

# WOMEN'S AUTONOMY AND THE FAMILY IN RECENT ROMANIAN POLICY-MAKING

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## Abstract

*In my paper I aim to provide an analysis of the relation between women's autonomy and the family in Romanian recent policy-making. I will focus primarily on policies developed by the Romanian state after Romania's integration in the European Union with regards to the family and family-related policy domains.*

*My analysis will focus on several variables: 1. the theoretical instruments available for analyzing women's autonomy in relation to state policies 2. the understanding of the family in Romanian policy-making 3. the interplay between women's autonomy and the family and how policy-making influences the relation between the two. The analysis will take into consideration the specific Romanian socio-political context in terms of economic conditions, ideological influences and gender relations.*

*Political theory is no stranger to the issue of individual autonomy. In my paper I will focus on recent feminist political theories on gendered accounts of autonomy. These accounts modify the understanding of autonomy and focus on conditions and aspects of autonomy relevant to women's lives and experiences. The current financial crisis and recent developments in Romanian policy-making will be analyzed in terms of how they affect women's autonomy. Since much of Romanian policy-making still avoids including gender and gender relations into its explicit justifications, provisions and evaluation, referring to the family as a basic social unit, the gendered consequences for women's autonomy of such an approach need to be understood and acknowledged.*

*In my analysis I will use both Romanian and European recent policy papers, as well as recent data obtained through social research.*

**Keywords:** *Women's autonomy; family; Romanian policies; feminist theory*

## Introduction

Autonomy is what Gallie would call an essentially contested concept. Essentially contested concepts are the ones "the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users"<sup>1</sup>. Political theorists have long debated its meaning or its "proper use" and no end to the debate is in sight. If anything, feminist political theory has added to the fire and produced its own set of interpretations. This is not an article focusing on these theoretical debates to great depth<sup>2</sup>.

Rather my aim in terms of the political theories of women's autonomy is to identify the main accounts proposed by feminist theorists. I will do this by focusing on two main accounts and how each would relate to the family, and specifically on how it interprets the relation between women's autonomy and the family.

The final part of the paper is then dedicated to identifying how policy-makers in Romania understand such a relationship, implicitly or explicitly, by analyzing recent Romanian policies. I will focus on explicit family-oriented policies, although conceptions about the family and autonomy are present in many areas of policy making.

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<sup>1</sup> Gallie, W.B. "Essentially Contested Concepts", in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 56 (1955 - 1956), 169

<sup>2</sup> For my own in depth analysis of the current debates on autonomy see Alice Iancu *A Conceptual Approach to Social Exclusion*, PhD. Thesis, Bucharest, National School of Political and Administrative Studies, 2010 (unpublished)

## 1. Women's Autonomy- theoretical overview

### A minimal and general account of autonomy

Autonomy is a concept mostly associated with the liberal theoretical tradition. A simple general approach would describe liberalism as tied to three basic principles:

1. Only individuals matter<sup>3</sup>. Social arrangements, institutions and policies are to be evaluated starting from the effect they have on individuals<sup>4</sup>. Also, “the only information *directly*<sup>5</sup> relevant for evaluating alternative political and social arrangement is information about their impact on individual human beings”<sup>6</sup>. If, for example, some cultural practices or privileges would facilitate or allow discrimination against women or a deprivation of their rights, than the institutional arrangements should use this as a tool for assessment and not the culture's presumed values or social prominence.

2. The second principle constitutes what Johnson names “the equality stipulation”<sup>7</sup>: Everybody counts as one, nobody as more than one<sup>89</sup>.

3. The third principle refers to the fact that individuals are considered to have agency, where “By an “agent” I mean a being who is capable of conceiving values and projects, including projects whose fulfillment may not be within the range of the being's immediate experience”<sup>10</sup>. This does not presuppose the idea that people will act in an altruistic fashion, for example, but that they are capable of it because of the values they hold, not merely because they feel like it.<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> In light of recent communitarian and feminist critics, it is also useful to state briefly that such considerations about the individuals as a criteria for evaluation do not presuppose anything about the individuals themselves. In Johnson's words, such an approach is based on individuals' intrinsic value because they are individuals, not on their character. While some liberal theorists do speculate about either the desired or the actual character or nature of the individuals, these in no way constitute a condition of their value. See Johnson, David.; *The Idea of a Liberal Theory. A Critique and a Reconstruction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19

