GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES DURING THE POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIAN SOCIETY - TRANSFORMATION OR CONSERVATION OF GENDER PATRIARCHAL REGIME?[1]

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Abstract

The paper aims to analyze family policies, labor market and social protection policies in the light of their correlated effects on the dynamics of gender relations, to identify such new tools for understanding national realities in European countries and to propose appropriate directions for intervention by programs and policies. The current research on public policies considers that the analysis of family policies, of labor market or social security policies, from the perspective of gender (in)equality, offers relevant indicators with regard to the welfare regimes and quality of democracy or to the democratic deficit in the post-communist Romanian society, placed in the actual European context.

This paper attempts to identify the mechanisms through which the state and its public policies reproduce and enhance traditional/conservative cultural models on gender roles and asymmetric social relations between men and women, also they reproduce the restrictive force of classic dichotomies between public-private life or productive-reproductive work. Despite the stated principle of gender equality, public policies maintain hierarchies and gender disparities in Romanian society, as in other European countries. This approach research shows that the complex interaction between cultural models of gender roles in the family/society and public policies is relevant to contextualized analysis of public policies and gender equality policies.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of cultural patterns (on family gender roles, labour organization etc.) on public policy (family policies, labor market policies, gender equality policies) in order to advance a set of questions: how do family and gender ideology influence the content of public policy and the conservation of gender regime in post-communist Romanian society? How can gender equality increase through public policies and to what extent is gender mainstreaming approach an appropriate solution in this sense?

Keywords: *public-private life report; gender regime; post-communist Romanian society; gender equality policies; cultural gender patterns.*

Introduction

This study falls within the thematic range which focuses upon the analysis of public policies from the perspective of gender equality. *The research objective* is the analysis of the relation of interdependence between the public policies concerning education, labour market, family, social security and cultural models (values, attitudes, convictions, stereotypes) related to family, gender roles, labour organization, correlating professional life with family and personal life, the border between public and private life as they are configured in post-communist Romanian society. By engaging in this research I look for answers to the following questions: *How do cultural models/family and gender ideology influence the contents of public policies? To what extent do public policies related to education, labour market, family, social security, depending on their cultural context, contribute to the (re)production of the gender division of labour and the preservation / change of gender imbalances in the sphere of public and private life?*

In the "cultural context" phrase, the concept of *culture* is used in its broad sense given by social anthropology, where culture is conceived as a "mental soft" referring to the patterns of

thinking, feeling and acting typical of a social group, community or nation (Hofstede et al. 2012, 17). The kernel of a culture is given by its values, which are considered to be the "invisible mental soft" of institutions, laws, public policies and social practices. The international researches of the population's values and attitudes (The World Values Survey (WVS) have facilitated the development of comparative studies, which give a clearer picture of the cultural background of public policies and explain why similar laws and practices work differently in different countries (Hofstede et al. 2012, 34). Besides other analysis dimensions of national cultures used in the comparative researches, the representation of masculinity and femininity is considered to be one of the aspects which shed light upon the understanding of cultural differences among countries with regards to the contents and impact of gender equality policies.

Aiming at identifying the social and cultural mechanisms which produce and maintain gender inequalities, i.e. the cultural basis of public policies, the investigation goes beyond the declarations of policy makers or governments with regards to reaching the objective of the equality between men and women in Romania. Endorsing the necessity of correlating the policies which regulate the sphere of public life (especially the policies related to labour market) with the policies focused upon social security / rights which also regulate private life issues (family, maternity, sexuality, domestic labour, care, the correlation and "reconciliation" between the professional and personal family life), I direct this analytic procedure towards the interrogation of the complex relations between the public and the private sphere in relation to gender regime or order[2] in the Romanian society of the present.

