

NEW EUROPE COLLEGE



Social Behaviour and Family Strategies in
the Balkans (16th – 20th Centuries)

Comportements sociaux et stratégies
familiales dans les Balkans
(XVIe-XXe siècles)

Actes du colloque international
9-10, juin 2006
New Europe College Bucarest

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La publication de ce volume a été rendue possible par l'appui accordé au NEC par l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie.

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ISBN 978-973-88304-2-4

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Socialization of the Family

– Support or control? –

Aleksandra PAVIĆEVIĆ

This paper forms part of the broader research on the topic of marriage, family and gender morality in Serbia in the second half of the twentieth century that I have been involved with over the last several years. It was my wish was to create a synthetic study that included all the important elements of a process that in practical terms was initiated before my interest in it began and which has not yet been finished. My focus was on the second half of the previous century, in which every decade, even each year, implied a rapid acceleration of the dynamics of cultural change, allowing neither time nor place to perceive the phenomena studied as a whole, thereby rendering their interpretation and understanding in the contemporary moment all the more difficult. Although my research – besides the analytical overview of literature in the area of social theory, law, ethnology and demographics – also includes empirical (field) research by the relevant institutions in a number of villages located in northern Sumadija, a region 70 kilometers from Belgrade, by taking into consideration the research topic as well as the topic of the conference itself, this paper will deal with interpretations of the most common ideas, positions and concepts in respect of transformation of the family

and the family as a whole that were dominant in social theory and social policy in Serbia during the period of socialism.

The intense development of a socialist society, which began immediately after World War II, was conducted simultaneously on two mutually dependent fronts: material and ideological. Both were in a way founded on the criticism of the traditional social concept – from its economic characteristics to the system of values – and were pursued under the universal slogan of “modernization”. The policy of transformation largely rested upon a number of dichotomies expressing the difference between inherited and desired social forms and contents. The inherited – *old, retrograde, conservative, patriarchal, alienated* – was to be replaced by what was desirable – *new, progressive, modern, egalitarian, democratic, free*. The main exponent of the inherited was the rural, agricultural family, while the main exponent of the desired, as later transpired, was the urban-type family.¹ The extent to which the scientific attitude was opposed to the rural tradition was summarized and stated explicitly in a comment on the goals of the social reforms: “The transformation of the comprehensive life framework has a unique goal: to liberate members of the family from the idiocy of rural life.”²

Modernization also implied the economic restructuring of the state through a process of intensive industrialization, and, as a consequence, urbanization; the dominant idea in the “non-material” discourse was the idea of the democratization of society based around a unique ideology of “freedom” to be incorporated into all instances of social reality. The de-alienation of society was to be achieved through the emancipation of its members in all forms – i.e. labor, ethical and religious – and was proclaimed the supreme ideal of the new order.

Despite the prevailing attitude in specialist literature that social transformation is conditioned by economic and technological factors and “progress”, it is my opinion that this process was primarily of a “spiritual” nature, i.e. the atheization of the society was its main trigger and motivator. The development of a modern society (not only in Serbia) implied its dechristianization and secularization, where “liberation” from God and the “compulsions” contained in religious attitudes to the world appeared as a prerequisite for accepting all others.³ I will not dwell on these well-known facts. I merely wish to state their extreme importance to the anthropological understanding of the processes which took place on a global level (independent of socialism) after World War II and the relative failure of the basic ideas and tasks of modernization faced by all socialist societies in Europe in the post-socialist period.⁴

I will now discuss the topic of this paper, the socialization of the family, i.e. the ideas and effects of one of the main measures aimed at “liberating” this nucleus of society. Why did the family appear on the list of institutions to be modified? From what was it supposed to be liberated? How was this achieved and what were its consequences?