<sup>4</sup> One of the methodological consequences of this is that social exclusion is evaluated by aggregating exclusions at the level of individuals. This is already one of the principles informing the choosing of relevant indicators of social exclusion (Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier and Nolan, 2003, p. 29)

<sup>5</sup> Author's emphasis

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, David.; *The Idea of a Liberal Theory. A Critique and a Reconstruction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22

<sup>7</sup> This could also be referred to as *basic equality*. A basic egalitarian account maintains “the idea that at some very basic level all human beings have equal worth and importance and are therefore equally worthy of concern and respect” (Baker,Lynch,Cantillon,Walsh, 2004, p. 23). Essentially, it is “a rather minimalist idea” (Baker,Lynch,Cantillon,Walsh, 2004, p. 23). Liberal approaches to equality, apart from generally subscribing to the basic conception of equality, widely vary in terms of which are the important inequalities and how they should be addressed. What is distinctive about this approach is that it does not take every type of equality as being unfair and it more readily accepts the idea that certain inequalities are unavoidable. A liberal approach is distinguished by some theorists from the *equality of condition* approach, aiming to eliminate what it deems significant inequalities (Baker,Lynch,Cantillon,Walsh, 2004, pp. 24-46).

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, David.; *The Idea of a Liberal Theory. A Critique and a Reconstruction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 21

<sup>9</sup> I also see it as a precaution against arguments that liberalism *strongly* prefers some sort of individuals, in terms of character, for example, over others. By “*strongly* prefers” I mean that this preference comes to determine the way political principles and institutions are conceived and would end up directly or indirectly favor some individuals over others, leading to unequal access to rights or privileges within the political arrangements.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, David.; *The Idea of a Liberal Theory. A Critique and a Reconstruction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22

<sup>11</sup> Johnson offers two illustrations of what in fact are two different aspects of agency: acting because of values and engaging in projects that are not about one's own experiences. For example saving somebody from drowning because of a feeling of sympathy is not an instant demonstrating agency. However, saving that person because one thinks human life is of value and worth the risk is an action illustrating agency. People can also engage in projects that would be fulfilled beyond their lifetime, like achieving gender equality. Because an agent is passionate about this she engages in research or activism regarding one particular subject, even though she will not experience the fulfillment of

There have been many liberal accounts focusing on autonomy, starting from John Stuart Mill. Mill's concern for autonomy was based on a concern for individual liberty, understood as self-determination. Mill's account of autonomy lists both the characteristics one needs to be considered autonomous as well as the conditions one needs to become autonomous. In *On Liberty* the main critique and the main argument is meant for society as a whole and for penalties of society "of law or opinion."<sup>12</sup> that impede individual autonomy<sup>13</sup>. Since Mill liberal accounts have been developed by a variety of theorists. These accounts focus on what is needed for individual autonomy, that is, on the necessary conditions, may these be absence of coercion, education or some type of resources.

### 1.2. Feminist Accounts of Autonomy

Feminist theorists have not been particularly enthusiastic in the face of liberal autonomy<sup>14</sup>, as it has been traditionally understood. However some believed the concept of autonomy holds great potential for gender research. Two strands of feminist research regarding autonomy can be identified: one liberal strand, maintaining much of the more traditional accounts and applying them to women's experiences, and one strand focusing on relational autonomy<sup>15</sup>, a vastly modified concept compared to the mainstream liberal ones.

The liberal strand encompasses feminist theorists who have argued for a renewed attention on the concept of autonomy, some in the particular context of Eastern Europe<sup>16</sup>. Marilyn Friedman argues for autonomy's value invoking several arguments: it is useful for social criticism and contestations of the status quo, it allows for greater expression of women's many voices and experiences and it promotes mutual individual respect for autonomy<sup>17</sup>. Autonomy is essentially based on self-reflection and freedom of the individual to both reflect on her desires and choices and

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the project. See See Johnson, David.; *The Idea of a Liberal Theory. A Critique and a Reconstruction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22-24

<sup>12</sup> Mill, John Stuart "On Liberty" in John Stuart Mill On Liberty edited by Bromwich, David and Kateb, George (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 78

