Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies • Vol. 7 (56) No. 2 – 2014

F!!! In the name of the father. Abusing the discourse on reproduction

Aleksandar TAKOVSKI [1]

Regulating sexuality has long been an institutional practice exercised towards the accomplishment of strategic economic and political ends. The fundamentally functional triad framing this practice is 'power-ideology-discourse'. Relying on this general conceptual framework, the study's prime objective is to identify and account for the elements of power abuse potentially present in the Macedonian government discourse on reproduction deployed as means of combating the problem of depopulation. Thus, within a critical discourse framework, the analysis focuses on linguistic manifestations of power abuse present in texts and talks produced by the Government and on their discursive relations with underlying and supporting practices, policies and procedures.

Key-words: *discourse on reproduction, power abuse, critical discourse analysis.*

1. Introduction

Human sexuality represents a defining aspect of humanity in every possible sense: biological, psychological, religious, cultural, politic. Sexuality is the aspect of human life that not only determines who we are (male, female, marred, divorced) but what we do as members of these categories, and what we should think and say about the meanings of these anthropologically defining categories. This constructive aspect of sexuality has been long recognised, which lead to sexuality's instrumentalisation as means of social and political control undertaken mostly by the powerful institutions like the State.

Undeniably the State has the right, obligation and necessity to regulate the sexuality of its citizens (roles, relations, identities, behavior) as an instrument used to protect public morality, to manage population, to achieve definite economic and political ends. In order to do so, the State, has continuously reproduced discourse(s) on sexuality which best serve and legitimize these ends. These discourses, structured around usually a heteronormativising ideology, are deployed by the use of power. Such deployment does not always serve the citizen's interest at the very best. In this context the subject under investigation is the discourse on sexuality produced by the

[1] South East European University, Tetovo (Macedonia).

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

MK Government, with focus being paid on the discourse on reproduction, deployed strategically towards the general end of coping with the problem of de-population and with the threats like economic and infrastructural stagnation, pension system (un)sustainability, and a general underdevelopment that non-coping with the problem bears.

The discourse has manifested its self in various forms, both linguistic (texts and talks) and non-linguistic (procedures, regulations, programs, policies). In this respect, the object of the study is to identify and analyse potential elements of power abuse, domination, and discrimination within the discourse on reproduction (re)produced by the MK Government.

In order to do so, the study will begin with a general discussion on sexuality as to present its complexity, its quintessential role in human life, its constructed nature, and the sociopolitical and economic reasons and necessity for its control and regulation. To understand control over sexuality, three concepts appear crucial: heteronormativity, power and discourse, each one discussed individually as to shed light on their role and involvement in the control over sexuality. Since the macro level accounts of power (Marx, Gramsci, Foucault) offer no satisfactory model for analyzing concrete manifestations of power relations as enacted and produced by concrete discursive units like language, the methodological frame relies on Critical discourse analysis as a convenient analytical frame that combines the macro level accounts of power with micro level analysis of linguistic means and strategies used. The CDA methodological toolkit will be applied to several texts and text types (a Prime minister public speech, a public campaign, news articles, net discussions) and several related policies and procedures (court verdict, legislations, law articles and a social welfare program). The analysis will focus on identifying the key topics, ideas and propositions enacted by these texts, on identifying the naturalizing arguments present and thus accounting for the ideology that underlies these claims, on identifying language elements of abuse, misinformation and misinterpretation used in these texts, and relating these with the social actions and procedures that work towards the accomplishment the same ends, and finally answering the question whether this discourse deployment is a by any means abusive.

2. Sexuality and control

The complex character of human sexuality is manifested in its various spheres of operation, like intercourse, sexual orientation, sexual relationships, gender identities and relations, reproduction, family, marriage, birth control etc. These are experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationship. All these aspects are produced within an intricate relation between several factors like biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethnical, legal, historical, and religious (WHO 2006).

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

That sexuality is a central aspect of human life is also argued by theoretical discussions according to which sexuality 'produces and reproduces human life' (Padgug 1999:20) but also, as noted by Weeks "what we think of sex fashions the way we live in" (1985: 1), which points to its constructed nature since 'what we think' is what we are instructed, explained, encouraged and expected to think[2] in a series of processes organised and administered by centres of power like the Monarch, the Church, or the State which recognised not only the centrality of sexuality and its historic contingency (Foucault 1978), the fact that it is constructed, but also that by constructing sexuality one constructs humanity. Therefore, control over sexuality achieved by various strategies and technologies was of a paramount socio-political importance. The concrete manner in which this control was accomplished is convincingly argued by Michael Foucault in his influential work *History of Sexuality* (1978) which he begins with the rejection of the "repressive hypothesis" of sexuality associated with the psychotherapy of Wilhelm Reich, according to which sexuality was repressed, forbidden to be spoken about. In this respect, Foucault argues that as from XVIII sex was not only allowed to be spoken about, but also encouraged and allowed to enter discourse via language, as to be able to be more easily accessed and controlled. The linguistic forms through which control took place were pastorals, confessions, law and civil law (where people could learn the 'truth' about sex). Two key concepts underlie the construction of the controllable discourse of sexuality. Those are knowledge and power, which are mutually co-constitutive as explained by Foucault, for whom, "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977: 27). The way they co-operate in a discourse is by the transformation of knowledge into concrete practices and procedures administered by what Foucault calls disciplines (institutions like school, hospital, penitentiary) which in turn tell people what excepted norms and forms of sexuality are, which instruct them what to think, feel and speak about these forms and norms, and which make sure that people act accordingly. The success of this meticulous administration over sexuality relies on the workings of two types of power which emerged in the XVIII, the disciplinary power, and bio power (Foucault 1978). The former saw the body as a machine (unit of production), thus focusing on optimizing its labour capacity, making it more useful, and more obedient, where as bio power focused on the body as part of population, and thus concerned itself with issues related to population management like propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life

