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## The woman in the communist regime. Meta - analysis about a gender study

### Abstract

*From the perspective of meta-analysis done in a qualitative structure, the study puts forward an inventory of the communist regime studies in the following ways:*

*1. The re-evaluation of the social ideology-propaganda-practice relationship of the equality between sexes in the communist regime*

*2. The contextualization and the evolution of the social representations of a woman's role.*

*3. The effects of some political decisions, which can count as aggressiveness of a state towards its citizens (770/1966 Decree).*

### Motto:

*Here, the woman kisses the man's hand until a moment ago, Marin Patru used to say*

*In addition, she always respects him. She makes him three-four kids, but never dares to be rude to him.*

*The most proud ones would not say anything to him.*

*A woman has her things (...) what does a woman know?*

*She is there to clean the glass on a lamp, fix the blinds*

*Align everything up, like a soldier's duty line*

*Get a hold of yourself; massage you when your back hurts*

*But what does she know?*

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### Key words:

Women, communist regime, ideology, propaganda, equality between sexes, social representation

The title, "The woman in the communist regime" started in Romania about half a century ago, organizations, institutions, publications, propaganda programs, social or cultural, which warranted the application of one of the programmatic points of the communist ideology: the abolition of women's free labour and her equality to man.

Taking in consideration all the studies which have been done, using scientific methods, we can denounce:

1. The re-evaluation of the social ideology-propaganda-practice relationship of the equality between sexes in the communist regime
2. The contextualisation and the evolution of the social representation about a woman's role
3. The effects of some political decisions, which can count as aggressiveness of a state towards its citizens (770/1966 Decree).

We will try in the next lines, a cutout from this perspective, mentioning the intention of a typical qualitative meta-analysis inventory.

## The woman in the state of "a new man"

Well recognized, the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) should have brought fundamental changes in the woman's state, considered in the divided societies in antagonistic states, in a condition of "domestic slave" (Engels, 1897). Women were on the way to becoming "working people" and members with all the rights of society, freed from kitchen work and the raising of children through the creation of canteens, day cares and kindergartens.

A primary effect of the contemplated changes would have been the replacement of the bourgeois family, founded on social and economic interests, through "*unrestrained cohabiting*" or marriages arranged exclusively on love. Between those two types, the ethical differences were not marked. For the making of the working class, "*it does not matter if love changes into an overlong, legalized alliance or manifests itself in the form of a passing liaison*", Bolshevik theory by A. Kollontai, in that period, the relationship between sexes. Therefore, a divorce law was introduced which permitted both spouses to end the marriage based on the motive of incapability (December 1917) and abortion was legalized (1920).

Looking at the children, regardless of their parents' wish, their communist education should have started from the first stage of their life. From a socialist point of view, E. Preobrajenski (1918) states - it is not rational that a society member should consider its' own body private property, inalienable, given that the person represents just a link in the evolution of the species. Just as irrational it would be if the parents would consider that the offsprings are "*theirs*". Consequently, obstinate programs have been drawn up, through which the children were taken from under the parents' wing and motioned towards the tasks of the ruling party and of the state.

The plans failed due to the lack of money. Not even the forbidden sexual liberty could benefit from the multitude's cohesion. Therefore, the great powers soon gave up in promoting these projects, because the monetary estimation was too great to allow a change. The pay of the activities (housewife, stay-at-home mom, raising and educating the children) practiced in the family, usually inexistent, especially for women, would mean the failure of the precarious, soviet economy. (Pipes, 1998).

In the communist regime just implemented, the fundamental, moral criterion was "the good of the cause" because, in accordance with the ideological changes, for the proletariat the ethics derived from itself, changes "*naturally, step by step*" (Buharin, Preobrajenski, 1975, p. 85).

Moreover, the duplicity of the social equality promoted by the Bolshevik regime shows itself before the duplicity of the sexual equality. The new tenants of Kremlin - the ex "professional revolutionaries" turned into Bolshevik leaders and their families - lived according to the bourgeois, stay-at-home customs, disapproved yet in the public address. The special food rations, the access to stores, hospitals, special dispensaries and a personal domestic help made up from nurses, cooks, cleaning ladies, drivers, bodyguards were introduced in the Kremlin's tenants' life from 1918. (Bajanov, 1991).