The analysis of this complex interconditioning between the public policies and the cultural models with regards to gender roles in family/society, i.e. the values and attitudes related to the issues of equality between women and men and the significance of the border between the public and private sphere is relevant to any contextualized research which focuses on the public policies from the point of view of gender equality. Since the 1970s, feminist studies and the research focused on the dynamics of the social relations between the sexes have shown that the issues of equality between women and men must be approached at the intersection between the public and the private space because the inequalities in the sphere of private life are inevitably projected onto and then firmly grounded in the sphere of professional labour and public life (Bereni et al. 2011, 110). Through this kind of research, which includes the gender component and the feminist perspective and analysis of public policies, the labour of care is taken out of the area of the private life in order to shed light upon the underlying social protection systems and the way in which these are built on the pattern of sexed and unfair division of labour. Domestic work, seen as a hypostasis of the labour of care performed within the family especially by women, becomes a referential field of research with significant economic and political stakes, lying at the very core of today's debates around restructuring the social protection systems and reformation of welfare regimes. Comparative reesearch shows that family is the main supplier of welfare, which means that the issue of correlating productive labour with the activities of care is not solved at the level of the EU countries, and the regimes of European social welfare, except for the Northern countries, give an uncertain answer to the issue of gender inequalities in the sphere of public and private life (Letablier 2001, 19-24).

Therefore, this study tackles the relation between the public and the private sphere correlated with productive-reproductive work, the gendering of the two areas, the hierarchy-oriented approach and unfair valorization, as well as the consequences of this dichotomy at the level of the public policies related to the labour market and correlated policies in the context of post-communist Romanian society.

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[2] *Gender regime* or order implies the dynamics of the socially and historically contextualized social relations between genders, i.e. the means of interaction between men and women within everyday institutions and practices, related to education, division of labour, public and private life, structure of power and the mental structures of these practices and institutions (Magyari-Vincze 2002, 146).

1. Gendered Frontier of the Public-Private Relation – Analytical and Political Stakes

The analysis of the issues related to labour and labour market from the point of view of the social relations between genders puts the whole problem in the area of the multiple interdependent connections between the public and private sphere because the social importance of labour and its economic stakes must be taken into account both in relation with the paid/productive labour and with domestic labour, and the gendered labour division in the public and private domains. Identifying gender inequalities, which are obvious in the public sphere (such as the weak participation and representation of women in political bodies; the inequalities between women and men on the paid labour market from the point of view of payment, work place quality, professional trajectories, etc.), as well as taking intervention and correction measures with a view to striking a balance will have no social impact and sustainable effects if they ignore the structural and invisible inequalities in the private sphere (mainly the imbalance generated by the gendered labour division, by defining and assuming domestic labour and the management of social time) (Silvera, 2012).

Tackling the imbalance between women and men in relation with labour, in all its forms (paid and unpaid; productive and reproductive or domestic), I raise some thorny aspects entailed by the relation between the sphere of public life and the sphere of private life, which used to be considered areas of demarcation between the two genders. The rigid separation of the two spheres, done in the name of liberal democracy and of the right to privacy, excluded an important set of social life issues from the area of research and public policy intervention. Those issues are related to the body, sexuality, violence, reproductive labour, maternity, family (Miroiu 2004, 69-71). At the same time, the analysis of the relation between the public and the private sphere in terms of opposition generated narrow and exclusivistic meanings of politics and citizenship, defined in terms of values and masculine activities and resulting in the exclusion of women from history (Waylen 2000, 216-221).

The modern person's need for *individual freedom* lies at the origin of this distinction, its effect being the statement of one's right to private life and the creation of a space where other persons or state institutions will not interfere (a space free from such interventions). Thus, the classical deep seated meanings of the public and private life concepts are outlined: *the sphere of private life* refers us to "the closed, personalized zone, which is invisible to the public eye, the place where the intervention of other people in one's own life stops, the limit to the information others have on our life" (Miroiu 2004, 70), as well as everything that has to do with "the private property, market and civil society"; *the sphere of public life* is identified with the action area of the State through public policies and political activity in general, (Gal and Kligman 2003, 57), with the public interest and welfare, with what is visible and accessible to others (Miroiu 2004, 70).