[2] Weeks demonstrates the historical contingency of sexuality through an account of homosexuality's treatment in Ancient Greece where it was not named, marked and most importantly it was not a legally regulated aspect of sexuality, but only a part of the larger complex of sexuality. (Weeks 1985, 2010). This, in addition is confirmed by Katz who informs that "the term heterosexual entered into English usage only in the late nineteenth century" (Katz, 2007: 21–2).

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

expectancy and longevity. Thus, these "disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed". (1978: 139). They collaborate in a process that "transforms the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behaviour" (1978: 26), a process which is "motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labour capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative (1978: 36).

3. Heteromormativity

Beside careful planning and administration which rely on knowledge and power deployment, another important aspect of the discourse on sexuality, which ensures its successful 'internalisation' on the part of the body/population is, as Foucault is aware, the need of defining privileged norms and forms of allowed sexuality, thus creating an ideological system that supports the practices of the disciplines towards the accomplishment of the economic and political goals. Such ideology, that has recently been termed *heteronormativity* (Werner 1993)[3], has its conceptual roots in the Gayle Rubin's essay "Thinking Sex" (2011), where by the use of the concept of 'charmed circle' (what society permits as natural and what excludes as unnatural), she questions the value system that social groups attribute to sexuality which defines some behaviours as good/natural and others as bad/unnatural. Similar idea is to be found in Butler's *Gender Trouble* where she also questions this 'naturality' organized around the norm of heterosexuality. According to her, "Heterosexuality is the basis of a culture of romance, marriage, and the family, and is enforced by our laws, government, churches, schools, and military. Viewing men and women as naturally complementary makes heterosexuality seem like the natural, normal, and right way of living (Butler 1999). Thus, within this dichotomy of good/bad, (natural/non-natural), "the positively charged pair is the heterosexual couple (which) is still seen as the building block of our society, the forum of ambition, achievement and happiness"(Weeks 1985, 28).

The manner in which heteronormativity works toward the accomplishment of strategic economic and political ends of the State is first by its recognition and exploitation of the fact that the heterosexual family is still the statistically most dominant and politically most significant form of societal organisation. This makes the heterosexual family economically and politically more marketable, commodifiable and hence profitable. In addition, as relevant for the case at hand, heteronormativity is particularly fitting frame for dealing with the problem of

[3] Warner, Michael (1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

depopulation because after all reproduction is still the exclusive domain of heterosexual intercourse. Thus, intervention within this inter-related discourse of depopulation and reproduction within a heteronormativising discourse on sexuality is a common place strategy deployed by Governments in the effort to deal with the issue. Juan Lee lists several cases of population management strategies used by various governments like Turkey, China, Singapore, and Germany (Lee 2011)[4]. What underlies these, except the heteronormaivising ideology and the institutional administration, is the deployment of power necessary to effectuate the intervention. As power is a necessary element of the whole discourse as mentioned before, it deserves some attention to demonstrate its working and the potential study of it.

4. Power

Within the large corpus of research on power, there is not so much contestation over what power is as the common sense understanding of power as a 'capacity to influence the thoughts and actions of B to act in a manner desired and demanded by A', can be inferred from many discussions. Where discussions differ and contest each other is the issue of how is power exercised. The typology of power spans over coercion, influence, authority, force and manipulation (Bacharach and Baratz 1970) up to the widely accepted and discussed mechanism of persuasion, by which the dominated are made to believe in the values of the dominant. (Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault). One such account of power as persuasion is offered by Gramsci who argues that through the cultural formation of individuals undertaken by the civil society institutions (family, law, church, education) the state has a position, a role in people's lives, a role in their attitudes, belies and behaviour. In this way, the State can influence the formation and interalization of desirable and permissible values and actions. In the process, the key element is 'consent' achieved by effective presentation by the State of the existing social order and value system as natural, universally beneficial and commonsensical (Gramsci 1971). The degree of effectivity in gaining of the consent relies much on the language used to naturalise the dominant's ideology.

