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The Upbringing Family in Communist Romania

Abstract: The Romanian communists leaders believed that, after centuries of ignorance and child raising after customs and habits, "family upbringing is in need of additional guidance". According to Stearns "children had to be remade¹" and the state pretended it knew more about children`s needs than their own parents! More than in any other historical period the state substitutes itself to the parents, through the school, children organizations and by educating the parents, using various guides and advice books written by the ideologists of the party, fully complying with the communist ideals but less with parenthood. The child is the object of state upbringing since "parents were not fully reliable for the task of raising their own children and they needed additional guidance". The aim of this study is to reveal the massive intrusion of the state in the family life, the uptaking of some roles specific to parents and grandparents – often by socialising children at very young ages – and the control that was reinforced in order to accomplish the requirements of the party. More than belonging to their parents, children were rather seen as belonging to the state and this brought half of a century of dualism between the old habits the parents were used to and the new rules reinforced by the state. We shall insist on the connexions between the proclamation of gender equality, mass schooling, family support measures for mothers and children and the characteristics of upbringing in the communist period.

Keywords: children, parents, communist Romania, kindergartens, nursery schools

The historical point of view about child raising; theoretical perspectives

When I proposed this subject for the Upbringing conference I had in mind few aspects: the gap between the so called traditional way of upbringing and the modern way of rising children, the

¹ Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 104-111.

characteristics of the communist model, built on the principles of the "new man" and the last, but not least, how this model responds to the real needs of the parents. This paper is part of the research concerning the childhood in communist Romania, whose purpose is to reconstruct the childhood of Romanians during this period through the live story interviews method. Before getting to the phase of interviewing people, which is the second step in my project, I looked in the official regulations regarding the children organizations, in the document issued by the central committee of Romanian Communist Party and in the children's magazines and literature in order to understand the meanings of childhood in communist Romania. In this paper I will focused especially on the relationship between the state and the family in what concerns the upbringing and education, in my attempt to illustrate the idea of the State-parent which is specific for the countries included in the communist bloc. I am not able yet neither to discuss about the upbringing methods, how the parents effectively rise their children in this ambivalent nor to evaluate the degree of state intrusion in the real life, beyond the discourse and intentions.

For the beginning I reviewed some of the main theories regarding the upbringing, the parental roles and the invasion of the state in the family.

It is known that in the contemporary societies the state wants parents to prepare themselves for their parenting duties through courses led by professionals, while books on child rearing, in the tradition of dr. Spock, websites and prime time television programs on child rearing and education are becoming increasingly popular.

The latest researches of the new childhood history have partially erased the myth according to which the mothers always had a primary role in child care and raising, while the father had to deal with the economical demands of the household. It has been seen that, throughout childhood years and throughout different cultural and social systems, the little ones have been entrusted to various hands: servants, nannies, maids, slaves. Even inside the poor social layers, the sources have documented the existence around children of grandparents, aunts or other relatives. In numerous cultures, the elder brothers raised the younger ones. At the same time, the whole community, especially aged people unable to work anymore, contributed to the child raising, thus passing over generations. This is what the childhood sociology calls "the system of multiple caregivers"². In some societies child raising within the community generated a saying full of meanings: "One needs a village to raise a child"³.

In industrialized Europe, many urban families began depending on the mother's work as much as on the father's so, because of the lack of specialized institutions, an increasing number

² W. Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood*, Pine Forge Press, 2004, pp. 91-95

³ W. Corsaro, p. 93.

of families turned to the relatives' or elder children's help for raising the younger. The advance of schooling also affected the old child raising habits; the elder brothers became a resource less available for the younger (there is a theory that claims that illiteracy was higher among girls, since they were prevented by their families to go to school, being real nannies for the younger children of the family). The fertility decrease at the end of the 19th century amplified this fault even more and led to the apparition of the first institutionalized care and education centres for young children.

Therefore, a progressive change regarding child raising from the point of view of those implied and of locations can be seen. We can state that, gradually, there was achieved a certain degree of externalization of the child caring tasks, towards persons or institutions, these changes being favoured by the economical and demographical evolutions.

