

HISTORY, MODERNIZATION AND NEVER MARRIED WOMEN IN ROMANIA

Adriana Savu¹

Resumo

A fim de compreender o desenvolvimento atual de qualquer questão de interesse para os cientistas sociais, é preciso conhecer o seu passado. Este artigo trata da falta de pesquisa acadêmica e de discurso público sobre mulheres não casadas na Romênia. Ele procura explicações voltando no tempo e acompanhando as mudanças demográficas, políticas e sociais da Romênia nos últimos dois séculos. O texto destaca o fato de que todos os projetos de modernização estabelecidos para a Romênia tiveram como alvo as mulheres não como indivíduos, mas como uma entidade coletiva responsável pela construção e reprodução da nação. O foco principal da sociedade romena manteve-se na família e na reprodução. Assim, as mulheres que nunca se casaram e sem filhos ainda não encontraram um caminho para fora da margem.

Palavras-chave: história, modernização, mulheres, nunca casadas, Romênia.

Abstract

In order to understand the present development of any issue of interest to social scientists, one needs to get a grasp of its past. This paper addresses the lack of academic research and public discourse on never married women in Romania. It looks for explanations by going back in time and following the Romanian demographic, political and social changes over the last two centuries. The paper highlights the fact that all the modernization projects set for Romania had targeted women not as individuals, but as a collective entity responsible for building and reproducing the nation. The main focus of Romanian society has remained on family and reproduction. Thus, the never married and childless women have not found their way out of the shadows yet.

Keywords: history, modernization, women, never married, Romania.

¹ PhD student, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania. Email: adriana.savu@dtd.snspsa.ro

Introduction

The increasing number of single people, including the never married² ones, and one-person households reflects a significant shift in contemporary demographics and social behaviors around the world. These trends can be observed in many societies, despite their different political, economic, social and cultural backgrounds. When considering the reasons for current changes in demographic behaviors in various countries, a lot of similarities can be found. There are also many specific features intricately linked with cultural values, and social and historical developments, accounting for some more or less acknowledged differences.

Despite the large and growing body of international research on singlehood as well as local statistical and observational data, Romanian social scientists have showed a rather general lack of interest in going beyond marital status as a merely nominal variable within demographic analyses and social studies. For reasons that will be looked upon in this paper, the family has always been the main focus of interest, and single and never married people have counted only as marginal phenomena, at best, or as social and individual dysfunctions, at worst. In this context, any study that focuses on never married people will pioneer an area of local research.

The approach of this paper, as well as the doctoral study from which it stems, started from C. Wright Mills's idea that sociological knowledge occurs at the intersection of biography and history, and that sociologists need to understand the connection between individual experience and society (MILLS, 2000). The interviews conducted as part of the doctoral research showed that middle-aged and older never married Romanian women are very reluctant to talk about their lives and marital status. Social stereotypes regarding their status are very powerful. Even when they are not publicly expressed, many old clichés are still strongly embedded in collective mentality.

² *Celibatari* (m.) and *celibatare* (f.), in Romanian; *celibatários* (m.) and *celibátarias* (f.), in Portuguese.

This paper analyzes Romanian cultural, social and historical contexts, aiming to explain individuals' disinclination to talk about their "never-marriedness". It also looks back in time into Romania's historical demography and its modernization projects in order to understand the apparent lack of public and academic discourse on never married women. As soon as this journey began, it became evident that one cannot fully understand the dimensions of singlehood without taking into account the gendered nature of society, power balance and gender discourses.

The state of demographic affairs: Statistical invisibility

There are demographers who stress the need for interdisciplinarity in studying demographic phenomena. Trebici and Ghinoiu (1986) argued that the demographic variables are knitted together with social, economic, ecological, cultural and psychological variables into a complex texture. They consider demographic behaviors as expressions of cultural models built over centuries and state that, in order to understand the demographic tendencies of the last several decades, one needs to enlarge the retrospective horizon pushing it back to even centuries before, unearth several socio-historical strata, and use knowledge of history, anthropology, sociology, economy and folklore. According to them, "marriage is the demographic event most strongly influenced by social factors, starting with legislation and ending with cultural and psychological factors" (p.110).

The results of the 2011 Romanian demographic census showed that more than a quarter (26.5%) of Romanians aged 15 and over were never married (32.27% of men and 21.15% of women)³. The data might seem unimpressive when compared to that of some Western European countries, but it suffices to say that in 2011 the percentages of never married Romanians, for both genders and all age groups between 25 and 54, were more than double the corresponding percentages in the 1992 census. In 2018, the national mean age at first marriage was 31.9 for men and 28.7 for women (INS). Looking back to the beginning of the 20th century

³ Data processed from 2011 Census Results, vol.1, t.12 (recensamantromania.ro).

situation, it can be said that in ninety years, from 1899 to 1990, the age at first marriage had increased by 0.5 years for men and 1.7 years for women (TREBICI; GHINOIU, 1986). The differences between the mean ages at first marriage in 1990 and 2018 were 6.9 years for men and 6.7 for women (TREBICI; GHINOIU, 1986; INS). The increase was even more pronounced for the capital city of Romania where, in the last twenty-seven years, the age at first marriage has increased by more than 8 years for both genders. In 2018, in Bucharest⁴, men married at an average age of 35.6 years, while women at 33 years (INS).