A highly relevant question in this regard is why subordinates do not resist the persuasion that tries to impose an estranged value system ('a false consciousness') upon them. In this respect, the American sociologist Charles Tilly offers several

[4] In all cases listed, depending on the problem, different strategies were used some of which include legalization of abortion and contraception by the Chinese government with the One Child Policy of 1978 as to prevent population growth, the ban on abortion by Turkish government to stimulate growth, the encouragement for procreation of the high educated citizens by Singapore government as to balance level of intelligence and population among its citizens, the reward (golden medal of honour) offered by Hitler to Nazi German mothers giving birth to eight children.

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

relevant answers, among which: a) subordinates are continuously rebelling, but in covert ways, b) subordinates actually get something in return for their subordination, c) as a result of mystification, repression, or sheer unavailability of alternative ideological frames, subordinates remain unaware of their true interests, d) resistance and rebellion are costly; most subordinates lack the necessary means, and e) fear and inertia hold them in place (Tilly 1991: 594).

A somewhat similar idea about the awareness of the subordinates and their willingness to comply is captured by the concept 'rational calculation' by Steve Lukes, which refers to the strategic motives and ends of submission where by "with rare, but significant exceptions, the public performance of the subordinate will, out of prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favour, be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful' (Lukes 2005: 127). However, what is intriguing in this strategic behaviour, as noted by Lukes, is that, it is usually "impossible to know from the public transcript alone how much of the appeal to hegemonic values is prudence and formula and how much is ethical submission" (Lukes 2005: 129).

This claim problematizes the possibility of unambiguously identifying power abuse as subordination may consciously and willingly be acted out. Moreover, if one follows Lukes' argument that power deployment is contrary to the interests of the dominated, than all power deployment is abusive as, Marxistically speaking, it neglects the interest of the dominated who are persuaded in the naturalness of the values of the dominant.

Part of the problem with the difficulty of demonstrating power abuse within the research presented is that these macro level accounts of power offer a valuable insight in the general operations and techniques of power, recognizing the instrumental role discourse and language play in the processes. However, they neither engage in demonstration and analysis of the specific ways language is used in the deployment of power, nor they offer instruments for such micro level analysis. Such framework that combines macro level accounts of power with micro level analysis is to be found in the critical discourse analysis.

5. CDA

In this respect, CDA is a fluid, dynamic methodological framework that "studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk 2001: 354). Thus language use, discourse and communication are most relevant dimensions of power for a CDA study. In this way, CDA tends to relate micro level properties of language and semiotic properties of discourse to macro aspects like society, organisation, relations and domination (van Dijk 2008).

Within this frame, van Dijk defines power in terms of control over the minds and the actions of people achieved through the influence on their cognition (opinions, believes, attitudes, representations, models of events and contexts, ideology). This

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

influence which serves the end of crafting the desirable action is achieved through control over discourse, more precisely by control over text and context. Control over context presupposes control over the definition of the communicative situation, the (non) allowed participants, the permissible knowledge, which text may or may not be produced, whereas control over text implies control over its production on all levels of constitution (morphological, syntactic, stylistic, rhetorical).

In this respect, Van Dijk outlines several ways in which power is enacted in discourse: a) directly, thorugh discourse that has directive pragmatic function (illocitionary force) such as commands, threats, laws , regulations, instructions, or indirectly by reccomendation and advice, b) by persuasive discourse types (ads and propaganda), where complinace is achieved by means of persuasion, repetition, argumantation, c) through the deployment of prescriptive discourse forms such as description of future possible events in predictions, plans, scenarios, programs and warnings based on experts' knowledge , by peresenation of undesirable course of action and d) by creation of influential narratives (news-stories, reports, novels) that present the (un)desirable course of action (2008: 37).

Power abuse in this context of control over the communication then is the deliberate misinformation, misuse of expert knowledge, manipulation, and indoctrination (2008: 19). This may be achieved in variety of ways by use of different linguistic stategies like topic control, when only negative actions of certain people are represented, or lexicalisation (the paritcualr lexical choice made to express certain aspect, a certain attitude towards the refered object, person or event), by using racial terms, or terms that misrepresent, or represent only one aspect of the complex issue, by using a sinlge source of information, by passivisation, disclaimers, hedges, eclectic forms and so on (2008: 22).

Within such conceptual framework, the analysis of power and power abuse becomes a tengible and manageable task of identifying and explaining such manifestations and manipulations created through langugage and accounitng them as related to the social and political practices, procedures and istitutions that instigate their stategic deployment. Within this general metodological frame, the analysis as related to the subject of this study is informed by questions like: what texts and talks (and discourse types – direct, indirect, advertising, persuasive, prescriptive, influential narratives) are produced within the general discourse on reproduction? What topics, key ideas and propositions are foregrounded and how (by what language strategies)? What is the underlying ideology? What are some of the ideologically naturalising arguments? Is this language use abusive, mis-informative or misrepresentative? What actions, procedures, laws underlie and support these texts? Do they violate norms, values, rights, laws?