The beginning of an answer to these questions is found in the Marxist view of the relationship between freedom and private property. It is well-known that Marxist theoreticians believed that freedom, as the supreme goal of the new social order, could be achieved only in a situation of absolute social equality. Private property was perceived as a source of inequality, and the transformation of the family as its main exponent was therefore seen as a prerequisite for general social change. The process of socialization of the family was founded on the idea that liberation from the multiple functions

traditionally performed by the family was a precondition of the development of a democratic family. Although this was primarily related to the function of production, other areas of family life – expenditure, nutrition, reproduction, socialization of offspring and care for the elderly – were not excluded.⁵

However, the family was primarily to be liberated from the “slavery” of the family economy. This was achieved through well-known economic reforms, such as the agrarian reform and nationalization. The liberation of the family from the function of production was supposed to lead to the abolition of the relationship of submission and the economic dependence of members of the family on the “supreme elder – the father of the family”.⁶ This implied the abolition of his authority, which was primarily of a moral, though of course also an economic, nature, implying the disappearance of the authority of traditional moral norms. This, at any rate, was stated explicitly in the proclaimed objectives of socialization, which perceived “traditionalism” and “conservatism” of the village family as the main obstacles to social reform; and the abolition of patriarchal morality and authority was therefore seen as the way to overcome it.⁷ The forced confiscation of land was but the first in a list of measures taken with the aim of creating stronger social (state) influence upon this group, which, up to that moment, had been relatively independent and self-sufficient.⁸ On the other hand, the tendency to change the foundations of the internal organization of the family implied the “liberation” of the family from the function of the mediator in the individual-family-society relationship, which was supposed to open up a broader range of possibilities for free choice, self-achievement and the emancipation of family members in the outside world. In essence, however, this also opened up possibilities for society (the state) to exert a more direct influence on the individual.

The confiscation of a large part of family property and the “abolishing” of private property implied the abolition of more than one aspect of the production function of the family. In modern conditions, this was, roughly speaking, replaced by the “production” of the money needed to support the life of the family, which contributed to its opening up and greater dependence on the social system. However, the evaluation of the results of this process is very much in question, mainly because of the dysfunctionality of the system of social policy, which became evident by the end of the 1970s. Forced measures, such as agrarian reform and the confiscation of property, among many others, placed the family in a situation of full dependence on social institutions, which, as it transpired, were unable to respond to its now critical needs. Besides this, socialization also had its price, which, though also symbolic, was mainly economic and which for a long time now has proved hard to attain for most families in Serbia. It may be said that the development of a consumer society, not the protection of the family – as was primarily proclaimed – is the main, or at least the most striking, consequence of socialization today. Thus, in one relatively recent study, it was established that “consumer orientation” in modern rural households provided proof that “members of the rural family emancipated themselves from submission to the farm and economic and labor functions of their existence, so that the family, household and farm are now perceived as the basis for more comprehensive human development”.⁹ Apart from the fact that, at a glance, “consumer orientation” appears to be a suspicious consequence of emancipation, it seems here that it had been momentarily forgotten that “emancipation” contained essential internal contradictions, having been forced, and therefore not being a spontaneously chosen life option. In the same paper, the author speaks about the relativity of the very notion of emancipation

in the aforementioned context: "...the other source of this change in perceptions and behavior of the members of the rural households is undesirable, as it stimulates values and behaviors which underestimate labor engagement, especially in agriculture, while stimulating values which relate to prestige and conformity."¹⁰ It is clear that, after taking over the traditional functions of the family, the state began to profit from them and failed to provide this social group and its members with the protection they used to enjoy in their traditional social milieu. Although social policy proclaimed the principle which, in respect of the family, stipulated much greater obligations and responsibilities towards the socialist society than had been the case with any previous social and political system, the family crisis was largely caused by the unpreparedness of the society to take on the functions from which the family had previously been "liberated" by means of the aforementioned measures.¹¹