In the contemporary society, mostly after the 1980s, there has been a significant increase in the number of children under 5 who spend most of their daytime under the supervision of adults other than their parents, especially due to the increase in the number of mothers working in other places than at home. Usually, these adults are specialized personnel from caring or educational institutions (nurseries, kindergartens – in Europe, day centers in the United States). Due to this transfer of responsibility from parents towards different other child care and raising methods, we can discuss about several types of *raising and care* available for families, out of which we should notice:

- Child care at home, by parents, often helped by some relatives;
- Child care at home by employed persons (nannies, baby sitters etc.);
- Child care in specialized institutions, with a daily short or long program or, in special cases, weekly⁴.

Since the social perception of the childhood concept has changed over time, the comparison or the compared analysis of child care inside the family is difficult. If in the past, in most societies, it was self-understood that children around seven could take up some tasks, working on the field or becoming apprentices to learn certain skills, nowadays the child is cared for by the family until he legally becomes of age (theoretically; practically, there are numerous cases when the child remains in the parents' home until marriage and even afterwards) or goes to the high school or college (if these institutions are in a different location from home). In all these cases, the default care, the responsibility for the physical and financial wellness of the child still belongs to the parents.

⁴ Amy Harris Solomon, "In home child care" in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood*, vol. I, p. 144.

It clearly is very difficult, if not impossible, to accurately reconstitute the scenario of child caring and raising at Romanians before the 20th century. Despite a relatively generous normative literature on the subject, the child raising practices, those we actually interested in, can only be intermittently foreseen, in memoirs of intellectuals, representing the educated layer and who, in order to underline the difference between their world and the rural one, sometimes refer to its practices as a counterexample for the becoming modernity. But the peasant's habits are very difficult to find and this usually applies to later, inter-war periods.

The state and the family in communist Romania

The communist period in Romania may be structured in sub-periods, according to the state influence on the Romanians family life. In the first stage of communism, which spans until Nicolae Ceaușescu took the power, one talks about a crisis at familial level, in the context of the efforts of the state to disrupt the society. The elements defining this crisis were massive industrialization, collectivization, rural exodus, schooling, the use of female work force. They have all influenced the family life, but we should not forget that people had just overcome a devastating war and the comeback to a normal life could not have happened overnight. The years after 1967 brought the consolidation of the family, through positive measures, like the ones supporting mothers and children, children allowances etc. but mostly through coercive measures – mentioning the forbidding of abortions is more than enough, but we should also consider the limitation of access to contraceptive means and the severe laws regarding divorce.

One could identify at least three major ways for documenting and analysing the influence of the state on the family in communist Romania: (1) the legislation, (2) the industrialisation and urbanization and (3) mass education. Each of these is responsible for a plenty of changes inside the family institution: the legislation - especially through the Family Code (1954) impose the principles of the equality between men and women – both in the public and private life – and subminated the power of the father in the family and the power of the husband inside marriage; the industrialization and urbanization had changed of proportion between the traditional and the nuclear families. Forced industrialization, the steep and continuous increase in the demand of work force led to the first break with the past: the big rural families are displaced, disrupted and this break allows their members to occupy the jobs generously offered by the party. Attracted by the mirage of the city, by the benefits of living in blocks, young people spire to these jobs and leave the villages. The nuclear family lives geographically further and further away from the household, from its roots. Eventually, the mass education had meant the acceleration of the process of women emancipation and changed

their status on the marital market. Although many researchers of the socialist period tend to give to the equalitarian policies of the state just a superficial character, a more theoretical than an actual one⁵, one cannot deny that the socialism offered women a chance to be educated and to get a job – with a corresponding income – and a social statute never enjoyed before.