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

6. Subject and focus of study

This methodological frame will be applied to the discourse on reproduction in the Republic of Macedonia constructed by the political elite as a means of combating the problem of depopulation that the country has been facing for the last two decades[5]. The discourse is typically heteronormative, a tendency that penetrates not only all levels of linguistic articulation but all discursive manifestations. It is only a part from the general discourse on sexuality whereby it is meaningfully related and strategically supported by inter-related discourses on marriage, family, anti-abortion and heterosexualism. The discourse on reproduction itself is manifested in variety of texts, text types, genres, social practices, procedures and legislative actions. On one hand there is an incessant public campaign (a persuasive discourse), public speeches by relevant figures (experts that sustain, support and protect the 'official' knowledge and legitimize the ends), speeches by authoritative political figures (Prime Minister), media reports and articles, which by promoting a sexually healthy and acceptable norms and forms of living (children, family, heterosexuality, heteronormativity) try to persuade the audience in the 'natural-ness', and the commonsensical and beneficiary character of both the ideological claims made and the action suggested by them. In addition, they also obliterate any alternative view. These mostly persuasive activities are supported (discursively co-constructed) by series of laws (on marriage, abortion, family), legislations, stimulating programs and initiatives, all of which underlined by the Government's attempt to produce a type of sexuality (roles, relations, conduct) the control over which will serve the economic ends of population and the political ends of control and governance.

The goal of identifying and analysing the elements of power abuse and domination will be executed over several texts (and three text types) produced within this discourse: the financial aid program for the encouragement of having a third child, the Prime minister speech that in more depth relates to the research questions (ideology, legitimisation, heteronormativisation and other) and the third child campaign.

7. Discourse on reproduction

In August 2008, the vice-president of the Government, also a Minister of finance, Mr. Zoran Stavrevski, announced a program that financially supports families who want to have many children, the primary target being those families that would

[5] Within a population of nearly more than two million, the number of 32.000 annual births in 1994 has dropped to 23.000 in 2013. The population growth rate being as low as 1.9%. All official figures are available at: http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2014/2.1.14.20.pdf, http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie.aspx?rbrtxt=8

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

decide to have a third or fourth child. The initiative was legitimised by the following argument:

"The Republic of Macedonia has been facing a decrease in the birth rate for years now. Continuous decrease of the birth rate is a serious threat for the demographic development of the country (...) In order to put a stop to this negative trend, The Government of the Republic of Macedonia has introduced a simulative measures targeting the increase of the number of the newly born children in form of a financial aid, a parental remuneration for the birth of the second, third and fourth child"[6].

Since the proposed measures primarily targeted the municipalities with a birth-rate lower than 2.1 %, which 'accidentally' happen to be dominantly populated by Macedonians, a citizen's appeal protesting the ethnically discriminatory program was filed to the Constitutional Law[7]. Acting upon the appeal, The Constitutional Law abolished the dispositions of the financial aid program on the grounds that it creates inequality by a selective application of a law that must equally apply within the whole territory, and as such it must offer protection and remuneration to all mothers[8]. Therefore, differently than originally planned by the Government, all women in the country were equally eligible for the financial aid offered by the government for the birth of their third child and all after.

Simultaneous to these legal reactions, the program caused additional concern and anxiety among the directly targeted beneficiaries (mothers), some of who have critically conversationalised the program on various internet platforms, portals and discussion forums. One such is the site conveniently named 'parents and children', where both mothers and females expressed many concerns like: the program being offensive towards those who are reproductively challenged, there are more urgently pending concerns like children with no parents, poor state of the children caring facilities, generally bad economic circumstances, the insufficient amount of the financial support (only 100 euros), the disheartening bureaucratically organized process of application, the requirements that parents must meet, like the obligatory vaccination, labour market uncertainty, employers not being very supportive of female pregnant workers.[9]

---

[6] The monthly aid is allocated as follows: 82 euros (30% of average salary) for the birth of second child in the course of the first nine months, 135 euros (50% of average salary) for the birth of third child in the course of ten years, and 190 euros (70% of average salary) for the fourth child in the course of 15 years. The Government's short announcement is available at: http://www.vicepremier.gov.mk/?q=node/249).

[7] It was initiated by the citizen Ismet Fetai from Gostivar, a town in the west part of the country dominantly populated by Albanians. It was also supported by Albanian NGO's and three female MPs from the Albanian party DPA

[8] The case was widely reported, among which in the Macedonian edition of BBC: http://www.bbc.co.uk/macedonian/news/story/2009/03/090318_sud.shtml

[9] The whole conversation thread is available at http://roditeliideca.bbgraf.com/t1325-topic

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

These concerns are counter-argued by some participants who only attempt to discredit the Government's involvement and initiation in the otherwise freely chosen path of reproduction which brings joy even besides being a financial challenge. As phrased by one forum participant:

"I have 3 children (…) I think I am the luckiest mother on the planet. After all children are real treasure. And I do not care what the State offers, I need nothing from it. (…) I forgot to tell that I am unemployed and that we live with my husband's family, he is employed. And I am sure that what we have accomplished is by unity, love, agreement and mutual understanding."

