

MARIAN PETCU

LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS

Marian Petcu

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication Studies,
Bucharest, Romania.

Email: marian_petcu2003@yahoo.com

Review of *În căutarea fericirii. Viața familială în spațiul românesc în sec. XVIII-XX* (Looking for happiness. Family life in the Romanian space of the 18th-20th centuries) Coordinators: Ioan Bolovan, Diana Covaci, Daniel Deteșan, Marius Eppel, Elena Crinela Holom (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010).

Key Words: happiness, religion, family life, inter-denominational marriages, fertility, mortality, Transylvania, Ioan Bolovan

The present work¹ is a *corpus eruditio* that brings together studies prepared by 23 researchers in Cluj Napoca, Oradea and Arad. Valorizing an impressive amount of social documents, some in figures and some not, the authors succeed a rare scientific performance: to bring forth an image of the Romanian family in Transylvania as it used to be in the period mentioned above. Thus, social relationships, strategies to improve these social relationships, the role of religion and ethnicity in structuring the family, church and state control, the importance of canon and norms, etc.

The norms observed in the creation of a family in Arad in the 18th century make the topic of the first study whose author is Eugen C. Ghiță. We find here documents on the relationships between husband and wife (six marriage contracts and two divorce papers), the mercantile patrimony (or, rather, forms of resource management), the emotional-financial inference in settling the marital status, as well as the lay-religious interference – marriage contracts are drawn up “in the name of the Holy Trinity.”² Documents presented and interpreted by the author indicate that the church becomes more permissive as regards divorce, the secularization process including less control by the church upon the family.

The study devoted to women education in Transylvania, prepared by Andra Carola Pinca, is, in fact, a research of the types of women education and emancipation, starting with the civilian girls' school in Sibiu. Interesting among others are the school curriculum (1857), the stages of the school year and the scheduling of school holidays around religious holidays, number of students, etc. About women emancipation is also the study signed by Dana Emilia Burian, this time the stress falls on consequences of divorce. “Ecclesiastic and lay laws do not always complete each other, especially as the Church is against divorce. However, at a certain time, the two State institutions would reach a compromise, holding common views on marriage and divorce,”³ which is regulated by the *Austrian Civil Code*, as well as other laws. It is obvious that women were not happy about “bed and table separation”, as it had happened until that time. *The Canonic Law Compendium*, edited under the guidance of Andrei Șaguna in 1868, together with other legal norms shall create the necessary conditions for spouse separation so that the wife should not be humiliated. Dramatic family cases are presented in which there is “unclear hatred” between spouses, and in which priests (counselors to the two) do not reach any compromise. The church transfers a part of its attributes to the State – the laws of the Church – “whom God joined, man shall not set apart” – proving insufficient to settle the most complicated cases. Things go so far that by the Law of 1894 (XXXI-XXXIII) the Church was subordinated to the State.⁴ From then on, every citizen had to obey the authority of the State and only then that of the Church. Although it had been expected that the rate of divorce would diminish, the opposite effect was obtained.

Family issues from an Orthodox perspective were the concern of Gabriel-Viorel Gârdan and Marius Eppel. The authors made use of a vast bibliography by means of which they demonstrate the major role of the Church. The Mystery of Marriage, sin, eastern tradition regarding the nature of marriage, family – seen as *one, sacred, universal* and *apostolic*, the dogmas and rituals are as many occasions for reflection on the evolution of the family institution. “Eastern tradition”- in the authors’ opinion – “associate in their deep nature the ecclesiastical community with family community, the specificity of the Christian marriage giving rise to the family-Church consists in the discovery and manifestation in the world of love as life and of life as love.”⁵ A precious corpus of sources of the Orthodox matrimonial law, canons, decisions of synods, the orthodox jurisprudence and other norms complete the study.

The Romanian Greek-Catholic view on family is another study whose author is Lucian Turcu. We find in this study “the essential stages in the construction of the denominational discourse in the Greek-Catholic Church of Transylvania throughout the 19th century.”⁶ Fears related to reports of the faithful and of the missionaries – identification and differentiation with/from others – shall generate, in time, a mental and social representation of belonging to an “un-schismatic” world, to a space of dual denomination. The elements of theological pedagogy, ecclesiastical ideas, setting the limits of the “right faith”, the inter-ecclesiastical dialog, the theological opinions of figures like Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Şincai and Petru Maior are just a few of the references of this research. In addition to these are the views of Iosif Papp Szilagyi and Ioan Raţiu on family, marriage validity, various elements of the matrimonial process.