The age at first marriage and the proportion of people who never marry are the two distinctive features that, for at least two centuries up until the World War II (WWII), according to Hajnal (1965), had differentiated the Western European marriage pattern from the rest of the world, including the Eastern European countries. Hajnal analyzed the marriage behaviors of European countries considering the time point of 1900. He used the age groups of 20-24 and 25-29 as indicators of the age at marriage and the age group of 45-49 as an indicator for the number of people who never marry at all, and drew an imaginary border⁵ in the middle of Europe that separated Western and Eastern marriage patterns (HAJNAL, 1965). Recent studies, however, showed that there was much more spatial variation in marriage behavior, even within the borders of the same country (GAVALAS; TSCHEULIN, 2017)

Historically, Romania belongs to the Eastern European marriage pattern group with a quasi-universal marriage and low marriage ages (HAJNAL, 1965; TREBICI; GHINOIU, 1986). The Table 1 shows the percentages of never married women in Romania for the age groups used by Hajnal and it highlights some significant changes taking place after the fall of communism.

Table 1 Percentages of never married women and age at first marriage

| Years | Percentage of never married women | Median age at first marriage |
|-------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
|-------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|

⁴ Bucharest is the capital and largest city in Romania with 1827810 resident inhabitants (as of January 2018) making up for more than 9% of the country's resident population.

⁵ The so-called "Hajnal line", an imaginary line that goes from Sankt Petersburg in Russia to Trieste in Italy and separates the Western European marriage pattern from the Eastern one.

| | 20-24 | 25-29 | 45-49 | |
|---------|-------|-------|------------------|------|
| 1899* | 20.0 | 7.9 | 3.0 | 20.3 |
| 1912* | 33.9 | 9.8 | 2.8 | 21.7 |
| 1956* | 33.5 | 13.3 | 4.3 ¹ | 21.4 |
| 1966* | 24.1 | 7.9 | 4.3 | 20.2 |
| 1977* | 33.5 | 9.9 | 3.5 | 21.0 |
| 1992** | 39.4 | 13.3 | 3.4 | 22.1 |
| 2002** | 66.0 | 30.8 | 5.8 | 24.1 |
| 2011** | 73.7 | 40.8 | 8.2 | 26.2 |
| 2018*** | - | - | - | 28.7 |

*Source: TREBICI; GHINOIU, 1986, p 87 (¹ the age group of 40-49)

**Source: insse.ro - 1992, 2002, and 2011 censuses and Tempo Online

***Source: insse.ro - Tempo Online (POP2016B)

Since the beginning of the 20th century, every Romanian, regardless of age, is asked to reply to the question of civil (marital) status on census forms. Most of the time, statistical data about never married Romanians include also individuals under the age of 18⁶. A rather small number of reports and authors go into more details about age groups in order to separate individuals with legal rights to marry from the under-aged ones or follow the evolution in time of the indicators related to marital status. Yet, the publicly available metadata from the last two national censuses (2002 and 2011) do not offer information on people's marital status for lower levels of administrative divisions such as counties and cities; they only provide the figures for the national level and the overall urban and rural areas. Thus, the single and never married individuals are partially invisible in statistics.

In a recently published book on Romanian demography, the authors analyzed the data from 1948 to 1989 and reasserted the continuity of the Eastern European marriage pattern (ROTARIU et al., 2017). Looking at marriage rates for the 1990-2015 time period, they observed the growing number of never married women of 50-54 years, but they were reserved in declaring that situation as part of a new

⁶ The legal marriage age in Romania is 18 for both genders. For "sound reasons", minors who reached the age of 16 may marry, with parental or guardian consent and judicial authorisation, and upon obtaining the required medical certificate.

demographic reality. They observed the phenomenon of marriage delay, but they toned it down by showing the overall figures in comparison to other European countries, an approach that, indeed, leads to the conclusion that the institution of marriage is still attractive to Romanians (ROTARIU et al., 2017). As stated by Trebici and Ghinoiu (1986), the demographic inertia is greater than that of other economic and social systems since the demographic changes are measured by the time interval of a generation. Demographers are not in a hurry to declare a change in the national marriage pattern and rightly so. However, if one takes into consideration demographic (and cultural) submodels within the national one, as in the differences between urban and rural demographic behaviors, the statement referring to the attractiveness of marriage would probably have more nuances.

The way in which statistical data are processed is influenced by public administration and its policies. Officials' and demographers' interest on Romanian fertility and reproductive behavior leads to processing more demographic data, including marital status, for women than men. However, it leaves out data on never married people. Social researchers who focus primarily on marital status related issues and who need to make comparisons between the sexes or follow indicators at specific local levels have to take on themselves the task of processing demographic data in totally new ways and ask for special permissions to censuses databases. Overall, drawing from the available data on marriages and births it can be inferred that "the demographic events in Romania during the last 15 years [...] bear the mark of both traditionalism and modernism" (BAETICA, 2015).