The illocutionary appeal and encouragement of the 'all we need is love' and 'money play no decisive role' arguments which constitute the backbone of this discourse are even more highlighted by the manner of its transcontextualisation in the power elite discourse on the issue. One such instance that demonstrates the empowered recontextualisation of these arguments is the Prime Minister's speech delivered on October 23rd 2012[10], a context that bears special importance as it is a Macedonian national holiday celebrating the foundation of the revolutionary organization VMRO[11] which is the ideological basis of the current party in power VMRO DPMNE[12].

On this occasion, the Prime Minister, Mr. Nikola Gruevski starts his speech by conflating the discourse on national history (heroes, freedom fighters, the dream of independent state), with that of reproduction by presenting the latter as one of the two means of achieving the objective of the former. Thus, the dream of independent state was achieved not only through fight but also through fornication, or in the Minister's words: "we were slaughtered, beaten, having only a slice of bread, but they (the enemies) could not kill more than we are able to produce", alluding to the five, six even more children families of the time. The underlying proposition that 'reproduction is a means of survival and combat' is emotionally highlighted by the contrast between the legacy and the sacrifices the national heroes made, and the modern time citizens' passivity and reluctance to contribute to the accomplishment of the same unifying goal, the survival of the nation. The formulation of the ideologeme 'fight for the (survival) of the independent state" runs as follows:

"...now that we have our own country, …when we have state, peace, schools, we are facing crisis of family values, and drop in birth rate. …we are running out of people, we are facing a demographic recession that ultimately leads to extinction.

[10] The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdIWGwnODyk

[11] The acronym stands for Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation founded in 1893 with the prime objectives of freeing the country from the Ottoman rule and foundation of independent state

[12] The addition of DPMNE (a democratic party for Macedonian national unity) came in 1990 with the foundation of the party that claims full legacy to the revolutionary organization established more than a century ago. http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/?page_id=172

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

…What did our ancestors fought for? They fought for a free nation, not a dying one."

In this short excerpt, the implicated appeal for contribution to the solving of the current problem is interwoven with the sentiment of due homage to national heroes, via the mediation of the previously established proposition 'reproduction is survival', which in the past was a means of gaining freedom and independence, but now it is an imperative means of keeping and perpetuating those accomplishments. But reluctance, non-involvement in the national survival strategy of repopulation is not the whole of the problem. Part of which is the family crisis the minister speaks about in an explicitly derogatory manner:

"We live in times of no second child, and we lead debates about distorted values, about single sex marriage, even about adopting children in those marriages, we speak of some rights of men or women, who is more represented in the policy, and while we are wasting ourselves on such topics we are running out of people".

Thus, for the Prime Minister, not only the non-heterosexual values are distorted, but also discussion about such values and discussion about rights to free sexual orientation and equal gender representation within institutions are not only irrelevant but distractive from the real pending problem of depopulation.

After this problematic claim, the Prime Minister goes on to explain the economic significance of reproduction by which economic stability and growth are accomplished through the stabilization of the labour market, sustainability of the pension system, infrastructural development and ensuring consumption. All these ideas are fallaciously argued with the assumption that the economic factor should not be decisive for the individual choice to have children[13] which reaches its climax in the following statement: "The problem (of not deciding to reproduce) is in the head not the pocket".

Having said this, the Minister poses the following dilemma: "Which way shall we choose? That of survival or that of extinction, that of family values or of decadence, of children or solitude?" The implied suggestion to choose the first option of the binary pair is enabled by Government designed programs like the financial aid program, and procedures like maximally covered *invitro* fertilization, among others, but mostly it is supported and encouraged by ideological (common sense, naturalizing emotionally appealing, not easily counter-arguable) arguments like "children are the most important thing in life" or "when thinking of expanding our family we think of our children".

This implicitly antihomosexual speech works by deliberate omission of arguments and other aspects of the problem like migration, rate of poverty, rate of unemployment, ideas that do not go in favour of the naturalizing attempts by the Government to present reproduction as both means of survival and due homage to

[13] The enthymemic logic he uses is present in the conclusion that economic factor is not the decisive one since two countries, one highly developed other very poorly, have the same birth rate.

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

history and historic accomplishments. Reproduction is underlined as key factor in economic stability and growth, but it is presented in isolation from other factors. On the other hand, the importance of economic factor is deliberately obliterated by the use of somewhat illogical arguments like 'the problem is not in the pocket'. Instead, encouragement towards decision of having children is deliberated by hardly counter-arguable truisms like "children are the most important thing in life". Another linguistically abusive technique attempting to achieve compliance is the advertising scare copy formatting of the non-solving the problem scenario which relies on future horror like predictions evoked by expressions such as "dying nation", "extinction". To additionally motivate contribution towards birth rate increase, the Prime minister relies on the idealization of traditional values, at the expense of demonizing the non-traditional, distorted ones. To support the claim that these values are the true, natural and undisputable, he uses demographic studies which should act as an authoritarian, undisputable source of knowledge. These traditional values are manifested in the ideal social unit, the many children heterosexual family, whereby children and family are made to appear as naturally presupposing each other. Such idea deliberately overlooks the existing reality of extramatrimonial children, or even abandoned children, simply mentioned here as to point to the selective character of the normative discourse which does not even consider the idea that if repopulation is a must, than it must be with the deployment of all possible and available means, not only by those discursively constructed, and hence allowed and controlled by the Government.

