage, and different reflectorial techniques. There is currently a flood of advertisements in Moscow newspapers for these new Russian abortion technologies." Since these services in the market are often too expensive to be affordable to a majority of Russians (Marsh 1996; Sargeant 1996; Rankin-Williams 2001), a very high number of abortions are 'out of clinic' or clandestine operations. This invariably leads to complications and infections.

Since the 1970s, Russia's decline in fertility was primarily accomplished by a very high abortion rate. Moreover, induced abortion in Russia has been used not only for birth limitation, but also for birth spacing. The substitution of abortion with effective methods of contraception has yet to take place on a large scale, and induced abortion is still the primary method of family planning in Russia (Popov 1994). Russia remains one of the countries with the highest abortion rate.

The reasons for this have been state intervention and formulation of family planning and population policies over a long period in such a way that while women have been accorded the right to choose to give birth or not, the necessary information, medical facilities, safe contraceptive methods have been made unavailable to them. This condition has accorded the state the flexibility to resort to a renewed emphasis on women's primary function as mothers when the need has arisen. But we can see that even during times of such policy orientation, women resort to dangerous and illegal abortion procedures to exercise their reproductive choice although this is at the severe cost of their life or health.

In 1996 the government widened the criteria for legal abortions in, perhaps, an attempt by Yeltsin to win over women electorate on the eve of elections. In 2003, in the absence of any pressing political imperative, the government did an about turn and reduced the social indications for abortion from 13 to 4, thereby restricting it (Daguerre and Corrin 2006: 196). In today's context, when Putin has proposed a "maternal capital" and an era of "Baby Boom" is being announced and the success of
strong pro-natalist cash benefits package by the state is also taken as guaranteed, Zakharov (2008) reminds us that the fertility trend has not changed significantly. Women and men continue to take reproductive decisions also taking into account their circumstances and choices.

Equally telling are voices from social actors involved in this debate. Women and their choices and health are excluded from the overarching debate on measures to be taken to meet the demographic crises. Moral and determinist arguments are used to articulate larger political and economic interests often posing as the true representatives of women’s own interests. Their aim is often to seek control over women’s sexuality and sexual choices. Vanden-Heuvel (1993: 491) reports that, “Numerous Russian nationalists believed that “communism, sexual permissiveness and women’s emancipation have destroyed the country’s moral foundations”. These attitudes were reflected in Russia’s population policies. Marsh (1996: 15-16) noted that, “...the issue of abortion is revisited, with some sections of society seeking to ban it in order to increase the indigenous population and prevent it from being overwhelmed by alien immigrants.” She added that, “...in Russia, the population decline in the 1990s, along with the diminishing proportion of ethnic Russians in the population, helps to reinforce this nationalistic message.” Simultaneously, in post-Soviet Russia, there was the beginning of a largely-male, vocal, anti-abortion movement (Koblitz: 1995), partly supported by the Russian state. The state’s goal was to fraternize powerful religious forces and also to use the moral and religious rhetoric to promote changes in attitudes towards fertility and abortion. Religion was used to serve broader national goals (Albanese 2003). In April 1997 in a conference titled ‘On Orthodox Faith in Defense of Life and Family’; the religious order gave its main arguments against sex education. ‘Rodina’ supported Orthodox Church and proposed replacing sex education with preparation for parenthood and family life courses (Dagurre and Corin 2006: 195).

Most political parties became more vocal in voicing their opinion on women’s ‘natural’ roles and its abdication leading to a demographic crisis. Liberal Democratic Party proposed to legalize early marriage as well as polygamy to increase birth rates. They proposed prohibiting abortions for 10 years to boost birth rates. ‘Rodina’ directly equated declining birthrates with a decline in traditional family values. United
Russia asked for more parental leave and benefits, which is what Putin did as his government's single contribution to women's reproductive roles. S. Mironov, speaker of the Federal Assembly and leader of 'Russian Party of Life' argued for changes in labour, tax and budget codes to make them more family friendly (Daugrre and Corrin 2006: 192, 195). They were all unanimous in blaming women choosing abortions as the most crucial factor responsible for the declining birthrate.