<sup>13</sup> On discussing the tyranny of society over individuals Mill argues that

"its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself." See Mill, John Stuart "On Liberty" in John Stuart Mill On Liberty edited by Bromwich, David and Kateb, George (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 76

<sup>14</sup> At this point a distinction needs to be made between liberal methods of knowing and liberal principles or to express this more clearly, between liberal epistemic preferences and liberal political morality. Methodological individualism is a method of knowing and of researching. It designates a particular unit of analysis (individuals) and whatever other traits are assigned to that unit, they are secondary to the main principle. I will quote Lukes more extensively here since he insisted precisely on this idea and his account is prior to any care-oriented feminist criticism on the matter: "Methodological individualism, therefore, is a prescription for explanation, asserting that no purported explanations of social (or individual) phenomena are to count as explanations, or as rock-bottom explanations, unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals" See Lukes, Steven, 1968: "Methodological Individualism Reconsidered", in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Jun., 1968), 121.

<sup>15</sup> For my own more in depth analysis of relational autonomy see see Alice Iancu *Relational Autonomy: New Perspectives in the Care/Autonomy Debates*, in *Perspective Politice*, Year III, Vol. III, no. 1, 2010, 13-26.

<sup>16</sup> See Cornell, Drucilla. *At the Heart of Freedom. Feminism, Sex and Equality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998; Friedman, Marilyn.; *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; Friedman, Marilyn. "Autonomy and Male Dominance" In *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism New Essays*, edited by John Christman, and Joel Anderson, 150-173. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; Friedman, Marilyn. "Autonomy, Social Disruption and Women," In *Relational Autonomy. Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, edited by Catriona MacKenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 35-51 . New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Miroiu, Mihaela : *The Road to Autonomy (Drumul catre autonomie)*. Iași: Polirom Publishing, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Friedman, Marilyn.; *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 56-73

to act upon the desires and choices one believes to be important to one's self<sup>18</sup>. Such freedom is referred to by some researchers as a "space" for our own self definition<sup>19</sup>. Accounts of self-reflexivity may emphasize reason, imagination, empathy or any combination of the three.

The liberal feminist theories of autonomy and the relational autonomy perspective have a radically different outlook on the family. The liberal strand is more prone to skepticism regarding the family, as it often constitutes one of the many social institutions perpetuating women's subordination. Mackenzie underlines for example how socialization can disrupt autonomy on three different levels: by shaping our beliefs, by determining our skills and abilities and by restricting a person's actions<sup>20</sup>.

Friedman identifies four strategies that an individual could use in the face of domination: to outright resist the impositions, to pretend to accept them but secretly resist, to detach from the oppressive environment or change one's preferences and develop "adaptive preferences"<sup>21</sup>. The last option comes at a high cost: "This measure, however, results in social isolation, something that many people find unbearable."<sup>22</sup>

The relational autonomy strand stems from the main feminist critique of liberal autonomy, one that argues that the very concept of autonomy is based on a male-modeled subject, disconnected from others<sup>23</sup>, and that this inherently causes it to fail when addressing women's lives and experiences, particularly care-taking activities, in need of re-evaluation and valorization, including political and financial valorization<sup>24</sup>.

Mostly what matters here is that the self is socially constituted, therefore it cannot be taken as forming and existing separate from others "the focus of relational approaches is to analyze the implications of the inter-subjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity for conceptions of individual autonomy and moral and political agency."<sup>25</sup> Such an approach values the family, or at least it's potential, highly and tends to see the relationship between autonomy and the family less in terms of conflict and skepticism. Rather it focuses on potentialities- the potential of the family to strengthen autonomy and the other way around. Autonomy is socially taught and learned and thus institutions contributing to this learning need to be supported and valued. Caring especially is seen as intrinsically linked to autonomy<sup>26</sup>.