The foregrounding of the emotional argument that "children are our treasure' and the deliberate de-evaluation and discreditation of the 'money' argument is also present in a mass media campaign launched in 2013 popularly called 'third child campaign'. The campaign uses two copy lines "Create future" and "Family and children are our greatest treasure" relatively corresponding to two general narrative sets, one that warns and forecasts gloomy predictions like empty classrooms, or walking rod metaphorically representing the only family tree, and another set which presents an idyllic family atmosphere full of joy and enthusiasm where the narrates address the audience with the same ideologically biased arguments as used by the Government.

In one such video, the youngest couple having five children is presented with the obligatory tone of happiness, no regrets, and most importantly with the reassurance that money should not be an excuse, an idea communicated by the mother. The video ends with the following caption:

"Children are our joy, our fortune. They are the foundation of the family. Creating new life we are closer to God. Our tradition of many children family is our future. For a happy family, for a certain future. Expand your family, have a third child"[14].

[14] The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBfb8FL-1tk

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

In another video, an old man laments over his family tree visually narrated by the pages of the family photo album he is browsing. He informs the audience that his great grand parents, his grand parents and his parents all have many children, but also that they managed to 'pull through' war and other calamities. The photo album ends with a picture of his grand children having no children followed by the old man's criticizing the youth of today for finding excuses for not having children like 'no flat', 'no work', 'no money', and 'there's time'.[15]

In terms of ideological bias and misrepresentation, the caption of the first video not only implies a pervertedly capitalistic metaphor of children being both an investment and capital for better future, but more importantly it introduces a novel even more strongly naturalising discourse, that of religious values and commitment. The underlying argumentation that reproduction is a path to God's grace is not only insensitive to the reproductively challenged but also to non-believers. In addition, the whole narrative organized around the multiple relations between children on one and family, God and future on the other hand, creates a non-questionable unity between the elements, a sort of natural, perfect microcosm created for the sake of the children, but for the benefit of all. Finally, many videos of the campaign by representing the family ideal, a heterosexual family with as many children possible and non regretting financially unburdened parents, not only portray heterosexual couples as the expected norm, but they leave out alternative means of becoming a parent, as it does leave out the primary concern of many parents, the financial conditions. All this skillfully crafted in an attempt to persuasively, though not always relying on rational arguments, present the reproduction as natural, normal, needed course of action towards the strategic end of repopulation.

The same end is also supported by other texts, text types and genres. Such is the series of filmed personal stories of couples expecting a baby titled "It's time for a baby". Each episode is divided into pre and postnatal narratives dominated by expressions of emotions like anticipation and joy, and marked by the absence of any type of challenge before and through out pregnancy. Such textual editing does not per se suggest procreation as much it presents it in a non-threatening, anxiety reducing manner.

A similar initiative to promote reproduction and mostly family values is the initiative by the Ministry of culture to financially stimulate Macedonian artists, mostly musicians that would create songs which promote family values, and the adherent value of having children. This hegemonic initiative illustrates the Government's strong determination to proceed uncompromisingly with its planned

[15] Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TET8xzS_7eY

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

strategy even by instrumentalising the 'so-called' artists towards the achievement of the Government's political ends[16].

Before venturing into a final analysis, presenting the discourse effects and some reactions will support some of the conclusions later made by demonstrating additional elements of hegemony and abuse present in the discourse under consideration.

There has been a minimal, insignificant increase of birth rates as from the beginning of the Government's financial aid program in 2008. This is pointed in many news articles, but more importantly it is substantiated by the official figures by the State Institute for Statistics which additionally points to the problem of the 20% increase of rate of poverty among families with three children.[17]

The program it self is contestably received and selectively applied. On one hand, mothers receiving or eligible to receive the financial aid express disappointment in the administrative procedure of application which according to them is ridiculous and intolerant, demanding of too large a documentation, let not speak of the imposition to have the children vaccinated as one of the basic requirements to receive the help[18]. On the other hand, there are families with four or five children that need more than the symbolically generous help offered by the Government. Such is the family of the devastated father of four children, whose story has recently been broadcasted (August 2014)[19]. Anticipating the fifth child, the father bitterly shares his misery caused by a series of unsuccessful attempt to apply for a social apartment, an application which was rejected on the grounds of him receiving a financial aid for the third child. The father, with tears and desperation utters the following antihegemonic reasoning:

"My fifth child is on its way, so let the prime minister came and explain to me how I am to feed all of them with that money. The State said that there should be many children families, so let them come and tell me how to cope".