Traditionalism vs. modernization, an ongoing debate

Theoreticians of modernity associate the process of modernization to industrialization and link them to economic, technological, social and political changes. The ink will probably never dry up with Romanian authors who write about the "unfulfilled" (RADU, 2015) or "hijacked" (MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, 2007) modernization in Romania. As a territory and nation placed between Occident and Orient, the cyclicity of

the debate about modernism versus traditionalism seems to never end and it "essentially defines Romanian cultural destiny" (RADU, 2015, p.9). Currently, analysts of Romanian reality speak more than ever about "the Two Romanias"⁷. During the interwar period, Romanian sociologists and anthropologists began to observe and write about the cleavages between the urban and rural Romania, and about modernization and democracy versus traditionalism, backwardness, nationalism and orthodoxy (BUTOI, 2016).

As a partisan of the idea of "multiple modernities", Paul Blokker (2004) argued that "the original Romanian modern experience differed significantly from the Western one" (p.321). He listed several modernization projects undergone by the territories known now as Romania, starting from the 1848 Revolution onward. As it happened with many European people who defined themselves as different and separated from other "nations", the Romanians went through a "national awakening". "Independence and autonomy as political concepts evolved around the Romanian nation as a reified, supra-individual entity whose existence and development were the primary objectives of the modern state" (BLOKKER, 2004, p.321). The revolution failed, but the ideas of unity and nation led to the 1856 "Little Unification" of two historical territories, Moldavia and Wallachia, inhabited mostly by Romanians. In 1878 Romania gained its independence from the Ottoman Porte and in 1881 it became a monarchy that lasted until 1947, when the last king abdicated and communists came to power. The unification and the independence had been the main projects of the 19th-century Romanian elites.

Blokker (2004) stressed that while the 19th-century Romanian project of modernization was based on cultural-linguistic collectivism, Western modernity was rooted in individualism. In Romania, the major focus was on the emancipation of the nation from foreign tyranny and protection and development of the nation; it was not on individual liberty and freedom,

⁷ A century old syntagma, firstly coined at the end of the World War I by the poet Gavril Rotică, but best known since its usage by the philosopher and sociologist Mircea Vulcănescu during interwar times.

nor on liberation from the interference of religion (BLOKKER, 2004).

In 1918, in the aftermath of the World War I and through a fortunate turn of events, the Romanians achieved their national dream of the Great Unification of all the territories where they had represented the majority of the population. The following two decades represented a time of great urban development, especially for Bucharest, a city that “could compete with the West” (F.T.⁸, 1930, p.62). However, the “other Romania”, the rural one, had not changed very much. The interwar period also saw the rise of Romanian fascist ideology that attracted many young people and intellectuals and promoted a new vision of modernization advocating for popular sovereignty, national emancipation, and a collective identity based on Orthodoxy and communal ruralism (BLOKKER, 2004).

The end of the WWII brought the installation of communism, and thus another project of collective emancipation and even more disregard for individual liberties. Blokker (2004) stated that the Romanian communist regime shifted “from internationalism to particularist nationalism” (p.331) that insulated the country from the reforms that took place in the other countries from the communist bloc. After 1989 the disintegration of the communist state and its institutions took place and the ideas of “European integration”, civil society, and individual liberty started to be promoted.

There is a general agreement that since 1500 until the second half of the 20th century, the Balkans lagged behind the rest of the Europe, especially with regard to economic development and state formation (CHIROT, 2002). At the beginning of the 20th century, Romania was eighty percent rural and illiterate. During the communist regime, due to the socialist process of industrialization and urbanization that triggered a massive villages-to-cities migration, the urban-rural ratio began to change significantly and the literacy increased dramatically. However, for the last 25 years the urban population stayed just a little over 50%, making Romania one of the less urbanized countries in Europe (PLECHER, 2019; STATISTA, 2015).

⁸ The cited book was published under initials only.

Women, the targets of modernization campaigns. The disenfranchised singles

Bringing gender into cultural and historical analyses means shedding light on new spaces of knowledge, making visible ridges and corners of society that were previously hidden in shadows, such as the private spaces to which women were relegated. Writing about female solitude in France during the last three centuries, Farge and Klapisch-Zuber (2016) stated that “the woman alone is in the dead angle of history” (p.7) and that single women had been treated as “silent residua”, not able or worthy of getting out of oblivion. While the French marriage pattern differed significantly from the Romanian one, the legal status of women became quite similar in 1864 when the Romanian Civil Code, largely inspired by the 1804 Napoleonic Code, was adopted. They both worsened the civil status of women, especially married ones, moving them “from a position of legal incapacity to one of absolute dependency on their husbands” (DĂRĂMUȘ, 2015). In the 19th century, French ideas and culture wielded the greatest influence on Romanian society and its elites.

Although most history books used to record only the contributions of male historical figures, the recent undertakings in women's history and feminist studies showed the important role of women in the Romanian unionist movements, as well as during and after the Independence War. The 19th century had known the most numerous and active associations of Romanian women in all the territories they lived in. Their fierce activism was focused on the bourgeois ideal of the woman as the mother of the nation. The fight for women's emancipation went hand in hand with nationalist ideals. Within the general context of liberal thinking which aimed at removing feudal privileges, solving “the peasant question”, and achieving the nationalist and unionist goals, the envisioned role of the woman was that of a wife and mother showing unconditioned devotion to her family, supporting her husband in his public endeavors, and raising children (POPA, 2002). The modernization and emancipation theses promoted by both men and women were part of the nation-building project and they reinforced the patriarchal family and society. Women's education was paramount to the national project, but was coupled

with motherhood as a patriotic duty. Women ought to be moved out of illiteracy because they had to properly raise and teach the future patriots of the country. Băluță (2014) argued that women's right to paid work was construed in a “functionalist key” (p.131), work being considered a much better way for women, specifically bourgeois women, to spend their time than wasting it on frivolities. Women's emancipation was destined only to serve the family and the nation.