These two strands of feminist theorizing on care and autonomy entail common relevant dimensions, rather the interpretation is different. They do not function as dichotomous categories. Neither one of these approaches values the family as it functions in a patriarchal society. They both reject it, albeit in a different ways. The liberal feminist approach pays particular attention to obstacles in the way of autonomy such as coercion, manipulation or lack of information. The relational

<sup>18</sup> Friedman, Marilyn., *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7

<sup>19</sup> Cornell, Drucilla. *At the Heart of Freedom. Feminism, Sex and Equality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 43

<sup>20</sup> MacKenzie, Catriona "Imagining Oneself Otherwise" in *Relational Autonomy. Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, edited by MacKenzie, Catriona and Stoljar, Natalie, (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000) 144

<sup>21</sup> Friedman, Marilyn. "Autonomy and Male Dominance" In *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism New Essays*, edited by John Christman, and Joel Anderson, 157

<sup>22</sup> Friedman, Marilyn. "Autonomy and Male Dominance" In *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism New Essays*, edited by John Christman, and Joel Anderson, 157

<sup>23</sup> Whitbeck, Caroline "A Different Reality. Feminist Ontology" in Gould, Carol (ed.) *Beyond Domination. New Perspectives on Women and Philosophy* (New Jersey: 1984 Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 1984) 64

<sup>24</sup> Tronto, Joan C, *Moral Boundaries. A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, (New York: Routledge, Chapman&Hall Inc, 1993) 154-160

<sup>25</sup> MacKenzie, Catriona and Stoljar, Natalie: 2000 *Introduction: Autonomy Reconfigured*, in MacKenzie, Catriona and Stoljar, Natalie (ed.) *Relational Autonomy. Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 4

<sup>26</sup> Clement, Grace, *Care, autonomy, and justice: feminism and the ethic of care*, (Westview Press, 1996), 35

perspective focuses more on how the patriarchal family can be modified in a way that values women's work and takes into account that interdependence is a basic human reality. The focus of some dimensions is thus what is clearly different, not the dimensions they address themselves. Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions in focus for each approach and their interpretation.

Relevant Dimensions of the Family	Liberal Autonomy Feminism Position Variables	Relational Autonomy Feminism Position Variables
A. Power relations	Freedom from manipulation	Relations should reflect mutual valorization of human interdependence
	Freedom from structural or individual coercion	Relations should reflect empathy and interdependence
	Decision-making and acting on one's choices should be free and not impeded on account of gender...	Decision-making and acting on one's choices should be free and the result of empathic communication and negotiation
B. Education	Equal Education	Education for both men and women should promote care and care-taking activities and an interdependent understanding of the self
C. Division of Work	The quality and quantity of work should be distributed in an equitable fashion- in terms of financial pay, social prestige, effort and knowledge	Care-taking activities and women's activities in general should be valued both financially and socially
D. Resources	General equal access to resources	Resources should be allocated to care-taking activities and care-takers

### 1. The Family-Autonomy Dilemma: Recent Romanian Policy Making What exactly are we talking about? The Romanian Family during Transition

Romanian family life and family structure remain deeply patriarchal. This is reflected in the division of work, power and resources within the family. Romania presented similarities with other countries within the post-communist region, including the prevalence of nationalist and traditional rhetoric<sup>27</sup>. Since my purpose here is not to offer a comprehensive account of the present Romanian family, I will focus on briefly illustrating the key variables identified in Figure 1.

#### A. Power Relations

**Freedom from manipulation** By manipulation I name actions that obscure or falsely represent women's choices. Women in Romania face manipulation in public discourse and in the public education system. Both manuals and teachers contribute to the entrenchment of gender

<sup>27</sup> Lukic, Jasmina; Regulska, Joanna; Zavissek, Darja "Introduction" in *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Lukic, Jasmina; Regulska, Joanna; Zavissek, Darja (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 6

stereotypes<sup>28</sup>. The traditional discourse was often framed as a reaction against previous communist gender policies and it meant “to drive women back into their “natural/domestic roles and “re-give” them their reproductive rights”<sup>29</sup>. The rhetoric supporting “caring mothers” and “income-earning fathers” has been probably one of the most disconnected discourses from actual empirical reality, since the reality is that few Romanian families could have a decent living with only one income, even if they intended to<sup>30</sup>. Almost one in five Romanians lives in poverty, according to 2008 ratings<sup>31</sup> more women than men, with some groups of women particularly vulnerable. Data taking into account the present Romanian political and financial crisis, as well as the Government’s latest policies, is yet to be available. What is clear is that this traditional rhetoric ignored or devalued women’s significant presence on the labor market in the communist years and since, and disregarded the obvious absence of a “traditional” reality, with most Romanian households needing two incomes to live above the poverty risk threshold. Thus the return to a “traditionalistic” rhetoric simply meant that women took on a double burden and faced additional barriers in the market (both cultural and resource related, especially in terms of time), while men were “freed” from domestic responsibilities.