In 1923-1924, the Soviet ideologists organized a couple important debates regarding the Bolsheviks' ethics, rising up the *"issue of women"*. *The government party has the right to cast a glance in anyone's family out of us and promote itself in it.*" declared with such an opportunity the public instructions police officer, A. Lunacearski, voicing his hope that among other things *"the vices defeated by the party"* will also be that of *"the chaos from the family life of the communists"*. From the investigation of an ethical norm, resulted the decision Politburo attributed to the family, as principal function, that of "support cell" for its' member or the members of the party from its constitution. The sexual equality slogan was formally applied through the changes intervened in the woman's state. To this was attributed, in the new political conditions, a triple role: the woman as a producer, the woman as a mother, and the woman as a wife.

In the Stalinist apogee, the same as in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the emphasis was displaced on the family's function of raising vigorous children, in the spirit of moral tradition. Abortion was forbidden (1936), the divorce was discouraged and the *"telling on"* was stimulated between family members. Through the *"party organizations, of the crowd"* intervention, the husband-wife, parents-children relationships were subordinated to the ideology.

## Without suffragettes

The totalitarian regimes have made from the control over information a priority, so that the Bolshevik *"experiments"* from 1917-1920 were eliminated from history. The set-up of communist regimes in the southeast and the centre of Europe, invaded by the Red Army, after the transition phase designated with the phrase *"the regime of the popular democracies"* (1945-1948), signified the imposing of practices and structures of the Stalinist Russia. Among these are also those concerning the woman's status. The women's life, them being turned into *"makers of material and spiritual goods"*, was not easier.

On the newspaper level, due to the electoral laws in 1946, a great change occurred, without exaggerating, epoch-making: all the women in Romania received the right to vote. Most of them have not even dreamt of "equality between the sexes"! Without previous effort and without suffragist movements, the Romanian women found themselves endowed, overnight, with all the civic rights.

From the world's history point of view, the fact that in front of the law women and men had equal rights represents a recent change. France - a standard for European democracy - can serve as a guide in evaluating the women's condition in Romania. "The women's acquiring equality would be the best proof of our civilization and would double the mankind intellectual forces," pleaded the novelist Stendhal in their favor in a "Lettre ouverte aux hommes" about 200 years ago. Only at the beginning of the 20th century however, the married French women obtain the right to spend their salary on their

own. After another three decades, the married women's judicial incapacity was suppressed, the husband still maintaining his right to choose the family's home and his authority over the children. In the long history until April 21, 1944, when women in France obtained the right to vote and be voted, many militants signed up for the sexual equality. With pressure, meetings and demonstrations, from 1966 married women are free to practice a profession without the husband's approval. In the eight decade of the preceding century, the paternal authority over the children, changes into "parental authority" and the principle of equality in regards to the pay for the same job was accepted. In 1983, a law is approved that states the professional equality between the two sexes and in 1987 the night restriction regarding work are eliminated for women. (Vernet and Butera, 2004).

This sequence of data shows well the slow progression and the recent consent of women's rights in a country where democracy has a well-known history. So much about the Romanian women ...! The people from Bucharest ridiculed in the 20th century the "feminism" of a Mițe ( regional word Maria), which mounted with great courage a bicycle. In a country where the church preached till recently fear and submission of women towards men, to the humour of many of the wedding guests at the religious weddings done in orthodox style. In the middle of the last century, the status of women wasn't very different from that of the children. Not taken from the old customs of the Romanian south villages, she had to walk at the same pace as her husband, hindered by both the great length of the dress and the "shortness of the mind", in some places, she wasn't even called by her name. The girl, called " âcă" (regional word for *girl*) would then soon be called "muica" (regional word for mother) through the command of "do it" of her father or her husband.

Through the democratic legislation adopted in the context of a precarious economy, exists nevertheless a formal equality due to which women go to schools, get a job everywhere, they speak up, take over responsibilities outside of the family, spend their salary however they wish, divorce when they want and raise their children on their own. There were new and significant social rights - the right to work and the assurance of the workplace- the right of education and free health benefits. Through these practices, the new regime exploded the traditional, Romanian society structures.

For the recording of progress, statistics meters are meaningful for comparison matters. The most spectacular change in the status of women happened from the access and free of charge education on all levels. Corresponding with the census from 1930, 44% of the population from Vechiul Regat was illiterate, the same with 62% of the population from Basarabia, 34% from Bucovina and 33% from Transilvania (Doggan, 1999, p. 117). At the same time, the number between boys and girls that finished high school or university also changed significantly. If in 1938-1939, in Romania, 41.2% of highschool graduates were girls and in 1971 it grew to 51.5%. Looking at university graduates, the percent of women graduates grew from 25.9% in 1938-1939 to 48.3% in 1989-1990 (Kligman, 2000, p. 36).