Researchers talk about the family changes using terms like *affecting*: „the communist regime has affected deeply the evolution of the Romanian family” or *brutal turnovers*: „through the brutal and painful social turnovers it enforced a new way of social organization, a new economic, social and political context, a new way of life”⁶. Since the introduction of the Civil Code in 1865 and until the 1947, the Romanian society passed through two devastating wars, through political and social changes that have definitely influenced the everyday life of the average citizen. Family life began and ended according to the updated Civil Code, the dowry was still an important factor in contracting a marriage, with the marriage itself actually being a civil contract. The family continues to play an important role in the young people choices, still having the right to oppose to the marriage even if, for those of age, the parents’ consent was not mandatory any more. In the inter-wars period the civil marriage remains the only officially accepted way of forming a family. A family that was still a patriarchal one, with the husband being the head: he has the lead, assures the economical stability and has a power of decision that is granted by the law. The woman, his consort, deals with the administrative matters and is the mother of his children. If she lives in the city she has a social life; if she lives in the country, she is the slave of her husband. At the same time, compared to the period before World War I, in the inter-wars period the number of divorces shows a significant increase, with a larger percentage of marriages that broke after less than five years⁷. However, a revolution in terms of rights occurs for the first time in 1929, when women are given the right to vote locally and then, before World War II, when the 1938 Constitution gives women the right to vote for the Parliament. This was the situation in 1947, when the communists took the power.

Engaged on a radical process of changing the society, on a soviet path, the communist power used the laws in order to realize the partnership between state and society, an almighty state and a totally subdued society. The life and death of individuals were given the same value as the distribution of tasks for achieving the five-year plans. An almighty state, as the Romanian one tried to be, had to be based on many subordinated individuals. Many and subordinated –

⁵ Jill Massino, *Marital roles and relations in state socialist Romania*, 2010, Massino and Shanna, *Gender politics and everyday life in state socialist, Eastern and Central Europe*, 2009.

⁶ G. Ghebreă *Regim social politic și viață privată*, 2004.

⁷ I. Scurtu, *Viața cotidiană a românilor în perioada interbelică*, București, RAO, 2001.

these are the key words. Both of them – multiplication and subordination – were carried out through law and through the terror of law.

The process of regulation of the family life in socialism resided in a series of legal acts, laws and decrees which either reinforced previous laws - like the decree 462 of 1948 concerning the abortion, or introduced new legal principles, the aim of which was to change the institution of the family according to the new socialist society. In order to achieve this goal the communist state used both compensatory and punitive measures.

In this process one can identify two types of measures: the general ones, affecting the whole society – for instance the laws concerning the equality between men and women – and the special legislation concerning the family life – family formation, reproductive life and divorce. We can add the measures concerning the family support and protection – maternal leave, allowance for children, childcare.

Equality was a key principle in the civic conduit of socialist states and Romania was not an exception from the general trend. In April 1948 was published the first communist Constitution whose 16th article stated that “all citizens of the Popular Republic of Romania, regardless of gender, nationality, race, religion or cultural level are equal in front of the law”. Article 21 grants women the same rights as men, reinforcing article 16: “The woman has rights equal to those of man in all fields of state, economical, social, cultural – political and private law life. For the same work, the woman has the right to the same salary as man.” After proclaiming the protection that the state offered to the marriage and family (art. 26), the legislator reinforces the protection granted to the mothers and children under the age of 18, who benefit from “special protection, stated by law” (art. 26). The duties of the parents are equal, both for children born inside and outside the marriage (art. 26).

The 1952 Constitution reinforces the principle of equality between genders, article 83 referring to the same rights proclaimed by the legislator in 1948, but developing the fields in which this equality manifests itself: “the woman has the same rights as man in work, salary, rest, social insurance and teaching”. The protection the state granted to the family, to the interests of mothers and children is also reaffirmed! It was for the first time when a legal text referred to the support for mothers with many children and for single mothers, to the paid leave for pregnant women, to the organization of maternities, nurseries and orphanages (art. 83). This law is very important from the historical point of view since, unlike the previous constitutional texts, including the 1948 one, the new law turns over the relation between the individual and the state. The reverse of the normal relations, in favor of the state, comes from the way the fundamental rights and freedoms granted by the constitution were expressed and guaranteed,

the words “citizens’ rights and freedoms” being turned into “rights and obligations”, but only in chapter VII out of X (we have to consider that all previous Constitutions listed the rights and freedoms immediately following the articles regarding the state territory). At the same time, the rights were only granted on the condition that they were exerted “according to the interest of the working people and for the reinforcement of the popular democracy regime” (art. 85). The introduction of certain restriction in the exertion of the “guaranteed” rights would gradually lead to the impossibility of their actual exertion, accentuating the state of disorganization of the personal life and of fatalism characteristic to that period. The individuals had to “conform” and display a “formal” integration with the values and norms that were coercively reinforced by the communist state.