An obvious scientific interest stirred the concubinage, as it results from the research study by Daniela Deteşan and Simion Retegan – the two authors analyzed concubinage cases among Romanians in Transylvania during 1850-1859. It was a context in which a large number of serfs were freed, and morals relaxed somewhat. Studying the archives – the collection of the Greek-Catholic Bishopric of Cluj-Gherla, the authors pinpoint the causes of concubinage and propose an estimate of the proportion of this phenomenon, highlighting the importance of the ecclesiastical legislation in the genesis and maintaining of families without legal marriage. A well-documented study dedicated to divorce in the orthodox milieu of Transylvania was achieved by Valeria Soroştineanu. The author identifies the sources that are relevant to the topic and includes besides figures of divorces in various locations, also the causes of divorce – poverty, illness, alcoholism, wandering, conflict about dowry are some of the more frequent causes.

Valuable in the information contributed is the study devoted to inter-denominational marriages by Gheorghe Şişeştean. “The game of the marital exchange”⁷ and “marital strategies”⁸ seem to be key-formulae in understanding the present study (Şimleu Silvaniei town). Denomination

and ethnicity are pursued in the statistics included by the author. Basically it is the mixed marriages of inter-denomination type (exogamic denomination) and the ethnically mixed (ethnic exogamic) marriages for which the author establishes the frequency and variations (in age, ethnicity, denomination). The 264 analyzed marriages by use of adequate indexes and sub-indexes, the interpretation of data – marital selections, demographic flows, the comparative studies of the three religions (Reformed, Greek-Catholics, and Roman-Catholics), rate of inter-ethnic and inter-denomination exchanges – render this study one of the most important contributions to family sociology from a historical perspective.

Mircea Brie proposes a research worthy of praise – denominational alterity through marriage (Romanians in the Crișana area). The study begins with a surprising statement – “social deviations, irrespective of their nature, are regarded skeptically”⁹, although “the moral and religious norms were very important at the time”¹⁰. Showing that there were no major problems in connection to marriages between Greek-Catholics and Orthodox, although most of them sought marriages with persons of same denomination, the author warns that many marriages used to have a social-professional goal: one of the two aspired to reach the social status of the other. But inter-denominational marriages supposed approvals from both churches, waivers for engagement that sometimes were late for months or never came. Additionally, the waiver had to be paid and the price was quite high, many young people could not pay. Truly useful proved to be legal provisions like the laws of 1894 and the creation of matrimonial state offices that put an end to divergent views of denominations, the state took over control of marital strategies. Practically, since then, individuals were no longer captive in their denominations and ethnicity – “in time, ethnic and denominational determinism dilute under the influence of modernity and personal emancipation ...”¹¹ The archives enabled the researcher the identification of 2,808 registered marriages, out of which 777 were mixed (27,67 %) – in the Greek-Catholic Bishopric of Oradea (1860-1910). Distribution by gender is also interesting – in most of the cases the Orthodox young women would go into mixed marriages (61,2%), versus young men (38,8 %).

Nicolae Emilian Bolea contributes a study on the religious education of children in mixed marriages, which refines the plural/multi ethnic and religious approach. The author uses the term “mixed religion marriages”. To be noticed that the Holy See shall accept mixed marriages through the Lambruschini guideline (1848), if the respective marriages had been blessed by a Catholic, non-Catholic, in any case non-Orthodox priest, in the beginning of this legal provision. Subsequently, the Church will have to consider social reality and change its attitude toward mixed marriages and the person who carries out the religious wedding service. Relevant are the figures obtained from the archive of the Orthodox Parish of Alba Iulia Maieri (1858-1894).

Information on the bringing up of Transylvanian children in the second half of the 19th century are provided by researcher Luminița Dumănescu. It is an important “chapter” in the existence of a family, viewed with respect to child feeding, weaning, relationship to the nurse, hygiene, clothing, child diseases, and others

Barbu Ștefănescu, professor in Oradea, has an excellent name study – the given names of children born in 1874-1923, in Săcal (Hungary). Remarkable information is brought to light at the end of thorough research in Corneliu Crăciun’s study – “Considerations on family in the Romanian press in Transylvania, in the second half of the 19th century.” It is a minute monitoring of the print press – *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, *Tribuna poporului*, *Familia*, *Amicul familiei*, *Femeia și familia*, *Familia română*, *Transilvania*, *Luceafărul* and others, from which the author extracts references to the family institution. Quite interestingly, because of frequent births outside wedlock, the ecclesiastical and lay authorities accept that the newborn should have the religion of the mother, but only if it’s recognized religions (actually all religions, except the Orthodox one¹²). There are numerous specifications regarding the marital status, the role of the godparents, the religious status of children, the role of the church etc. Gender discrimination, as we would call nowadays women obedience before men, women education, causes of marriage failure, and many other issues – faced also by contemporary families – found their place in the studied press.