This distinction, considered "*the most solid and enduring of the liberal political and philosophical proposals*" (Iliescu 1998, 154), is related to other distinctions and must be judged in association with these: state-civil society, political-personal sphere, social-individual sphere, work place-home, productive/paid labour-domestic/unpaid labour, a.s.f. These correlations allow the understanding of different and nuanced meanings acquired by the public and private life concepts, in the contents of some theoretical constructs, within some culturally and historically contextualized everyday ideologies and practices.

Although it has an older history, the distinction between public and private life mainly belongs to the space of liberal policies and theories, which launched the *"separate spheres" doctrine,* which distinguishes between public and private, state-civil society, production-family. Through this perspective, the idea of a private life area, which must be seen by the authorities as holy and inviolable (Iliescu, 1998) becomes defining. The classical liberals gave a major importance to this distinction, associating what is private with freedom, in the sense of *negative freedom*. The attempt of distinguishing the two spheres, of establishing the border between public and private life is problematic and may generate controversies. Serious objections can be made against the idea that a really private sphere should exist, and within it the individiual's acts and attitudes should not

influence society, which renders the demarcations between facts of exclusively private significance and events of public sequence rather difficult (Iliescu 1998, 159).

Thus, both the intervention of the state as a warranter of individual rights and the role of the state as an important actor in formulating the policies of social protection are put forward, which means the stakes of the analysis of the relation between the public and the private sphere and of reconsidering the border between the two spheres are social (the social relations between sexes from the perspective of justice and social citizenship), economic (economic and social valorization of labour in the private sphere; the development of domestic services and emplois domestiques) and political (the issue of the intervention of the State in managing social welfare).

Apart from the positions supporting the necessity of a clear and often rigid demarcation between the two spheres, there are theoretical perspectives which argue the interdependence between the two areas and the flexibility of the border separating them (Phillips 2000, 397). The women's emancipation movement, as well as gender studies, have significantly contributed to the effacement of this border and the reconsoderation of their relation.

The feminist movement of the 1960s belongs in this mode of interrogating and critiquing the definitive nature of a border between the public and the private sphere. It saw the contentious character of the drastic separation (rigid distinction) between the public and the private sphere, (instituted by the tradition of European modernity, as well as the older Judeo-Christian tradition) on account of the fact that *the private sphere* is very frequently a space of abuses and injustice, of family violence, while the state refrains from intervening in this area, which may mean a tolerant approach to these abuses and the frailty of securing individual freedom. Carol Hanisch's message "*the personal is political"* in the essay "The Personal Is Political" (1971), which remains the epitome of the second wave of feminist movement, marked a major contribution to enriching political theory through reconsidering the concepts of public and private life and the role of the State and public policies, which become more sensitive to the domestic/private issues (Ballmer-Cao et al. 2000, 40). In this sense, a concept of *privacy* in relation with the individual and not with the family must be created, in the sense that "freedom must be extended in the private sphere as personal, individual, and not collective (family) freedom." The argument is that "personal problems are not merely personal, but also part of the social/public phenomena just because human rights do not lose their validity on the doorstep to one's home" (Miroiu 2004, 71).

Both in a reflexive context and at the level of concrete action, the dualism/dichotomy between the public and the private sphere, masculine/feminine, respectively, are frequently associated, and this association refers us to the order of gender/gender relations characteristic of a given society (Gal and Kligman, 2003). There is a whole theoretical and practical tradition of this association, whose origins are in ancient history and which has not disappeared; this tradition considers the dualism between the public and the private sphere a factor which generates separate spaces for women and men, placing women in the "domestic" private sphere and men in the space of collective business (Dragomir and Miroiu 2002, 301). Thus, it may be argued that the *distinction between the public and the private sphere has been gendered,* which means it has been culturally encoded from the point of view of gender differences, which led to the architecture of a social space with gender peculiarities for women and for men, which often becomes a space of gender inequalities (Miroiu 2004, 71).