Attracted by the mirage of the city, by the benefits of living in blocks, young people spire to these jobs and leave the villages. The nuclear family lives geographically further and further away from the household, from its roots. Eventually, the mass education had meant the acceleration of the process of women emancipation and changed their status on the marital market.

The Family Code was based on the principle of the care of the state for the marriage and family (the transfer of authority from the individual patriarchy to the state patriarchy⁸).

The extension of the state protection over the family life meant, at least at a declarative level, the introduction of economic and social measures with the purpose of assuring the stability and familial cohesion in order to allow the family to fulfil its functions: “to perpetuate the population, to raise, educate and form the young generation for the social life”⁹. The fundamental change came from bringing the woman on position where she was equal to man (art. 25) and from removing any family (parents, grandparents, tutors) intervention over marriage. The spouses mutually agree about where they would stay and live (let us remember that in 1865 it was stipulated that the woman had to follow her man wherever he deemed necessary); all goods acquired during marriage became common goods and each spouse had to bring a contribution proportional to his/her possibilities to support the family expenses. The spouses had to care for each other and offer mutual support when needed and were equally responsible for the accumulated debts. If we compare the above mentioned stipulations to those of the 1865 Civil Code, it is clear that the new law concerning the matrimonial life breaks the tradition of the supremacy of the husband in the family, of the man in private life, this democratization of family life totally turning over the previous relations, at least at a formal,

⁸ M. Miroiu, “Fețele patriarhatului”, 2002, pp. 210.

⁹ I. Albu, *Căsătoria în dreptul român*, 1988, p. 8.

declarative level (in the real life, especially in the rural area, the situation was not exactly like that; the studies realized after 1989 showed that the social conditions called for and legitimated the dependency towards men, in spite of the equalitarian declarations¹⁰).

This principle would subsequently justify the intervention of the state in the most intimate details of family life; likewise, through the subsequent coercive measures, the family with children (preferably as many as possible) was going to be considered the model of the communist family. The official ideology considered that the need of care for the marriage and family had found its consecration in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, according to which “the family represents the natural and fundamental element of the society and has the right to be protected by the society and by the state”. During the socialist period, the pro-natality and family protection measures (support for early marriage, penalties for its delay, stimulants to have as many children as possible etc.) were a characteristic of most communist states.

The Family and Family Upbringing in the Romanian Communism. “The state is responsible for the upbringing of children”!

The communist’s ideas regarding the new role of the state in what concerns the children upbringing were made public through an article signed by Alexandra Kollontay, published in 1920 in *Komunista* and translated in English in „The Worker”, article which served as a programmatic, guiding document of the communist states, at least in their early ages in what concerns the regulating the family life and the care for children for the entire communist bloc.

”The workers’ state will come to **replace the family**, society will gradually take upon itself all the tasks that before the revolution fell to the individual parents. Communist society will come to the aid of the parents..... We have homes for very small babies, crèches, kindergartens, children’s colonies and homes, hospitals and health resorts for sick children. Restaurants, free lunches at school and free distribution of text books, warm clothing and shoes to schoolchildren. All this goes to show that the responsibility for the child is passing from the family to the collective”.....”Communist society takes care of every child and guarantees both him and his mother material and moral support. **Society will feed, bring up and educate the child**. At the same time, those parents who desire to participate in the education of their children will by no means be prevented from doing so. Communist society will take upon itself all the duties involved in the education of the child, but the joys of parenthood will not be taken away

¹⁰ Băban and David, *Voci ale femeilor din România. Aspecte ale sexualității, comportamentului de reproducere și ale relațiilor de cuplu în epoca Ceaușescu*. UNICEF România, 1996, 12.

from those who are capable of appreciating them. Such are the plans of communist society and they can hardly be interpreted as the forcible destruction of the family and the forcible separation of child from mother.”¹¹

In socialism, the state, the communist state, thought that it will be better to take the responsibility of children raising since the parents were educated and formatted in the so-called ”bourgeois” tradition, similar in their minds with ignorance and superstitions. The battle for building the new man (who was, in order, a new citizen, a new husband, new wife and a new child) started in the family and in this respect is particularly interesting the dual attitude of the state regarding this institution: on one hand, the communists introduced a series of regulations that broke the traditional family living but, on another hand, they focused precisely on this traditional character in an attempt to preserve the family as the main institution of the private society. Communist society considered the social education of the rising generation to be one of the fundamental aspects of the new life. The old family, narrow and petty, where the parents quarrel and are only interested in their own offspring, is not capable of educating the “new person”.