## The Duplicity of the equality between sexes

Did the women from Romania acquire equal rights after 1946? In accordance with the Bible story of the banishing of the first couple on Earth, Eve had to endure the hardships of life. Her plight of having a painful birthing experience and her struggle of rais-

ing the children; to this was also added the burden to toil and sweat through life, this initially set aside for Adam.

You do not need to study extensively the former regime to conclude that alike for men and women, democracy is only symbolical. Just like in 1946, and all the elections from the communist years, the citizens put in the urns the ballots, they answered - if they were asked- with the phrases committed to propaganda (ex:" I voted for the good of our people") and the "results" were always those decided by the top leaders a long time before the election day.

Equal with men when it came to general and vocational education, in 1989 40.8% of factories' employees were women. Although the ideology of the time requested insistently the promoting of women in jobs of management both political and economic, it was applied in the same way the equality between husband and wife. Like minorities, women secured a certain political share of the influential jobs. Their presence was usually symbolic, reflecting an operative, percentage system. In the political and state institutions, just like in the bodies of leadership in enterprises, women were as P. Bourdieu (1992) puts it "*the dominated fraction of the dominating class*".

If the equality between the sexes was achieved through the constitutional right and obligation of women to work, alike with men, in working families or first generation intellectuals have been kept, with predilection, the traditional relationships from the peasant families. In the spirit of the rural tradition, the responsibility of taking care and educating the children remained the undertaking of the woman, and her share of the housework was kept disproportioned in comparison with that of the man. The economic evolvement meaning the metallurgical and construction industry, the production of consumption goods was always adverse, therefore, to those traditional responsibilities, women also added the weight of supplying the family. In their private life, women continued to remain inferior to men, disadvantaged by the politics' recommendation. The woman "citizen and working person" had simultaneously obligations to be "the marvelous wife and mother". Like for Eve, the blame falls on her for the drunkenness, laziness, waste, dissipation or "political errors" of the man. Although "the problem with happiness", cinema's top theme from the last stage of the regime, is resolved in the classic way for the family's peaceful life. A cliché image is dinner - with the family's chief seated at the head of the table with at least four kids, being served from the steamy bowl (unknown when prepared) by his wife, both just returned, from a glorious working day. Manager of the industrial factory, zootechnic or Member of Romanian Parliament, among her obligations, the woman in the communist regime is by all means "more equal" than the man.

## "The woman - the well of the socialist nation"

*The family code*, adopted in communist states after the second WW, was a copy made after the Stalinist one. In Romania, the legislation about divorce registered fluctuations varying with the present ideological commands.

In 1948, they were eliminated from the Romanian Civil Code, article 254-276 referring to the reasons for divorce established through consensus (in operation from 1864). Through the 18/1948 law, the divorce became dependent on justice's ideological commands, which reviews on repeated lines, the conditions for the unbinding of the marriage, thus in 1966 the divorce was possible only in "*exceptional cases*". Since the individual's rights weren't part of the communist politics, the divorce was discouraged.



Abortion was, as well, forbidden in Romania from the beginning of the establishing of the communist regime until the its' abolition in USSR. Article 482 of the Penal Code was reviewed in 1848, therefore the interruption of a completely healthy pregnancy was turned into a crime. Just like before 1944, not many women resorted to curettage (in 1938 for 2036 inhabitants, there was one general doctor), the traditional methods to plan a family and stop a pregnancy didn't change too much. Also, the activities that violated the mentioned article weren't followed, especially in the 50s. Given this discrepancy, the law lost its' significance.

The consequences of the social life's modernisation, the birth rate continued to drop and was reduced to infantile death rate. Between the two World Wars, Romania had the highest death rates from Europe (especially the infant death rate), but also one of the highest birth rates.

In 1955, abortion was legalized in the Soviet Union and most of the satellite countries copied this measure respectively. Without journalistic campaigns and without a preamble which specifies reasons, in September 1957, abortion was legalized in Romania due to demand (after it was forbidden in 1948). The precise measure that only the stopping of pregnancies carried out will be sanctioned, outside a medical institution or by a person who is no qualified.

What exactly determined N. Ceausescu, so that after only one year of being in power to prohibit abortions, after the Soviets and his predecessor Gherghiu-Dej allowed it? The fact that it represents the highest level of an initiative proves its form for public promotion: not a law implied by the country's legislative body, but a decree which initializes a long line of dictatorial applications.