Women in Romania rarely have access to different types of discourses or to data illuminating the actual consequences of the choices presented to them. Public rhetoric, in the media or advertisement is only traditional in relation to household tasks and power. It is far less traditional in relation to sexual representation of women: available attractive women’s bodies are highly present. The types of women that Romanian women very rarely see in the media are the students, the professional and active women. Women in the Romanian media are wives, lovers and mothers and they take up their roles within the family with no apparent contestation.<sup>32</sup>

**Freedom from structural and individual coercion** By structural coercion I refer to those institutional, social and cultural factors that severely reduce the number of reasonable alternatives available to women. One example would be that women after divorce have a higher chance of difficulty in founding a new family, especially since they are the ones taking care of children resulting from previous marriages. In this case “Blackmail about divorce” is favoring the man and the feminization of poverty among one-parent household confirm this reality.<sup>33</sup> By individual coercion I refer primarily to the use of any type of violence (symbolic, verbal, and physical). Available data shows a rising trend in domestic violence against women in Romania and an overall significant level of violence in general, with four new cases reported every 24 hours<sup>34</sup>

**Decision-making** While gender-based hierarchies might often manifest themselves more or less subtly, Romanians explicitly endorse them. The usually associated dichotomy public/man and

<sup>28</sup> Stefanescu, Doina-Olga *The Gender Dilemmas of Education (Dilema de gen a educatiei)*, (Iasi: Polirom Publishing, 2003), 87-152

<sup>29</sup> Magyari Vincze, Eniko, *Gender Regimes and Women’s Citizenship*, in Lukic, Jasmine, Regulska, Joanna, Zvirsek, Darja (eds.) *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 31

<sup>30</sup> In absolute numbers Romanians have the lowest income in the EU. See The Research Institute for Quality of Life (Institutul de cercetare a calitatii vietii) *Quality of Life in Romania 2010 (Calitatea vietii în România 2010)*, <http://www.iccv.ro/node/190>, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, National Strategic Report on social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010, 6

<sup>32</sup> Mihaela Miroiu *What do we usually “Learn” about men and women in the Media? (Ce “învățăm” de regulă despre bărbați și femei din mass-media?)*, in Laura Grunberg (coord.) *Mass-media on the Sexes. Aspects of Gender Stereotypes in Romanian Media (Mass media despre sexe. Aspecte privind stereotipurile de gen în mass media din România)*, (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2005), 125-128

<sup>33</sup> Pasti, Vladimir, 2003: *The Last Inequality (Ultima Inegalitate)*, Iasi: Polirom Publishing, 119

<sup>34</sup> Gandul Newspaper *Domestic Violence on the Rise: 128 dead within the family in 2010, compared to 115, last year (Violența domestică, în creștere: 128 de persoane omorâte în familie în 2010, față 115, anul trecut)*, <http://www.gandul.info/news/violenta-domestica-in-crestere-128-de-persoane-omorate-in-familie-in-2010-fata-115-anul-trecut-7749238>

private/woman breaks down in terms of decision-making. Women are “private” in their work, not in terms of power. In 2000 38.5% of men and 27.6% of women stated that men should *lead*<sup>35</sup> in the family. Only 57% of men agreed that women are “the rulers in the home”. 85.8% of men and 85.1% of women believe that the man is the head of the family. 82.1% of men and 74.8% of women believed a woman should follow her man<sup>36</sup>. The numbers are telling and they indicate a deep hierarchy within the family in terms of decision making.

### B. Education

**Equal Education** The horizontal segregation in the education system, leads to women and men gaining different skills. Statistically, young women graduate mainly from high-schools while young men graduate mainly from vocational schools. Women who fail to go to the university are practically pushed towards a housewife status or towards very low-paid jobs. This translates into differences in their marketable skills, making it so that failing to continue with a higher education degree after graduating from high-school, drastically diminishes women’s chances of getting a well-paying job or of getting a job at all<sup>37</sup>. Vertical segregation reveals lower access of women in postgraduate studies. Women enter the educational system in higher numbers but end up in fewer numbers at the MA or PhD levels<sup>38</sup>. The content of the education supports gender stereotypes, as mentioned earlier.