Women who postponed marriage were harshly criticized. In an 1878 women's magazine, the editor⁹ wrote: “The unmarried woman is a lost woman. She is excluded from the world of married people, frowned upon by the honest society, and despised even by communists, who are against the order of things and against the rules established with wisdom by religion” (BĂLUȚĂ, 2014, p.170). Women without husbands were generally “referred to as acephalic ('femei fără căpătâiu' in Romanian), an expression that in those times alluded to being deprived of male guardianship, occupation or 'meaning of life” (DĂRĂMUȘ, 2015). The syntagma “fără de căpătâi” was also used for vagrants, people who escaped the control of state or local officials and were considered a social plague (VINTILĂ-GHIȚULESCU, 2015).

In the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Bucharest was the center of urban development of then Wallachian Principality, and later of Romania. The city attracted a manifold crowd of all classes and nationalities, from poor peasants and women fleeing from abusive husbands to foreign workers and industrialists. During that time period, Bucharest had known several upheavals, wars and military occupations. The city went through many epidemics of typhoid fever, pox, cholera, but in the second half of the 19th century the most feared of all seemed to have been the sexually transmitted diseases. The physicians, alongside policemen, became the guardians of public health and morality. “Celibatul”¹⁰ was listed together with concubinage and prostitution as the epitome of “bad morals”. Starting with 1854, any woman without male guardianship was assimilated to prostitutes, registered as a “public woman” and subjected to “prophylactic measures and control” (DĂRĂMUȘ,

2015). Within the city, marriage was the best way for a woman to gain respectability and keep herself away from the interference of public officials into her private life and upon her body.

As mentioned before, at the end of the 19th century, the urban population represented roughly only one fifth of Romania's total population. For the most part, the rural world functioned on “tradition”, customary rules and religious control, and that included also family formation. In an 1890 book on Romanian wedding customs, ethnographer Simion Florea Marian recalled the purposes of marriage: 1) to have a partner in life to help and receive help from, party with, mutually alleviate sufferings, and share the good and the bad in life; 2) to have legitimate descendants in order to perpetuate the blood and ancestry, not leave the family heritage to strangers, be cared for in the old age, keep the traditional postmortem feasts, and pray for their souls after their death; 3) to not be told about that they had lived for nothing on this Earth. Despite the civil laws which allowed young people to marry earlier, the priests were advising for patience in reaching up a certain biologic and social maturity.

According to Marian, there were many young boys who did not marry between 18 and 30, as it was customary and best for them to do it, and some of them never did, living as bachelors all their lives. Similarly, some women could also marry late or not at all. Usually, they were expected to marry starting from the age of 15 to 20. The difference, Marian said, was that all young women would have liked to become wives and not one of them would have voluntarily chosen not to marry. On the other hand, a man could choose not to marry because he did not want to cause grief to his mother by bringing another woman in the parental house, as it was customary. The reasons for women failing to attract potential husbands could have been their ugliness, laziness, the poverty of their parents who could not provide a dowry, or the “loss of their honor”. It was believed that some women remained old maids because their fated soulmates had died or not been born yet. The women and men who did not marry at proper ages were the target of public mockery and sang to and about during collective gatherings and dancing celebrations (MARIAN, 1890).

⁹ Maria Flechtenmacher in *Femeia Română* [The Romanian Woman], no.15, February 20, 1878, cited by Băluță (2014).

¹⁰ Celibacy, as the state of never being married; not related to religion or sexual abstinence.

Olariu (2004) stated that, in the 19th century, the Romanian monasteries from Moldavia and Wallachia were receiving many unmarried daughters of the grand and small noble families. Some of them, Olariu said, were sent on the nunnery path by their families because they were unable or unwilling to endow them or as a religious sacrifice for the family redemption, and yet others had chosen that life for themselves. According to Olariu, most of these women were well educated, spoke several foreign languages, had good manners and were very patriotic, up to date and even involved in social and political events. This trend was so popular that the ruler of the Romanian Principalities, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, was forced to put an age limit for admittance into monasteries, 40 for women and 50 for men (OLARIU, 2004).

Based on data compiled by a German statistician at the passage from the 19th to 20th century, Emanuel Socor (1913) wrote that Balkan countries, Romania included, had more men than women, as opposed to all the other European countries. He argued that a greater proportion of females to males represented a social disadvantage, being the main cause of prostitution, illegitimate births and, generally, the decline of public morality. The male segment of the population, Socor said, represented the active, productive and defending force of a nation, and the female segment represented its reproductive force. The state of never being married was considered pathological, the possible result of a poor general economic situation of a country or, more likely, of a worrisome moral decadence at individual level. According to Socor, both the status of never being married and marrying late were social evils that had to be fought against. Individuals without families and those without a country were deemed the same: they “lived in a vacuum” and were “harmful” to society (PRUTEANU, 2004, p.134).