How and why was the anti-abortion decree adopted? Being hard to restore the mental process of a political decision, the psychology was and remains "*a difficult zone of history's research*" (Lynch, 1994, p. 85). In accordance with the testimony of one of Ceausescu's men, the anti-abortion decree was adopted because the Romanian leader wanted to be the commander of a great nation - population wise. (Popescu, 1994) The rise in birth rates - with a yearly rate of 18-20% - involved mechanisms similar of the planning in the economics domain.

In the newspaper "Scanteia", the new measures and interdictions which aimed at the realization of the "plan" of minimum four kids for each family, was being let known. The decree - promulgated in the name of the State Council on October 2nd, 1966 - mentions in the preamble that the ending of a pregnancy represents "*a case with grave consequences on the woman's health and brings about big harm to the birth rates and natural efficiency of the population.*" The decree states exceptions, as well as sanctions for its' violation (the manufacture, obtainment or commercializing of birth-control being an offence).

Therefore, the state police and the prosecutor's office were implicated in the human reproduction problems, the same with the starting of "*the class fight*", they were implicated in the annihilating of the category declared "*the proletariat's enemies*". The most intimate component of a human life - the sexuality - was subjected to the political party's command and control, and the interventionist state reaches, in Romania, the top in this characteristic.

## The psycho-sociological consequences

The first consequence accounts for, of course, the increase in the *birth rate*. As a result of the demographic, legislated politics, in 1967, the total birth rates doubled compared to the previous year, resulting in 3.7 kids born to a woman, for the period after 1944 in Romania (Trebici, 1991). In 1973, the birth rates returned to 2.4 kids per woman, in the years that followed, it remained at the low numbers that could be seen before the adoption of the decree.

Looking at the statistics, the ban on abortion did not mean it disappeared. To stop the pain at the end of an unwanted pregnancy, women would resort to different means. Some of these means would draw on the practices described by P. Istrati at the beginning of the preceding century. "*Cruelty without name, true barbarians*" (1983, p. 65), the writer named the way women would stab their uterus with knitting needles, carried weights, they would burn their feet with boiling water and they would break their feet jumping from high altitudes. A look at the means for abortions proves that the deed tantamount to the suffering both physical and psychological is hard to estimate.

Romania was not the only country where the political control over the citizen's sexuality was instituted. Deng Xiaoping's limiting of the number of children in China lead to the institutionalizing of the same practice with grave repercussions at the individual's mental level and the collective one. Among the psychosocial consequences of the "*Chinese phenomenon*" (studied in more detail than the Romania's anti-abortion legislation) we keep in mind the decrease in self-esteem of the people. "*The superiors and the subordinates alike contributed to the regime's perpetuation*" - observed J. Gross (1988) - because the totalitarian society "*needed as much participation as vulnerability from everyone*" (apud Kligman, 2000, p. 256).

Combining "*the techniques of a hierarchy, which over watches with those of the sanctions which normalises*" (Foucault, 1997, p. 166), the periodical gynecologist exam for "the tracking down of the pregnant women" signified a method of suggestion from the omnipotent political power. The obligation for this control was "*one of the weapons with the help of which the state penetrated the physical body of its' citizens*", owing to the fact that women began to view their own bodies as an "*inner enemy*" (Kligman, 2000, p. 113).

These were staggering consequences, the decrease and death rate of thousands of women due to complications that occurred from the illegal abortions. The number of women that died from complications during abortions is terrifying: just for the year 1989 there are 1193 deceased, for the years 1966-1989 there are 9452 deceased (Kligman, 2000, p. 230-234). However, the statistics that the interviewed gynecologists reveal are far from the truth. Among the "advice" obtained from these specialists was also that in case of death, the reason should be written as final complications (most often "renal blockage" or "septicemia"), therefore the number of women that died from abortions surpasses 10 000.

In understanding the connection of this decision with the social memory, to be remembered is the political appeal which accompanied the popularization of the Decree 770/1966. The leading article in "Scanteii", the issue which published the decree, was titled "*Our kids - our country's kids*". The limitation on the individual liberty was motivated, through it, as a "*patriotic duty*" in "*the spirit of Romanian tradition*".