The problem innocently expounded by this frustrated father runs deeper than he is able to articulate. First, his life story is an empiric counter example to the Prime minister claim that the problem is not in the pocket. Ironically, the problem is also in the head in the sense that having five children in situation of 'absolute poverty' could only mean lack of education, and mostly lack of family planning programs organised by the Government. These are some of the concerns and recommendations that other, non governmental oriented experts point to when

[16] The process of instrumentalisation of artists and intellectuals is well depicted in Czesław Miłosz's work *The Captive Mind*, with the difference that Macedonian pop artists are popularly not regarded as intellectuals but sold outs

[17] The figures are available at:
http://www.stat.gov.mk/OblastOpsto.aspx?id=2
http://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/NewsDetal.asp?vest=1131471245&id=10&setIzdanie=23073

[18] Majkite se zalatna…http://dnevnik.mk/ ?ItemID= 270BD280E030A14BA8C3741CE23020FD

[19] http://novatv.mk/index.php?navig=8&cat=18&vest=16283 (22.08.2014)

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

talking about the need for "concrete measures to increase employment rate (now officially 28% unemployment, 270.000) and decrease rate of poverty" (Hadzimustafa 2013)[20].

Having all this in mind, the final discussion will try to offer a theoretical account of the elements of abuse in this complex discourse which is strategically organized towards the solution of a serious demographic problem by the deployment of heteronormitvising and naturalising ideology.

8. Discussion

The biopolitics of the Macedonian government is a necessary action frame for dealing with a serious problem, necessity which hardly can be denied by sound argument. How ever, the proposed solution (reproduction), and the texts and practices designed to support its accomplishment are much debatable.

The heteronormativisng ideology upon which this discourse is created is discriminative and injustfull in its own right. As seen in the Prime Minister's speech anti non-heterosexual roles and relations are not only unacceptable, but also evaluated as threat (decadent, leading to extinction etc). Further more, heterosexuality is ambiguously deployed both in spiritual terms as path to grace ('closer to God') and in materialist terms as means of economic survival ('new consumers'). In this respect, the campaign skilfully foregrounds the ideal of heterosexual couple, a policy further supported by the parallel, supportive anti-abortion campaign and the Government's continuous attempts to legally, by Constitution, both define and regulate matrimonial and extra-matrimonial relations in exclusively heterosexual terms.

In terms of power deployment, alternative views as manifested both in experts' warnings and people's reactions are silenced mostly due to control over the media with largest viewership. Thus, no alternative view is allowed to be not so much constructed but effectively communicated. More over, alternative means of dealing the problem are also disregarded. Means like new maternity leave policies (longer leave, leave for fathers), de-taxation of necessary products for children, protection of female labour rights and alike.

No doubt that stimulating procedures like financial aid, invitro-fertilisation opportunity and alike are created, but the gravity of the problem necessitates the deployment of all possible means, there fore the counter-hegemonic voices must not be silenced, but appropriated.

[20] http://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/NewsDetal.asp?vest=1131471245&id=10&setIzdan ie=23073

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

This silencing relies much on deliberate mis-information and misrepresentation, the basis of power abuse as postulated by van Dijk. The discourse does not only leave out other potentially beneficial social policies, like those mentioned, but it tries consistently to negate the relevance of the economic factor by making directly spinning claims that 'the problem is in the head', and 'our grand parents had not much but they had many children", claims that are contradictory to figures (rate of poverty) and lived experiences. Thus, the decision to reproduce is presented as will based not factor based process. More over, the discourse carefully disregards the most significant contributing chain of factors to the problem of depopulation, which is economic migration caused by low material conditions in the country[21].

In line with van Dijk's outline of abusive discourse types, not only the whole discourse is advertisingly persuasive, relying on naturalizing, emotional arguments and non refutable narratives like "children are fortune", "children are future", but it also makes the bleak predictions of future scenarios manifested in expression like 'extinction', 'survival', 'solitude'. Regardless of the careful construction of the texts constitutive of this persuasive discourse, what seems to be strikingly paradoxical is the continuation of the discourse reproduction within circumstances that proved its low efficiency (the State Institute of Statistics figures), again pointing to the 'deafness' of the discourse producers.

The abusive nature of this discourse is additionally demonstrated by its potential violation of human rights concerning sexuality as articulated by both theoretical and activists' human rights discourses. Within the context of the first, the political scientist Rosalind Petchsky whose work is concerned with gender and sexual rights elaborates four different categories of sexual and reproductive rights, the violation of which is a demonstration of empowerment and subordination. These include: a) right over one's own body, to be free from assault as well as unwanted sex and pregnancy, b) the right to make decisions about his or her own sexuality and reproduction, c) equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation, and d) the principal of diversity which affirms that freely chosen group affinities are respected, while at the same time individuals are 'not subordinated by group claims in the name of tradition' (Petchesky, 2003: 8).