The Great Unification in 1918 did not improve the status of women, on the contrary, it even worsened the situation of those from the new added territories who previously had more civil liberties. In a 1923 public lecture, the women's rights activist Calypso Botez stressed that in the Great Romania, under the Civil

Code of 1864¹¹, women were assorted together with children, lunatics and imbeciles (BOTEZ, 2002).

Writing about urban developments in Romania after the First World War, F.T. (1930) lamented the status of the Romanian family. He argued that, within urban settings, unmarried Romanian men, “lewd” and “rebellious to prolific family life” (p.106), were grave-diggers of the nation contributing to the enticement of women into prostitution, family breakdown, national decadence, and the overall lack of unity. The whole dominant class he said to be comprised by sterile people. Young women were “gorged with all the education and modern science, but with nothing from the cult of maternal love” (p. 137). The basic idea was that “a prolific and morally pure people could be conquered, but not exterminated” (p. 88). F.T.'s words written in 1930 are consistent with the statement of a Romanian historian who wrote recently that “the main continuity element in the history of Romania is the feeling of geopolitical insecurity” (ABRAHAM, 2017, p.299). This sentiment, as well as the harsh conditions of life for the general population, maintained the high level of religiosity in Romania for the most part of its modern history. Olariu (2004, p.35) talks about an “interesting symbiosis between religion and liberal spirit” that existed in Romanian society.

Apart from the two world wars and the Great Unification, “the communist episode” (ARNASON, 2000) was the most important historical and social experience of the 20th century in Romania. Before the WWII, in a country of mostly illiterate peasants and an elite composed of liberals, christian-democrats and far-right ultra-nationalists, the working class had been small in size and poorly represented in Romanian politics. Under the Soviet occupation, a new electoral law establishing equal rights for men and women to vote and be elected was promulgated in 1946 and reinforced two years later by the 1948 Constitution. The new regime began by using women as an electoral mass and making them the main target of the new modernization campaign (CÎRSTOCEA, 2003; DOBRE et al., 2015).

¹¹ The 1864 Civil Code, with all its amendments issued over time, was abrogated as late as 2011

The communist state pursued equality between sexes by making women fully productive workers and taking over many of their formerly domestic tasks. Giving women a certain economic autonomy, the state proclaimed the abolition of the patriarchal family, the liberation of marriage from economic constraints and freedom to choose one's spouse according to personal feelings. During the communist regime education was financially supported by the state and illiteracy became all but eradicated. Young people were encouraged to pursue professional and higher education and were offered jobs at the completion of their studies through a centralized "repartition" system that, when a change of place was involved, provided living accommodations rented by the state. They were offered a certain independence from their families, the role of the "father" being taken on by the state. While not entirely (or at all) removed, the patriarchal family gave way to the patriarchal state. The formation of new families, as well as their dissolution, became a state affair directed through a complex web of rewards and penalties. Young married couples, especially the ones with children, were favored when jobs and houses were allocated and through the income tax system. Single people did not fit the mold of "the new man" designed to build the communist future. The marital statuses of "unmarried" and "divorced" were black spots on personal files that could have kept the respective individuals from advancing in their careers, partly accounting for the high rates of marriage and frequency of remarriage (TREBICI, 1991).

The Romanian propensity for marriage and family that was emphasized by demographers and other social scientists resulted from the combination of different factors. Apart from being the "traditional" way of going through the adult life and the convenience of acting according to what was expected by the father-state, "the practice of family lifestyle was the only functional strategy against oppressive or weak social institutions" (ZUREK, 2016, p.55).

Some researchers have highlighted the ambiguity in the communist regime's attitude towards the family (ROTARIU et al., 2017). Family policies had mirrored the shift of general policy from international socialism to socialist nationalism and then to the Nicolae Ceausescu's autocratic regime. Almost immediately

after Ceausescu came to power, the infamous anti-abortion and anti-divorce decrees¹² were issued. They had devastating effects on the country's population, in ways that are probably not yet completely understood despite the rich literature that has been written on this topic after the fall of communism. Many commentators have stressed that the abortion restrictions were not problematic in themselves, but they became problematic mostly due to other factors such as total lack of sexual education, lack of any contraceptive means, and the extreme system of control and penalization (ROTARIU et al., 2017; TREBICI, 1991). Basically, the state controlled women's reproductive lives and held everyone involved responsible for any transgressions. The entire female population of fertile ages was forced to submit to mandatory gynecological exams, which were held periodically, but also unexpectedly, at workplaces in factories and institutions for the purpose of discovering undeclared pregnancies. Under the pretense of health screenings and with the help of medical and Internal Affairs representatives, the state monitored women's bodies and sexuality (SOARE, 2011). Many marriages of that time were probably inevitable outcomes of unwanted pregnancies that were very difficult to prevent or terminate.

It is important to stress the fact that "numerical disproportions between successive generations have chain effects" (TREBICI, 1991, p.89). From the perspective of this paper the most important chain effect that Trebici wrote about is that of the anti-abortion decree upon the "marriage market". He emphasized that the cohorts of the first two years, 1967 and 1968, following the decree are the largest ever for both sexes. Given the relatively stable age difference at marriage between men and women (3 - 3.5 years), the women born in those two years were supposed to choose their partners from earlier cohorts of men, which were significantly smaller in number (TREBICI, 1991). Considering these facts, it can be inferred that a percentage of the female cohorts born in 1967 and 1968 couldn't and won't find a marriage partner. The next census, to be carried out in 2021, should provide a

¹² The Decree 770 "to regulate the interruption of pregnancy", and the Decree 779 "to amend some legal provisions on divorce", both issued in October 1966.

more accurate conclusion on these women, who will then be in the age group of 50-54, the best indicator for the lifelong “never-marriedness”.