The legislation from 1965 made a difference from the previous “bourgeois” legislation of Family law. It replaced the „concept of „paternal power” (which gave the paternal rights to the father; mothers had these rights after fathers’ death) with „paternal rights and duties for the children” and „children’s best interests”. The family code also imposed an increased control of the state on family life. The law stipulates that **in case the physical or moral wellbeing of the child is endangered, the child should be** cared for by an institution for child protection, or by another person. Parents of children in institutions maintained their paternal duties (art. 676 b), situation which led to the impossibility of adoption of the practically abandoned children. Tutelage was considered a social duty. Any person who knew about a child without parental care, was obliged to announce the situation to the Local Authority (Autoritatea Tutelara). According to the law, in case of parents giving up the child for adoption the first possible adoptive parents would be those who had previous contacts with the family (a friend or a relative)¹².

The main role of family was considered to be giving birth to children and to raising them in the new social spirit. That is, to become worthy citizens of the communist society. The politics of the communists were aimed at fighting against the Western urban family type, and for the preservation of traditional Romanian family values. This included an ideological

¹¹ A. Kollontay, ”The communism and the family”, *Komunistka*, No. 2, 1920.

¹² The Family Code, art. 693.

strengthening of rural-patriarchal values, which was partially successful. Of course, the prototype of this family was the Ceausescu family: Nicolae, Elena and their three children. He was the father, she, the mother of the nation! In a speech from 1966 Ceausescu said: "it is mandatory to fight against retrograde attitude, against improper and flyaway attitudes regarding family because the consequence of these attitudes is the increase of divorces, broken homes, neglect in rising and educating children"¹³.

Urban nuclear families diminished their social functions during the communist regime. Especially, the educational roles were transferred to society. Women had to return to their employment soon after delivery of a baby (the mother was entitled to a maximum of 112 paid days off from work). To make this possible, nurseries and kindergartens were offered to families. However, nurseries were notorious for being crowded and for providing low quality child care. Women were working equally with men, which was progress compared to the pre-war, dominant housekeeper role. However, this also meant more duties in a still patriarchal family decision-making model. Women knew that they had to work and contribute to the family income because one (husband's) wage was not sufficient for the family's living expenses. As the traditional roles of the women (raise children—the more, the best, according to the dominant communist ideology—and domestic activities) continued to be performed, women's duties had doubled.

The kindergartens, according to the law, had nothing to do with the education of children; according to their definition, these state institutions were meant "to allow the mothers to participate in the productive and in the cultural - social activity" (art. 19). The kindergartens were organized in such a way to allow women to work; a 9 – 11 hours working program was considered to be a normal one, the 6 hours one was a reduced program, while for women in the countryside seasonal kindergartens that were opened in the period when the field had to be worked, were organized.

A session of *Femeia* magazine (*The Woman*), the official magazine for women, was entitled "Parenting Schools" – Școala părintilor - advised women and men on a host of parenting issues, from disciplining unruly children to setting progressive examples for gender relations within the family. In the July 1970 issue, which focused on spousal abuse and authoritarian fathering, the magazine chided men for acting in ways that were not only harmful to their wives, but also to the psychological development of their children. Moreover, the attention that *Femeia* devoted to men's roles as husbands and fathers paled in comparison to

¹³ Nicolae Ceaușescu, Discursul de deschidere la „Conferința Națională a Femeilor din 1966”, *Femeia*, nr. 10, anul 1966, pag. 2.

the attention it devoted to women's roles as wives and mothers. Therefore, efforts to promote gender equality in the family were often tempered by images and articles that, particularly after 1966, glorified women's natural roles as mothers, and such policies as maternity leave, which reinforced gendered caregiving.