At the end of the article, in known, propagandistic language "*the calling*" was released. "*The Political Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party addresses at the same time an appeal to the population, workers, from*

towns and villages, to understand well that the assurance of a normal, demographic growth is a high honor and obligation for every family and for the our whole nation, which always took pride in having lasting families and many children, which were raised with love, ensuring this way the vitality, youth and vigour of the whole nation. Today, more than ever, we have the high obligation of guaranteeing our nation, new generations which can contribute to the blossoming of our socialist nation, at the triumph of socialism and communism in Romania."

After the publication of the anti-abortion decree, from among the women's states promoted by the communist ideology (mother, wife, maker), that of mother becomes most important. In the public address, the woman is often designated through the phrase "*the source of life*", the child becomes "*the completion of the woman's destiny*" and the birth - "*nature's miracle*". In the models for all the newspapers from Romania and in the TV and radio program schedules, permanent shows and headings were introduced with the theme of achieving political demography. The embraced prohibitions and the sanction of their non-observance were motivated with "*scientific reasoning*" in the medical, ethical and moral categories. With propagandistic functions and effects aside from the "*manufacturing of approval*" context (Herman and Chomski, 1988), the "*adhesion of working people*" could be studied at the accepted degrees.

Moreover, the publication of the decree was propagandistically prepared, using the same manipulation scheme for easing the crowd's reaction. However, the Writer's Union president, Z. Stancu published an article about the "*competitions*" of peasant families about having the most children. The fantasy is sustained bombastically with the reason of the similarity between fertility-wealth. (When asked the question, how many children do you have, a peasant answers, depending on the case, "only seven" or "only nine", the prose writer accrediting the idea, otherwise false, because in the Romanian, traditional outlook, the number of children and grandchildren represented material wealth and the family's prestige.)

## The past's reminiscences

In this field also falls the comparison between the "*Dej epoch*" and "*Ceausescu epoch*" in terms of social oppression and repression. The exposed conclusions are in favour of the last phase, when less were victims. "*The class struggle*" stopped when Ceausescu ruled, and the number of political convicts can't even be compared with the phase from 1946 - 1962 - is the historian's conclusion. In reality, just when in "*the socialist camp*", other connections than those instituted by Stalin were established; Ceausescu and his decision centre, which managed him, introduced repressive measures resembling the effect's noxiousness with those theorized for the assurance of the proletariat's victory in the bloody "*class struggle*".

For the anti-abortion decree, the consequences previously recalled, other oppressive measures were juxtaposed. For example, the regulation of presenting oneself at a mandatory job offer for the university graduates from art or medicine; indifferently from the home situation and their aspirations in the period of 1981-1989. This event is tantamount to the establishment of "*compulsory residence*" just like for "*titoisti*" and "*kulaks*" in 1949-1964. (The enrolment case of 1982, from the philosophy-history at the University in Cluj: from 25 graduates, 17 were married with 11 children; through repartition all the families were separated and after 10 years only one couple remained married.)



However paradoxical it seems, Romanian historians and researchers in the social-humane sciences were exclusively monopolised by the victims of "*the class struggle*". Although the number of victims from the anti-abortion decree surpasses them. Like a deep, social memory, the traumatizing memories of the women who went through the illegal abortions are also important.

In the long run, "*the legacy*" of the antiabortion legislation could contain "*the learned helplessness syndrome*" (Seligman, 1975), which explains partially the carelessness of the family planning. Another significant consequence owing to the conditioned, remanent representations of the communist ideology (to be remembered the propagandistic phrase: "*our children - our nation's children*"), could be the lack of responsibility of the parents towards the raising and educating of their children. These children are entrusted too easily to the placement centres or abandoned. Thus in Romania, in 1993, there were 158 078 institutionalized children and circa 5000 "*homeless children*" (Kligman, 2000, p. 256).

It seems that in discussions from outside the country, that talk about banning abortion, the Romanian case is better presented. For example, the newspaper "*Cristian Science Monitor*" from January 27, 1990 writes the "*the Romanian law which forbid abortion before the Revolution should be advertising for US.*" (apud Kligman, 2000, p. 257).

Without intention of joining "memory militants" of the past communism, we think that the effects of the anti-abortion decree in the mind's make-up are important through its' length (23 years) and its' scope, marking the family institution, more significantly in the area of the family's responsibilities in regards to raising and educating the children. In our opinion, the mental consequences of this way can be evaluated and in explanations seeing the absence of an opposition structured in the personnel of "*Ceausescu's regime*". Complexed by the control over sexuality and fearful of a child's birth which are sometimes hard or impossible to raise, are states that express, in a way, the tension and inhibitions of Romanians at the end of the 20th century.

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