Ceausescu, as many others before him, saw the basis of Romania's future power in its very demographics (ABRAHAM, 2017). His dream was to achieve liberty and freedom of the country from any “imperialist powers”. He planned a sort of speedy recovery from backwardness by way of intensive industrialization for which he needed a massive work force. The state controlled the destinies of its citizens in ways that fitted the communist concepts of family and citizenship. The single individual (especially the never married one) was lost in the collective plans, once again.

Most of the country's modernization projects in the last two centuries had women at their center. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Romanians gathered around the ideas of unity and nation-building. Romanian women carried the burden of representing the collective identity, the honor of the nation and the future destiny of the country. Their reproductive role was a central element in the nationalist discourses (YUVAL-DAVIS, 2003). Those who failed to assume such responsibility by not marrying and biologically reproducing the nation were symbolically disenfranchised from being seen as valuable members of society.

After the fall of communism, Romania entered a phase of partial to total dismantlement of the previous state institutions. The communist state had proclaimed the family as “the basic cell of the society” which has been, after all, a common thesis in various religions and political systems. Trebici (1991) stated that the family was always perceived as a “fortress in which people retreated in order to resist 'the aggression' of the society” (p.95). It is debatable whether this is still true today.

Nowadays, Romanian society is probably more fractured than ever, beyond the rural-urban divide. The last big national projects were checked off, once Romania became part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). The modernization of the country is pretty much directed by the European institutions of which

Romania is a member. The country is facing the greatest demographic crisis in its history with a massive loss of population due to emigration and low birth rates. The issue of never-married people might seem for some the least important problem to worry about. In Romania, almost nobody counts the single population¹³ in order to compare it to the married one and use it in public argumentations.

If we compare the feminist positions in Romania, the U.S. and UK, in the context of the 19th century and after that, we can find an explanation for the current state of discourse on never married women in Romania. One of the major differences have always been the much higher rates of industrialization and urbanization in the two Western countries which led, from early on, to increased numbers of “working-class spinsters” (FREEMAN; KLAUS, 1984, p.394). The cities of the 19th century's industrialized world attracted many “bachelor girls” (MORAN, 2004). In both the U.S. and England a new lifestyle flourished, that of a working, independent, urban single woman who lived by herself. The first-wave Western feminists addressed primarily to those women (MORAN, 2004). The marriage institution was brought under close scrutiny and alternative discourses emerged. Even in the antebellum American South, as Molloy (2016) argued, unmarried women of the planter class came to represent an alternative model of femininity, and “the Cult of Single Blessedness developed alongside the Cult of True Womanhood” (p.403). Jeffreys (1997) stated that “spinsters provided the backbone of the feminist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century” (p.86). This statement cannot be supported when talking about Romanian feminism.

On the other hand, with regard to marriage rates up until the middle of 20th century, the U.S. and Romania were more similar to each other than they were to England¹⁴. “America has always been a very married country” (MORAN, 2004, p.223). Compared to the highly developed societies, Romania still is quite “married”. On the contrary, England had a “great army of [...] unmarried women” (FREEMAN; KLAUS,

¹³ That is the never married, the divorced, and the widowed.

¹⁴ Moran (2004) compared America with England and Western Europe.

1984, p.394). It was said that a quarter of all women in England never married, therefore the “spinster problem” was discussed in newspapers and solutions were looked for in parliamentary debates (FREEMAN; KLAUS, 1984; GORDON, 1994).

In the U.S., ever since the beginning of the feminist movement, the fight was centered on individual rights embracing “political and economic individualism” (MORAN, 2004). In Romania, the collectivist mentality has always prevailed. Some say that American second-wave feminism forgot about single women (MORAN, 2004) especially the never married ones. Romanian feminists, before the communist regime and even after it, have never really addressed the emancipation of women as independent individuals, for their own sake and happiness. During the communist regime the so-called equality for all was proclaimed and the feminist activities were considered obsolete, reminders only of the inequalities of the bourgeois society.

Conclusion

The number of never married people, especially women, is on the rise everywhere in the world. The reasons for that are usually linked to modernization, urbanization, the growing access of women to education, and ultimately, globalization. There are a lot of differences regarding the way this phenomenon evolved in time in various societies. There are also many particularities in the way a local culture responds to the models offered by the global society.

Despite the increasing number of women who postponed or forwent marriage over the last two decades, the topic of never married women has never been the main focus of social research in Romania. The very few recently published academic papers addressed only the subject of never married characters as depicted in Romanian and international literature. Social scientists took notice of never married and childless people within the category of non-marital ways of living, but still they did not give them the same consideration as for cohabiting couples (mostly accounted as pre-marital cohabitations) or single parents (usually called “mono-parental families”). In this context, one way to approach the topic of never

married people is starting with studies from abroad. However, rather than relying exclusively on the inferences drawn from the analyses on other societies and cultures, it is important to engage into a similar process of investigation based on specific elements of the local culture. Social history and historical demography can help answer some questions about the current social developments.