As the stenograph of the meeting of 5 June 1977 shows, a series of improvements that were to be brought in the regulation of the Country's Hawks were discussed. Nicolae Ceaușescu appeared disturbed by the proposed suggestions, their vast majority concerning form and phrasing. In the proponents' opinion, these alterations cleared the organisation's significance and purposes, but according to the leader they threatened the latter's existence: "you propose that instead of they are faithful sons of the people and the Party we substitute with they are preparing themselves for becoming faithful sons...". He received the reply that it was assumed that these children were in the midst of a process of formation, of education and Ceaușescu asked: "What do you understand by a process of formation? When they were born, were they not born as sons of the country/motherland? There is a wrong conception in your case. Are they not sons of the people? Is there a need for a certain process of preparation in order to become sons of the people? Then, whose sons are they?!"¹⁴ Consequently, the leader's perception of these children's affiliation is obvious: they belong to the state, to the people, and far less to their parents.

Conclusions

In communist Romania the conditions were relatively similar to those from the USSR: an agrarian, poorly educated and deeply religious (and superstitious) society, which still perceived the child as a working hand in the household and afterwards a wage-earner! Schools were built and compulsory mass education became the rule. Women were granted access to and entered massively on the working market (inappropriately called a "market") and to factories and plants, respectively, and the state built nurseries and kindergartens motivated not so much by care for the little ones, but in order to permit and facilitate the mothers' access to work.

The child represented a privileged figure in the communist mythology, as he symbolised the future, "*that generation who will take over, from Stalin's hands, the flag that, once, Lenin had triumphantly raised*".¹⁵

Summarising – the Romanian communists leaders believed that, after centuries of ignorance and child raising after customs and habits, "family upbringing is in need of additional

¹⁴Communist Party Archive, "Secția organizatorică" File 3675/ 1977.

¹⁵A. Cioroianu, *Miturile comunismului românesc*, 1995, 95.

guidance". According to Stearns¹⁶ "children had to be remade" and the State claimed that it knew more about the children's needs than their own parents! More than in Western societies and much more than in any other historical period, the State substitutes the parents, by means of the schooling system, by the use of the children's organisations and by educating the parents (in the USSR even through their own children) through various guides and advice books elaborated by the Party's pedagogues and ideologists in strict accord with the Party's ideals and less with parenting principles. The child is the object of state upbringing since "parents were not fully reliable for the task of raising their own children and they needed additional guidance". The early enrolling of children and schooling has two main goals: to inoculate as early as possible the communist ideals, through any means, from the tenderest ages, and to block the control of the parents – most of them being raised according to and familiarised with the old systems, in which the head of the family's authority was incontestable/indisputable and traditions played first fiddle – over their children, so that the mission of the state of moulding the "new man" might be successful! The communist ideologists considered the child an innocent being, good by nature, damaged by the inequitable society and the imperfect social arrangements – they thus embraced illuminist ideals – on which one could intervene and who could be modelled according to the new ideals in order to become a better worker, a braver soldier and a more reliable citizen.

Childhood meant, primarily, schooling – which greatly reduced the time potentially allocated to the household chores fulfilled by children (children are taken from the fields and brought to school) – and, secondly, organisation, on the principles of socialisation and of building the character within children's organisations. The Soviet model of children's organisations pushes the Occidental model of the *Boy Scouts* or the fascist model of the HJ towards its absolute limits, almost all children aged between 9 and 14 being included in the Pioneer Organisation (*Vsesoyuznaya Pionerskaya Organizatsia Imeni Vladimira Ilichy Lenina*) that offered them dancing classes, physical training, summer camps and indoctrination – often through memorisation! On the other hand, children had to participate, in accordance with their own abilities, in the collective work efforts in the fields, factories and plants, in helping the veterans, etc. Naturally, school became the recruitment basis for the future communist youth. School as an institution was the first link in the training system of staff needed to build socialism. Youth needed to be educated in the spirit of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism. In 1918, Soviet communists decided that "we must make the younger

¹⁶ P. Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, p. 103.

generation a generation of Communists. We have to transform children into true communists. We must learn to influence significantly the family. We have to take control and, to say clearly, nationalize them. Since the first days they [the children] will be under the influence of Communist kindergartens and schools”.

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