Generally, it can be concluded that the roles from which the family was to be liberated were perceived as being those of constitutively lesser importance. Their abolition was meant to promote the development of emotional and friendly relations among family members,¹² while family life as a whole was apparently not taken into consideration. In one of her papers, Zagorka Golubovic even distinguishes between the "essential" functions of the family and those not considered as such, connecting the latter exclusively to the traditional family type.¹³ The process of socialization of the "subordinate" family functions – i.e. production and mediation – were meant to help preserve the freedom of the family and its identity, as well as the "inviolability of the intimacy of its internal life".¹⁴ This in effect meant that the reduction of family functions was aimed at liberating the family from the remaining functions – those of reproduction and socialization.¹⁵ The reality, however, turned

out somewhat differently, namely that there was an accepted attitude in the social theory that almost all aspects of life of a traditional family were subjected to its economic functions. Thus, having children was perceived as a form of production (of people) primarily aimed at meeting the basic economic needs of the family.¹⁶ At one point, Zagorka Golubovic explains how “the biological reproductive function in a traditional family organization was also closely connected to the economic function, as it was not natural restoration of the species that was highlighted, but renewal in an economic sense – aimed at providing able-bodied members, who will maintain the tradition and activities of this small family business on biological grounds”.¹⁷ In light of this interpretation, we cannot but wonder whether the author has ignored the fact that religious beliefs were quite important when it came to the “regulating” and general understanding of reproduction in a traditional social context. The influence of religious dogmas on this aspect of family life made a significant contribution to bringing it as close as possible to what we might call “natural restoration of the species”. Besides this, the participation of all members of the family in its everyday life and the meeting of its various needs (regardless of whether related to everyday life and the needs of the traditional or modern family and regardless of the manner in and extent to which the needs of individual family members participate in these joint needs) is a fact that is more than logical. But this does not mean, however, that these family functions are to be interpreted as a reason for having posterity. The economic determination of family functions and various aspects of family life to a certain extent go without saying (and again regardless of the type of social organization), and as such this attitude would not be that disputable were it not for the negative and superficial valuation of the concept of the traditional family

and the manner of life as a whole set in its foundations. It was thus for this reason that having posterity was also subjected to socialization, regardless of the declarative unquestioning quality of family intimacy. On the one hand, this was performed indirectly, since the fundamental changes in the proclaimed system of values also contained (spontaneous) changes which related to the attitude towards reproductive behavior and sexual life as a whole.¹⁸ The struggle for the emancipation of women also played a significant role in this, since it supported the mass employment of women, if nothing else.¹⁹ On the other hand, the lack of economic instruments to confirm the importance and responsibility of parenthood, as well as advocacy of birth control, family planning and the need to *overcome the spontaneous characteristics of reproduction* had a direct impact on the changes in the attitude towards having posterity.²⁰

The need to socialize the family, i.e. to merge it with society, was in some places explained in terms of lack of trust towards the family as the factor of socialization of the youth, something characteristic of all socialist societies.²¹ In light of this explanation, the fact that the entire described set of ideas and activities led to a limiting of the “right” of the family to socialize posterity – achieved among other methods by enrolling children in pre-school institutions and extended-day programs for school children – seems logical. Clearly, this today still relates more to urban rather than rural families, since, in the latter, in the case of extended households (the most widespread form), the eldest generation takes care of the children before they start school. In relation to this, it is worth mentioning that the policy of socialization of the family also implied liberating the individual from family ties and the traditional loyalty to relatives.²² Despite the fact that it was once remarked that “the family can hardly be separated from its functions”,²³ based on

the other sources it can be concluded that this implied neither the reproductive function nor links and solidarity among relatives. It appears that the family adopted the new reproductive models most easily,²⁴ and that disappearance of family connectedness took place much faster than the development of institutional, or, as mentioned in one place, “social” forms of solidarity, which led to a large number of single or elderly households and financially unsupported persons.²⁵

In view of the aforementioned argument, it is clear that a large number of activities traditionally connected with the family group were declared unneeded. Given this reduction as well as the functionalistic interpretation of social functions – something clearly quite widespread in social theory – the question posed by some theoreticians relating to the point of further survival of the family form sounds quite meaningful.²⁶ It is necessary here to mention that the disappearance of the family is possibly the epilogue to the transformation, i.e. the crisis of the family envisaged in scientific opinion. It should be borne in mind that this possibility was interpreted more in terms of “collateral damage” of a broader social and economic restructuring than as its goal. Although the description of the real state of the matter lies somewhere between these two interpretations – i.e. although the process of transformation of the family was both the goal and the consequence of global social trends – it may still be concluded, based on some discussions, that the disappearance of the family was the expected and desired, and therefore the planned, outcome of socialist ideology. This was to be achieved through the absolute denial of the importance of the role it used to play and its full merging into the broader social community.²⁷ This is corroborated by the fact that the family was not treated in the