**C. Division of Work** In terms of care, traditional rhetoric and the lack of institutionalized care<sup>39</sup> implied a worsening of women’s double burden. A national-wide research showed that in 2000 70% to 80% of all households task were performed by women<sup>40</sup>. For men, traditional gender roles meant they were only marginally regarded as having caring responsibilities within the family (other than earning an income). A significant part of women with dependents in their care declare they have no income, thus raising the question of how or if access to the labour market is made available to them<sup>41</sup>. While men and women may declare that in principle domestic work should not be segregated on account of gender, in fact actually work is segregated as such<sup>42</sup>.

**D. Resources** Within the family and outside it, women have fewer resources. In the market they face the gender pay gap, horizontal and vertical discrimination leading to inequalities of income. Children in the household lead at the European level to lower incomes for women “if one compares the **employment rate of women and men with children** under 12 to care for, this gender gap is

<sup>35</sup> emphasis mine

<sup>36</sup> Gallup Institute *Gender Barometer*, , 2000,

[http://www.gallup.ro/romana/poll\\_ro/releases\\_ro/pr030411\\_ro/pr030411\\_ro.htm](http://www.gallup.ro/romana/poll_ro/releases_ro/pr030411_ro/pr030411_ro.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Pasti, Vladimir, 2003: *The Last Inequality (Ultima Inegalitate)*, Iasi: Polirom Publishing, 168-172

<sup>38</sup> Data obtained through a national-representative survey conducted as part of the CNCSIS (National Centre for Scientific Research in Higher Education) Project No.964 *Gender, political interests and European insertion*

<sup>39</sup> Romania has seen in the last decade a decrease in hospital beds, day-care centres and kindergartens and this contributed to an increase of women’s care-work responsibilities. For example, from 1991 to 2006 the number of state-funded kinder gardens more than halved) See Băluță, Oana “The Gender Dimension of Reconciliation Between Work, Family and Private Life” in *Equal Partners. Equal Competitors*, coordinated by Oana Băluță, (Bucuresti: Maiko, 2007), 114-116

<sup>40</sup> Gallup Institute *Gender Barometer*, , 2000,

[http://www.gallup.ro/romana/poll\\_ro/releases\\_ro/pr030411\\_ro/pr030411\\_ro.htm](http://www.gallup.ro/romana/poll_ro/releases_ro/pr030411_ro/pr030411_ro.htm)

<sup>41</sup> According to the data obtained through a national-representative survey conducted as part of the CNCSIS project *Gender, political interests and European insertion* (developed by the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration and coordinated by Prof rd. Mihaela Miroiu), 61per cent of women living in a household with dependants declared that they do not have their own income; in households with no dependents only 38per cent of women declared the same thing

<sup>42</sup> Pasti, Vladimir, 2003: *The Last Inequality (Ultima Inegalitate)*,( Iasi: Polirom Publishing, 2003) 119

almost doubled. Also, the employment rate of women falls by 12.4 points when they have children, but it rises by 7.3 points for men with children reflecting the unequal sharing of care responsibilities and the lack of childcare facilities and work-life balance policies<sup>43</sup>. In terms of resources within the family, the early transition years showed that resources within the household were gendered: television sets, for example, took precedence over vacuum cleaners or other items that would have eased women's work<sup>44</sup>. Gender differences in income were clearly influenced by state policies since the 1990. Then policies reflected what Miroiu calls "state's men, market's women"<sup>45</sup>.

After this brief presentation it becomes apparent that no dimension of autonomy is addressed for women in Romania in relation to the family, may it be from a liberal autonomy standpoint or from a relational autonomy standpoint. Romanian family remains deeply hierarchical. Care work is not valued (since it is not correlated with gain of resources or power and status within the family) and is rarely shared. Women's avenues of contestation and freedom from coercion are reduced. In Romania women are subjected to public discourses loaded with gender stereotypes.