According to Kay (1997: 88), "...in independent Russia, scaremongering politicians have linked the 'demographic crises' to a possible threat to national security." Recently, Russian political discourse has adopted a more and more stringent note of moral panic reiterating the impending threat of 'extinction of the nation'. Kachalova and Chernomazova (1996) quote a demographer, Alexander Sinelnikov, who calculated that if the present birth-rate is maintained, the population of Russia will be halved in another two generations. Extrapolating his calculations in 1,000 years, he comes to the conclusion that at the beginning of the fourth millennium, the citizens of Russia will number 150. He is horrified by the thought that, "How would it be if this decline in the birth-rate touches the entire planet? This would lead to the inevitable extinction of the human race in approximately 1,000 years".

He argues that, "The idea that the interests of the individual or family are greater than those of society can be only a pretty slogan. If people must always be right in their disputes with the state, then they would stop paying taxes and serving in the army, which would lead any nation to collapse". The demographer further laments that "the involvement of women in the work force...leads to a decline in the birthrate, and makes possible the dissolution of marriages on the initiative of women: economic dependence no longer keeps them from divorce..." Spoken in such stark terms, this argument nevertheless is revealing in the sense that control over women's reproductive capacity and prescriptions of citizen's duty are collapsed into the broader agenda of consolidation of power by the state. Traditional patriarchal hierarchies are harnessed to reorganize the changing dynamics of the new nation in the making.

Under certain political situations, priorities based upon "scientific" and moral foundations can become the basis for government policy (Kachalova and Chernomazova 1996). This argument from the mouth of a demographer exposes the
fault line of pure scientific facts or statistical truths when used as the bases for formulating social policies like demography.

The debates criss-crossing demographic, nationalist, immigration and religious discourses in Russia have been attempting to mobilize issues of reproductive rights and freedom of women to make their case for a stronger Russia. Often, politically opposed to each other in vying for the top place in projecting themselves as representing true interests of the nation, each political platform is however, united in 'correcting’ deviations in women’s behaviours and choices, especially regarding reproductive issues. While, abortion seems to be the most visible arena of political and moral contest, other equally important issues of marriage, divorce and sexuality are similarly under great public scrutiny to ensure a ‘natural, normal and moral’ family environment. Reproductive health, malnutrition and falling mortality rates are hardly seen as alarming issues clamouring for immediate attention by a state which is wholly preoccupied with its concern for a dying nation, depleted armed forces and a weak aging population.

We have observed that state policies in collusion with the market forces are reorganizing the processes of social reproduction in favour of male neo-liberal interests. Profit driven free market has refused to accommodate the needs and costs of social reproduction targeting specifically women, driving them out of paid and secure high income jobs. The shift in state policies has worked very systematically to make labour market unfriendly for women. Alongside, withdrawal of state from institutionalised domestic services and care institutions have forced women to make way for men in the volatile, insecure but lucrative private sector. Instead, they assume domestic and care work responsibilities in the increasingly private domain of the family. In situations where women have dependent children and other family members, they are facing destitution. The choice of quality medical care, good education for children and consumption items in the market have certainly widened but in the face of real restriction of incomes, it has very little value for a majority of women who experience this change as an experience of inequality, undignified and brutal dependency and the utterly impersonal market which without fail prioritises the interest of profit over and above the needs of most vulnerable sections of society.
In this context, it is optimistic to suppose that international oil-price generated boom in the Russian economy and a fast growth rate will be an adequate answer to the kind of challenges that Russian society is facing today. If the orientation of policies continues in the present direction then women will tend to lose the rights they had in the socialist era, however complicated, insufficient or unresolved they might have been. The monetization of child care benefits and other social securities attached with various tasks of social reproduction has so far, neither shifted the burden solely from women, nor has it induced any great stimulus to the falling birth rate. As the contradictions sharpen in today’s Russia and cultural and ideological recasting of women’s identity is underway, it remains to be seen how the interests of global capitalism to maximize profits can be reconciled with those of women’s rights and emancipation in future. In the following chapters, we will look at the reproduction of gender ideology in popular culture and political discourse to see the possible identities that are being offered to women and whether they can be the renewed basis of effective political mobilization of women for their rights.