When studying the singlehood phenomenon in Romania it is useful to keep in mind the novelty of urbanization, on a comparative historical scale, and the different trajectories and timings of modernization of the so-called “two Romanias”. The rural Romania might be forgotten by the policy makers, disregarded by the cities' inhabitants, sometimes idealized and other times despised, but it is still relevant for any type of analysis on the Romanian society.

This paper argues that the current absence of academic discourse on never married women in Romania is related to the country's social and demographic realities up until one or two decades ago, as well as to how demographic data is processed nowadays and made (or not) publicly available. The discursive invisibility of never married Romanian women is also linked to the way women have been perceived over the last two centuries: never as autonomous, free individuals, only as agents of modernization who held the country's destiny in their hands and were expected to be simultaneously wives, mothers and, later on, productive workers.

References

- ABRAHAM, Florin. Romania since the Second World War: A Political, Social and Economic History. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- ARNASON, Johann P. Communism and Modernity. *Daedalus*, vol.129, no. 1, p. 61-90, Winter 2000. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027615>. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.
- BAETICA, Radu. Marriages and Births in Romania. Eurostat - Statistics Explained, 2015. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Marriages_and_births_in_Romania. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.

BĂLUȚĂ, Ionela. Du foyer au forum: pour une sociogenèse du féminisme roumain au XIXe siècle [At the forum entrance: the sociogenesis of Romanian feminism in the 19th century]. București: Editura Universității din București, 2014.

BLOKKER, Paul. Modernity and Its Varieties: A Historical Sociological Analysis of the Romanian Modern Experience. PhD thesis. European University Institute, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Florence, May 2004. 364 p. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/31059794/Modernity_and_its_varieties._A_historical_sociological_analysis_of_the_Romanian_modern_experience. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.

BOTEZ, Calypso Corneliu. Drepturile femeii în constituția viitoare [Women's rights in the future constitution]. In: MIHĂILESCU, Ștefania. Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte (1838-1929) [From the history of Romanian feminism: Anthology of texts (1838-1929)]. Iași, Polirom, 2002. p. 250-266.

BUTOI, Ionuț. "Cele două Români": originile și contextul unei formule controversate ["The two Romanians": the origins and context of a controversial formula]. Sociologie Românească, vol. 12, no. 1-2, 2014. p. 18-31. Available at: [http://www.arsociologie.ro/images/stories/sr/articles/sr_2014_1-2/SR_2014\(1-2\)_18-31_Butoi.pdf](http://www.arsociologie.ro/images/stories/sr/articles/sr_2014_1-2/SR_2014(1-2)_18-31_Butoi.pdf). Accessed on: 2 Dec. 2018.

CHIROT, Daniel. Schimbarea socială într-o societate periferică. Formarea unei colonii balcanice [Social change in a peripheral society: The creation of a Balkan colony]. București: Corint, 2002.

CÎRSTOCEA, Ioana. Conceptul de gen o categorie utilă pentru analiza socio-istorică a regimului comunist din România [The concept of gender, a useful category for the socio-historical analysis of the communist regime in Romania]. In: BĂLUȚĂ, Ionela; CÎRSTOCEA, Ioana (coord). Direcții și teme de cercetare în studiile de gen din România [Research directions and themes in Romanian gender studies]. București: École Doctorale Régionale en Sciences Sociales, Colegiul Noua Europă, 2003. p.95-143. Available at: http://www.nec.ro/data/pdfs/publications/relink/directii-si-teme-de-cercetare/Directii_si_teme_de_cercetare.pdf. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.

DĂRĂMUȘ, Lucian Dumitru. Les femmes sans mari des classes populaires, des prostituées? Arbitraire administratif et résistances des femmes (Bucarest,

1850-1870) [Women without husbands of the lower classes: prostitutes? Administrative arbitrariness and women's resistance (Bucharest, 1850-1870)], Genre & Histoire, no. 16, Fall 2015. [online] Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/2227>. Accessed on: 27 November 2018.

DOBRE, Claudia-Florentina; JONDA, Bernadette; SKÓRZYŃSKA, Izabela; WACHOWIAK, Anna. Regaining the Future by Rebuilding the Past? Women's Narratives of Life during Communism. SENSUS HISTORIAE, vol. 18, no. 1, 2015. Available at: <http://sensushistoriae.epigram.eu/index.php/czasopism/o/article/viewFile/250/252>. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.

F.T. Urbanism și cult național [Urbanism and national cult]. București: Ed. Proprie, 1930. Available at: <http://www.digibuc.ro>. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.

FARGE, Arlette; KLAPISCH-ZUBER, Christiane (eds). Madame ou Mademoiselle? Itinéraires de la solitude féminine, XVIIIe-XXe siècle [Mrs or Miss? Itineraries of female solitude, the 18th-20th century]. Ebook, Montalba, 1984. Also available at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3330642j/f17.doble.r=celibataire.shift>. Accessed on: 2 Dec. 2018.

FREEMAN Ruth; KLAUS, Patricia. Blessed or Not? The New Spinster in England and the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries. Journal of Family History, vol. 9, no. 4, 1984. p. 394-414. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/036319908400900406>. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018

GAVALAS, Vasilis; TSCHEULIN, Thomas. Diverse Marriage Patterns in Imperial Germany. Journal of Family History, vol. 42, no.1, 2017. p. 37-53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199016681610>. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.