No actual conditions for autonomy are fulfilled. Self-reflection, lack of cohesion or the valuing of their own autonomy are absent for women in Romania, thus failing any liberal feminist test. Care work and women's work in general is devalued, unpaid and set on a lower scale of evaluation, thus failing the relational autonomy test. Women learn about and internalize patriarchal structures within Romanian families, not empathy, interdependence and mutual valorisation. All this however has not deterred some Romanian social researchers, after reviewing some of the same data presented here, to conclude "The important thing is that the majority of women, not only the majority of men, believe that housework and childcare are their duty, which demonstrates the *complete and voluntary acceptance*<sup>46</sup> of this role identity within the family"<sup>47</sup>. However such statements show the gender blindness in Romanian social research, not the autonomous choices of women. The next section will address how/if the same gender blindness is present at the public policy level during the last year.

### Romanian Recent Policy Making- Ignoring Gender as Much as We Can

Since an official updated strategy of the Government is yet to be made public, I will focus in this part of my analysis on policy measures undertaken, public declarations of political representatives and older policy papers (when available). Data continues to be scarce and difficult to pinpoint.

In Romania law 202/2002 art.2 stipulates "The measures for promoting equal opportunities between women and men and eliminating direct and indirect gender based discrimination are applied in the field of labor, education, health, culture and information, decision making process, as well as in other fields regulated by special laws."<sup>48</sup> However the responsible state agency for monitoring and promoting its implementation, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, has been disbanded in 2010.

In policy areas related to **education** no progress has been made in terms of gender stereotypes and no sign of future progress exists. In relation to ensuring women's **freedom from coercion and violence** the Romanian state's already questionable commitment to addressing it actually decreased, the National Agency for Family Protection was also disbanded in 2010, while at the same time domestic violence is increasing.

<sup>43</sup> Report from the Commission to the Council, The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions *Equality between women and men — 2009*, Brussels, 27.2.2009, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Pasti, Vladimir, 2003: *The Last Inequality (Ultima Inegalitate)*, Polirom Publishing, Iasi, 133-134

<sup>45</sup> Miroiu, Mihaela : *The Road to Autonomy (Drumul catre autonomie)*, (Iasi: Polirom Publishing, 2004), 266

<sup>46</sup> my emphasis

<sup>47</sup> Raluca Popescu *Calitatea vietii de familie în România*, 2003, <http://www.iccv.ro/sites/default/files/calitatea-vietii-de-familie-in-romania.pdf>, 26

<sup>48</sup> Law 2002/2002 [www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/documents/GE\\_Romania.doc](http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/documents/GE_Romania.doc)

In terms of **manipulation in public discourse** 2010 proved a most illuminating year. It was a complicated year for Romanian policy-makers and political representatives. Romania faced a political and financial crisis. The response was to implement massive budget cuts, especially in domains where women work. It was also a time for a brand new discovery in Romanian political discourse: the working woman became a hot topic. If throughout transition terms such as “women’s emancipation” and “women’s careers” were largely absent from public discourse, in 2010 Government representatives and the Romanian president embraced them. It soon became apparent that state feminism had not conquered Romanian politics, but rather pragmatic budget cuts were making their mark on political discourse.

In mid 2010 the Romanian Government cut both the parental leave period and child-support benefits, and Government representatives and the president invoked the necessity of budget cuts. The Labour Minister Ioan Botiș declared „our goal is the reintegration of mothers in the labour market”<sup>49</sup>. President Băsescu declared „my wife returned to work three months after having our children”<sup>50</sup>. What both the Government and the President ignored was that 1. The cuts were announced with only a few weeks before being implemented, thus severely affecting families and pregnant women’s plans. 2. Women lacked access to affordable child-care and thus adequate alternatives. Mr. President’s wife had had her children in a time where child-care state facilities were double in number. Although official prior documents stated that child-care facilities were a state priority it “During 2008 – 2010, the development of family policies shall focus on promoting measures to encourage women’s participation on the labour market by developing child care facilities and developing day-care centers to ensure the return of mothers to their jobs”<sup>51</sup>, in reality little if any progress has been made in this area. Private facilities are almost unreachable for the majority of the population. Finally after much debate, at the end of 2010 a new law was adopted instating an optional system- parents could have the option of both a shorter and a longer child-care leave, with different paying options. Other cuts, such as the state benefit given to new families on getting married were also cut and payments ceased<sup>52</sup>. The Labour Minister Ioan Botiș declared that additional benefit cuts were intended for families, such as the cut for families with children having low „behavior grades”<sup>53</sup>, meaning below 8.