In this respect, the discourse under consideration seems to violate most of these rights. Through the accompanying discourse on anti-abortion it does not guarantee a plausible solution to unwanted pregnancy. Second, although individuals

[21] The issue of migration is especially a sensitive one from several aspects. First, the figures claimed by the State Institute of Statistics and those of Eurostat differ radically. The fomer claims some 190.000 people left the country in the past two decades, where as for the latter the number is likely to be higher than 400.000. When one relates this problem with the problem of not having a census for 12 years and thus not having an exact idea of the country's demography, one easily speculates existence of hidden motives for both, the figure discrepancy and the non-execution of the census.

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

are allowed to make their own choices, the persuasion, prescription and normativisation reproduced by the discourse seem to instruct the individual into making the 'right' choice. Third, practice, not so much as the discourse on reproduction and sexuality, shows that equal treatment is the mostly violated right. Finally, the framing of reproduction, traditional values and debt to history is made at the expense, the demonization of the distorted non-heterosexual values as manifested in the Prime minister's speech.

What seems to be particularly interesting in the alleged violation of these rights is the articulation of such right by the Macedonian Constitutional Law, where the issue is being regulated by the Article 42 which states that: "It is the right of the individual to freely decide on the question of reproduction.", and the article ends with "The Republic, based on the need for harmonised economic and social development, leads a humanist population policy."[22]

The key dilemma in regard to this particular phrasing is whether the incessant campaigning and the normativising discourse is a constraint or even a violation of the constitutionally guaranteed right. It seems that the discourse it self does not have either enforcing or sanctioning power to make people abide and behave accordingly. As such it is only a suggestive discourse the goals of which can be validated by the right of the Government to 'lead a humanist population policy", a formulation by which a case of right violation may be inferred. Regardless of this aspect of legally protected discourse, there is little doubt that at least speaking form aspect of discourse production (texts, types and supporting procedures) it is perpleted with elements of power abuse, both in terms of misinformation and misrepresentation, and deliberate non appropriation of other suggestions, views, procedures. A relevant question following out of this conclusion is whether a possible course of action is possible. In other words, whether an alternative action frame may be not only articulated but also implemented. Although van Dijk (2008) suggests several courses of action like mediation, consultancy, advice (2008: 23-26), the popular, empirically evidenced, pessimistic opinion that the current Government seeks not and accepts not a different, alternative view is at the moment an unsurmountable obstacle towards designing and effectuation of a more plausible, efficient and collectively mediated and produced effort towards the solution of the pending problem.

References

Bachrach, Peter and Morton S. Baratz. 1970. *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York and London: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel. 1978 [1976].*The History of Sexuality.*Volume 1. New York: Pantheon Books.

[22] The constitution is available at: http://www.dzr.gov.mk/Uploads/ustavrm.pdf

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the Prison notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
Katz, Jonathan Ned. 2007. "The Invention of Heterosexuality: The Debut of the Heterosexual". In *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*, K. E. Lovaas and M. M. Jenkins (eds.), SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks CA.
Lee, C.H. Julian. 2011. *Policing Sexuality: Sex, Society and the State*. London and New York: Zed Books.
Lukes, Steve. 2005 [1974]. *Power: A Radical View*. London: Macmillan.
Padgug A. Robert. 1999. "Sexual matters: On conceptualising sexuality in history". In *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (eds.), 15-29. London: UCL Press.
Petchesky, Rosalind P. 2003. *Global Prescriptions: Gendering Health and Human Rights*, Zed Books, London.
Rubin, Gayle. 2011. *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*. John Hope Franklin Center Book
Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Scott, James C. 2001. *Power.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Tilly, Charles. 1991. "Domination, Resistance, Compliance… Discourse". *Sociological Forum*, 6 (3): 593-602.
Van Dijk Teun A. 2001. "Critical discourse analysis". In *The Handbook of discourse analysis*. Blackwell Publishers, Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, and Heidi E. Hamilton. (eds.) 352-371, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
Van Dijk Teun A. 2008. *Discourse and Power*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. Print.
Weeks, Jeffrey. 1985. *Sexuality and it discontents: Meanings, myths and modern sexualities*. London and New York: Routledge.
Weeks, Jeffrey. 2010. *Sexuality*. 3rd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
WHO. 2006. *Defining Sexual Health: Report of a Technical Consultation on Sexual Health*. 28–31 January 2002, Geneva, World Health Organization. Available at: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf

About the author

Aleksandar Takovski is an English language lecturer at South East European University, Republic of Macedonia. He holds a PhD in literature, having defended the thesis "Humor creation in fantasy novel: Language-Literature-Culture". His research interests include: critical discourse analysis, political discourse analysis, humour studies, semiotics and interdisciplinary studies. He has published several articles in the listed fields, some of which: "From Agora to Pandora: The unprecedented case of simple Skopje square", "Author-Humour-Text: The Humour of Terry Pratchett as a Mortal and as an Author", "Texts are A-changing, are times catching up? On the divergence between the discourses of social change in Macedonia", "Advertising semiotics: A methodological discussion on the complexity of communicatively modelled process".

BDD-A18377 © 2014 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:56:58 UTC)