GORDON, Tuula. Single Women: On the Margins? London: Macmillan Press, 1994.

HAJNAL, John. European Marriage Patterns in Perspective. In: GLASS, D.V.; EVERSLEY, D.E.C. (eds). Population in history: essays in historical demography. London: Edward Arnold, 1965. p. 101-143.

INS - National Institute of Statistics. [online] Available at: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online> and www.recensamantromania.ro

JEFFREYS, Sheila. The Spinster and Her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880 - 1930. North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997.

- MARIAN, Simion Florea. Nunta la români. Studiu istoric-etnografic comparativ [The Romanian wedding: A comparative historical and ethnographic study]. București: Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1890. Available at: <http://www.digibuc.ro>. Accessed on: 2 Dec. 2018.
- MILLS, C. Wright. The Sociological Imagination. 1st ed. With a new afterword of Todd Gitlin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- MOLLOY, Marie S. "A Noble Class of Old Maids": Surrogate Motherhood, Sibling Support and Self-Sufficiency in the Nineteenth-Century White, Southern Family. *Journal of Family History*, vol. 41, no.4, 2016. p. 402-429. Available at: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/617624>. Accessed on: 2 Dec. 2018.
- MORAN, Rachel F. How Second-Wave Feminism Forgot the Single Woman. *Hofstra Law Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, Article 5, 2004. Available at: <http://scholarlycommons.law.hofstra.edu/hlr/vol33/iss1/5>. Accessed on: 2 Dec. 2018.
- MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, Alina. Hijacked Modernization: Romanian Political Culture in the 20th Century. *SÜDOSTEUROPA*, vol.55, no.1, 2007. pp. 118-140.
- OLARIU, Elena. Statutul femeii la mijlocul veacului al XIX-lea [The woman's status in the mid-nineteenth century]. In: CIUPALĂ, Alin (ed.). *Despre femei și istoria lor* [About women and their history]. București: Editura Universității din București, 2004. p. 26-36.
- PLECHER, H. Romania: Urbanization from 2007 to 2017. *STATISTA*, June 20, 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/455918/urbanization-in-romania/>
- POPA, Raluca Maria. Dimensiuni ale patriarhatului în gândirea liberală românească între 1848 și al doilea război mondial [Dimensions of patriarchy in the Romanian liberal thought between 1848 and the Second World War]. In: BUCUR, Maria; MIROIU, Mihaela (eds). *Patriarhat și emancipare în istoria gândirii politice românești* [Patriarchy and emancipation in the history of Romanian political thinking]. Iași: Polirom, 2002. p. 25-71.
- PRUTEANU, Marian. Discursuri despre femeie în România dintre cele două războaie mondiale [Speeches on women in Romania between the two world wars]. In: CIUPALĂ, Alin (ed.). *Despre femei și istoria lor* [About women and their history]. București: Editura Universității din București, 2004. p.122-136.
- RADU, Alexandru. Civilizația română modernă neîmplinită. Un eseu post-lovinescian [The unfulfilled modern Romanian civilization: A post-Lovinescian essay]. Iași: Adenium, 2015.
- ROTARIU, Traian; DUMĂNESCU, Luminița; HĂRĂGUȘ, Mihaela. *Demografia României în perioada postbelică (1948-2015)* [Romanian demographics in the post-war period (1948-2015)]. Iași: Editura Polirom, 2017.
- SOARE, Florin S. Implicarea Ministerului de Interne în politica demografică [The involvement of the Ministry of the Interior in demographic policy]. In: JINGA, Lucian M.; SOARE, Florin S.; DOBOȘ, Corina; ROMAN, Cristina. *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu. Instituții și practici* [The pronatalist policy of the Ceausescu regime: Institutions and practices]. Iași: Editura Polirom, 2011.
- SOCOR, Emanuel. *Despre populație* [On population]. Iași: Editura Librăriei SOCEC & Co. Societate Anonimă, 1913. Available at: <http://www.digibuc.ro>. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.
- STATISTA Research Department. *Distribution of population in European countries in 2014, by degree of urbanization*. *STATISTA*, Jan. 1, 2015 [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/753396/distribution-of-population-in-european-countries-by-degree-of-urbanization/>
- TREBICI, Vladimir; GHINOIU, Ion. *Demografie și etnografie* [Demography and ethnography]. București: Editura Științifică, 1986.
- TREBICI, Vladimir. *Genocid și demografie* [Genocide and demography]. București: Humanitas, 1991.
- VINTILA-GHITULESCU, Constanta. *Evgheniti, ciocoi, mojici. Despre obrazele primei modernități românești (1750-1860)* [Evgheniti, ciocoi, mojici: On the faces of the first Romanian modernity (1750-1860)]. București: Humanitas, 2015.
- YUVAL-DAVIS, Nira. *Gen și națiune* [Gender and nation]. București: Editura Univers, 2003.
- ZUREK, Aldona. Polish Singles - Between Family Life and Independence. In: Adamczyk, Katarzyna (ed.). *Singlehood From Individual and Social Perspective*. Wydawnictwo LIBRON- Filip Lohner, 2016. p. 55-75. Available at: libron.pl/katalog/download/typ/full/publikacja/210. Accessed on: 7 Dec. 2018.