What transpired in 2010 was how political representatives think about childcare and mothers in general. First, even from older policy documents what was clear was that **the division of care work and the hierarchy within family decision-making** is supported by the state. Women’s care work within the family was clearly expected by the state to be unpaid and apolitical: „Most of the dependant elderly benefit from the care services provided inside the family. This reality raises numerous problems that need to be solved. Most family carers are women, wives or daughters. Many

<sup>49</sup> *Press Declarations of Labour Minister, Ioan Botis, at the End of the Government Meeting (Declarații de presă susținute de ministrului Muncii, Ioan Botiș, la finalul ședinței de Guvern)* [http://www.gov.ro/declaratii-de-presa-sustinute-de-ministrului-muncii-ioan-botis-la-finalul-sedintei-de-guvern\\_11a111119.html](http://www.gov.ro/declaratii-de-presa-sustinute-de-ministrului-muncii-ioan-botis-la-finalul-sedintei-de-guvern_11a111119.html)

<sup>50</sup> *Basescu on the « Countries of mommies and little babies » Băsescu, despre țara „mămicuțelor și bebelușilor”* <http://www.gandul.info/news/basescu-despre-tara-mamicuțelor-si-bebelușilor-de-ce-nu-l-a-desemnat-pe-geoana-sa-primeasca-onorurile-militare-si-cum-face-ponta-pe-fata-mare-7793737>

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, *National Strategic Report on social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010*, 26

<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection *Report on the activity of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection in the field of social inclusion, January-September 2010*, <http://www.mmuncii.ro/articole/2010-12-10/raport-privind-activitatea-ministerului-muncii-familiei-si-protectiei-sociale-in-domeniul-incluziunii-sociale-in-perioada-1-ianuarie--30-septembrie2010-2001-articol.html>, 13

<sup>53</sup> “Behavior grades” are grades Romanian children receive in school measuring how well-behaved they are. This is an overall grade and is separated from other grades. The range is from 1 to 10. How exactly such grades reflect on Romanian children’s freedom of exercise in contestation and debate with authority figures such as teachers, especially girl’s contestation of social norms, is something that could be studied in the future to much use.

carers are in their turn elderly persons and may become dependant. The family care is ensured mainly in the rural area, where the traditions and moral values are maintained to a higher extent.<sup>54</sup>

The prime-minister himself, Emil Boc, just as mothers in Romania were protesting cuts in their benefits, advocated for „christian-democratic values” and argued for a system based on personal responsibility and a merger of liberal economy and christian-democracy<sup>55</sup>. Even if he was careful to mention that solidarity still is important, there was an obvious move in Romanian political discourse towards a clear and transparent reduction in the already low politization and public valorization of care work. It became clear such work is viewed by the government as designated to the family, which means the women in the family, since the „traditional values” invoked by policy makers maintain both **the division of labour within the family and hierarchy in decision-making.**

## Conclusions

Women’s autonomy is not accounted for by Romanian policy-makers within any of the dimensions of analysis set forth by feminist political theorists. Both liberal feminist autonomy and relational autonomy reveal that women’s autonomy is absent from Romanian policy-making.

Even more, the current Romanian policies not only fail both feminist accounts of women’s autonomy, they fail even the first minimal principle of liberalism stated at the beginning of this paper „only individuals matter”. While invoking liberal economy Romanian policy-makers use the term „liberal” as they please, since not even a minimal understanding of liberalism would endorse the promotion of „christian-democratic values” at the expense of women’s autonomy, as Johnson’s account presented previously shows. And while the financial crisis provided policy-makers with a pretext for not politicizing and valueing women’s care work, and for ignoring the patriarchal make-up of the Romanian family- deeply hostile to women’s autonomy, recent policy-making has not come as a surprise. Public policies and public discourse in Romania had not favored women’s autonomy much in the past. 2010 just allowed for a greater transparency of the disconnect between women’s lives, on one hand, and the policies that affect them, on the other.

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, *National Strategic Report on social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010*, 60

<sup>55</sup> Emil Boc *The Values of Christian democracy (Valorile democrației creștine)*, 22 Plus, 4th May 2010, <http://www.revista22.ro/22-plus-valorile-democra355iei-cre351tine-8132.html>

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