Elena Crinela Holom proposes a study entitled “Individual destinies, family destinies in a village of Transylvania (19th-20th centuries).” It is a historical demography consisting in the examination of protocols/registries in the Greek-Catholic Parish Noșlac (1901-1918), as well as in other relevant social documents. Marriages, women fertility, domestic group structures, nominal family papers are presented in great detail.

“Family in Central Europe during the first demographic transition” is the title of the study by Ioan Bolovan and Sorina Paula Bolovan, who integrate in their work dynamics of fertility and mortality, the factors that influenced demographic realities and other social variables in the context. The authors insist on the relationship: church-state-family in order to find scientific explanations for the developments of families. State pressure upon church with regard to control over the intimate life of citizens, secularization, effects of the French Revolution, the triumph of secular marriage, divorce legislation – here are a few factors to reconfigure weddings’ rate, family size, family duration. The examples included in the text are revelatory – the Austrian legislation (1812, 1868), especially the Civil Code, made the relationship between the founders of a family less regulated by moral and religious norms – “<Undermining> the divine authority as regards marriage and family surely had a negative impact (unquantifiable, unfortunately), during the long and medium term, upon

the rise of illegitimacy, concubinage, birth control, abortion and divorce.”¹³ Clearly said –diminished moral control of the church over the human body favored spreading of birth control, increased number of abortions, finally a negative demographic growth. The church–state-mixed marriages relationship, certain aspects of the family life cycle (see the multi-generation family, role distribution in such a family, for example) are subchapters in which the authors identify the tendencies in family evolution, certain matrimonial behavior typical to Central Europe, others particularities that future historical sociology research may valorize.

The family in Transylvania during the first world war is another well documented and scientifically argued article that belongs to Ioana Elena Ignat. A study that goes beyond the historicity the authors got us used to is the one signed by Anamaria Macovei that focuses on “the prototype of the Romanian family during the communist regime” (1965-1989). “Problems of Romania’s population in the second half of the 19th century in the view of A. D. Xenopol” is the contribution of Florica Ștefănescu. Closing the work is an article in gastronomic history written by Csapo Emöke.

I praise such research studies that honor the scientific community, more so as they are approaches with utmost rigor of polemical issues – homogenous and mixed family, relationships between denominations, relationships with ecclesiastical and state authorities on family matters and so on. The Church has been a polarizing institution in family evolution – there are numerous document testimonies in this respect in the book. Practically, no sequence in the family configuration, structuring and deconstruction is outside community or outside the communion secured by belonging to a religion. The integration of local approaches (micromonographs, sometimes) into the contexts of the zone or region is a plus in the originality of the book. It is, in any case, a work that brings to light a forgotten world, unjustly ignored – that of the family.

Notes

¹ Ioan Bolovan et al (coord.), *În căutarea fericirii. Viața familială în spațiul românesc în sec. XVIII-XX* (Looking for happiness. Family life in the Romanian space of the 18th-20th centuries), (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010).

² Eugen Ghiță, “Aspecte juridice privind relațiile matrimoniale în orașul Arad în secolul al XVIII-lea”, în *În căutarea fericirii. Viața familială în spațiul românesc în sec. XVIII-XX*. Coordinators: Ioan Bolovan, Diana Covaci, Daniel Deteșan, Marius Eppel, Elena Crinela Holom (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010), 17.

³ Andra Carola Pinca, “Educația feminină în Transilvania. Studiu de caz: Școala civilă de fete din Sibiu”, in *În căutarea fericirii*, 47.

⁴ Andra Carola Pinca, 54.

⁵ Gabriel Viorel Gârdan, Marius Eppel, "Familia în gândirea teologică și în dreptul matrimonial ortodox", in *În căutarea fericirii*, 63.

⁶ Lucian Turcu, "Familia greco-catolică românească: reperele identității confesionale", in *În căutarea fericirii*, 73.

⁷ Gheorghe Șișeștean, "Căsătorii interconfesionale și construcții indentitare la sfârșitul sec. Al XIX-lea și începutul sec. XX (cazul orașului Șimleu Silvaniei)", in *În căutarea fericirii*, 111.

⁸ Gheorghe Șișeștean, 111.

⁹ Mircea Brie, "Alteritatea confesională prin căsătorie la românii din zona Crișanei (în a doua jumătate a secolului XIX- începutul secolului XX)", in *În căutarea fericirii*, 145.

¹⁰ Mircea Brie, 145.

¹¹ Mircea Brie, 249.

¹² Corneliu Crăciun, "Considerații asupra familiei în presa română din Transilvania, din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea", in *În căutarea fericirii*, 247.

¹³ Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan, "Familia în Europa Centrală în timpul primei tranziții demografice", in *În căutarea fericirii*, 297.