Preliminary Draft Constitution of the FSRJ. Some items in this document dealt with marriage, the relationship between parents and children born through marriage or an extramarital relationship, equality of the sexes, and special protection of children and youth,²⁸ but the family as a unit, and measures aimed at its protection, were simply omitted. Besides this, the provisions on the family, scattered among some other acts, are, as M. Mladenovic writes, “frequently not stimulating, but rather discouraging for the family group”.²⁹

Nonetheless, the family has survived. But is this so because of the disintegration of the socialist system or due to the fact that functionality of the family as an institution clearly could not be restricted to its “technical” activities? In his paper from 1973, Mladenovic writes that “...having abandoned concepts of free marriage, freedom of love, unilateral divorce, social upbringing of children, etc., the socialist countries once again turned to the family, proclaiming the principle that only a solid, strong family could enable the bio-social reproduction of a person”.³⁰ Some years later, in 1995, Andjelka Milic also pays respect to the family, describing it as “the focal point of everyday life, its organizational centre. It is a stability zone within the permanently fluctuating trends of everyday life and variable historic trends. It is the only and the main remaining resource left to individuals after the society succumbed to devastation and destruction”.³¹ It appears that, though in a permanent crisis and faced with the failure to meet all the existential and not-so-existential needs of its members, though frequently deprived of resources and measures to “control” and direct its members, the family is finally on its way to obtaining the status of an institution whose existence is neither limited nor defined solely in terms of economic, historic and political parameters.

Generally speaking, though the “unquestionable” truths of socialist ideology and society – i.e. the emancipation of women

and the special protection of motherhood, the emancipation of children, the socialization of the family, etc. – were at least theoretically directed towards the humanization of family relations and the development of individualism as a manner of “free bonding, forming friendly and democratic connections among the family members”,³² decisions on how valuable or even applicable they were must be taken based on their real performance in society. The increase in the number of single and elderly households, childless marriages, all forms of extra-marital relations, children born outside wedlock, incomplete families, self-sustained, divorced or abandoned mothers, the number of cases of family pathology, generation gaps, psychological, sexual and social disharmony, the disorganization of the family – all these appear to be a good indicator of the failure of a specific worldly dogma.³³

The democratization of society and the family is still the main idea in both the social theory and the proclaimed values of social policies. What has not changed, however, is the attitude to what can be regarded as true democratization. For this reason the fact that the contents of this notion must be modified in relation to historical experience, and more so still in relation to the real and basic needs of human society, is still beyond the reach of anthropological and political strategies and practice.

NOTES

- ¹ GOLUBOVIĆ, Z., "Teorijsko-hipotetički okvir za istraživanje promena u strukturi porodice," in *Sociologija* 3, Belgrade, 1966, p. 9.
- ² MILIĆ, A., "Promene društveno ekonomskih obeležja domaćinstva," in *Domaćinstvo, porodica i brak u Jugoslaviji*, ISR UF, Belgrade, 1981, p. 43.
- ³ ARIJES, F., *Istorija privatnog života*, Klio, Belgrade 2004, p. 213.
- ⁴ CVETKOVIĆ, V., "Usud moderniteta," in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima dvadesetog veka I*, Institute for New Serbian History, Belgrade, 1994.
- ⁵ FIRST, R., "Hipotetski okvir za istraživanje poljoprivredne porodice," in *Sociologija sela*, 40-43, Zagreb, 1974, p. 14.
- ⁶ MILIĆ, A., *op.cit.*, p. 23.
- ⁷ MILIĆ, A., "Seoska porodica u procesu menjanja," in *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, no. 81, Novi Sad, 1986.
- ⁸ MLADENOVIĆ, M., "Mesto porodice u našem društvu, Osvrt na Prednacr ustava FSRJ," in *Gledišta* 1, Belgrade, 1963, p. 102.
- ⁹ MILIĆ, A., "Seoska porodica," p. 102.
- ¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 109.
- ¹¹ MLADENOVIĆ, M., "Neke alternative porodice," in *Gledišta* 3, Belgrade, 1966, 329; MLADENOVIĆ, M., "Istorijske i ideološke veze socijalne politike i porodice," in *Sociologija* 3-4, Belgrade, 1973, p. 474.
- ¹² BURIĆ, O., "Domaći poslovi: ostaci ekonomske funkcije porodice," in *Porodica i društveni sistem*, ed. Olivera Burić, ISR UF, Belgrade, 1980, p. 266.
- ¹³ GOLUBOVIĆ, Z., *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- ¹⁴ BURIĆ, O., "Porodica i društveni sistem, Završna razmatranja," in *Porodica i društveni sistem*, ur. Olivera Burić, ISR UF, Beograd, 1980, p. 357.
- ¹⁵ FIRST, R., "Trasformacija seoske porodice," in *Gledišta* 12, Belgrade, 1972, p. 1615.
- ¹⁶ GOLUBOVIĆ, Z., *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ¹⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ¹⁸ MILIĆ, A., "Preobražaj srodničkog sastava porodice i položaj članova," in *Domaćinstvo, porodica i brak u Jugoslaviji*, ISR UF, Belgrade, 1981, p. 160.

- ¹⁹ The legalization of women’s rights in general was a growing trend throughout the period observed, but the realistic possibilities to establish a functional system for the protection of women and children in Serbia today, at the beginning of twenty-first century, are remote. However, this process had an influence, if not on changes in the position of women, certainly in terms of changing their behavior, the main gate through which the state “stepped into” family intimacy. I do not believe it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the whole set of given circumstances does not have encouraging effects on the stability of the family.
- ²⁰ MILIĆ, A., “Preobražaj srodničkog sastava,” p. 160; MLADENović, M., “Neke alternative porodice,” p. 329.
- ²¹ MLADENović, M., “Istorijske i ideološke veze,” pp. 465, 466.
- ²² MILIĆ, A., “Preobražaj srodničkog sastava,” p. 140.
- ²³ BERKOVIĆ, E., “Mesto lične i zajedničke potrošnje u preobražaju porodice,” in *Domaćinstvo, porodica i brak u Jugoslaviji*, ISR UF, Belgrade, 1981, p. 97.
- ²⁴ MILIĆ, A., “Preobražaj srodničko sastava,” p. 160.
- ²⁵ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁶ GOLUBOVIĆ, Z., *op.cit.*, p. 7.
- ²⁷ MLADENović, M., “Neke alternative,” p. 324.
- ²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 96.
- ²⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁰ MLADENović, M., “Istorijske i ideološke veze,” p. 465.
- ³¹ MILIĆ, A., “Svakodnevni život porodica u vrtlogu društvenog rasula, Srbija 1991-1995,” in *Društvene promene i svakodnevni život: Srbija početkom devedesetih*, Belgrade, 1995, p. 140.
- ³² MLADENović, M., “Neke alternative,” p. 327; MLADENović, M., “Istorijske i ideološke veze,” p. 470.
- ³³ MLADENović, M., “Podruštvljanje porodičnog prava,” p. 364; MLADENović, M., “Preobražaj porodice,” p. 563; ĐURIĆ, V., “Neki uzroci atomiziranja porodice poljoprivrednika,” in *Sociologija sela*, no. 19-20, Zagreb, 1967, p. 58; MILIĆ, A., “Preobražaj srodničkog sastava,” p. 144; MLADENović, M., “Istorijske I ideološke veze,” pp. 462, 474; ERLIH, V., “Trideset I tri godine transformacije porodice,” in *Sociologija sela*, no. 31-32, Zagreb, 1971, p. 164.

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