The manner of analysing and representing the relation between the public and the private sphere, i.e. the opposition/separation, engendering and ranking of the two spheres, the habit of identifying femininity and the roles taken by women with the private space (as if this were a matter of fact), as well as the reflex of unequally valorizing tasks, which results in taking the family problems, care labour, gender inequalities in the private sphere out of the public sphere are considered problematic by the feminist approaches (Okin 2000, 345-347).

Thus, putting forward the relation between the public and the private sphere (le rapport public-privé) and the flexibility of the border between the two spheres does not mean that this border has been effaced and the private life has been turned into a political issue or that the idea of some

high and abusive interferences (which yielded bad consequences upon the dictatorial regimes by adopting pro-natalist policies in communist Romania or forced sterilization policies in China).

Even if there are numerous differences and divergences among the feminist theorists concerning the relation between the public and the private sphere, reconsidering this relation has generated a significant shift of perspective at the level of social and political theory, with visible effects at the level of concrete life. The following gains/new perspectives upon the way of getting to grips with the world are relevant to this argument: a) looking at the two spheres as interdependent and understanding that the inequalities in the private sphere trigger other inequalities in the professional sphere; being aware that the private sphere is an important place of fabricating/molding gender relations (Bereni et al. 2011, 113); the connections between these two spheres (professional and familial/domestic), both at the level of analysis and at the level of intervention through public policies increase the chances of achieving the translation from *de jure* (judicial equality) to *de facto* (actual equality); b) the problems in the private sphere (travail domestique, de sexualité, de fécondité) are not merely personal, but political problems of general interest, which implies a reconsideration of the concept of political issues (Phillips 2000, 397); c) questioning the notions and implications of domestic labour, the gendered division of labour and unequal valorizing of labour: productive versus reproductive labour; d) the issues of correlating the professional time, the familial time and personal time (Silvera 2010, 63-64); e) the rigid distinction between public and private grounds any patriarchal system of reference (Miroiu, 2004); f) the more involved in the private sphere and the more attached to domestic roles women are, the more acute their subordination and oppression will be (Bereni et al. 2011, 113); g) putting forward the supposedly universal concept of *citizenship* and the issues of keeping women out of the area of civil, political and social area for a considerably long time interval; h) the identification and analysis of gender inequalities from the perspective of both components (public-private); gender problems relate to the way in which both spheres are organized (Miroiu 2004, 72); i) extending the concept of democracy, in the sense that enforcing democracy in the public sphere is not possible in the absence of enforcing its principles in the private sphere to begin with; j) reconsidering the "*gender contract*" and questioning the condition of woman in today's society from the perspective of the values of freedom, equality and social justice (Silvera 2010, 63-64); k) the relevance of the analysis of cultural, social and institutional mechanisms through which the restrictive force of the classical dichotomy is reproduced and reinforced by the public policies, and which, despite the declared principle of gender equality, are likely maintain the gender hierarchies and disparities.

Another impact of these perspective shifts upon the relation beween the public and the private sphere, generated by the feminist movement and gender research, consists in a series of regulations adopted in several countries worldwide in the last decades; these regulations have guaranteed and reinforced the civil and social rights within the sphere of private life: family rights (marriage, divorce, children custody) ; the possibility of sexuality and reproduction control; the support of the state in bringing up children ; gender equality on the labour market; access of women to jobs stereotypically considered to be the panache of manhood; equal payment for labour of equal worth; legal provisions preventing rape, pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment and domestic violence; policies of preventing sexism in education, hiring, mass-media (Miroiu 2004, 72).

Considering the relation between the public and the private sphere as a social and cultural construct and analysing the process of the (re)configuration of the two spheres and the border between them contextually, and the way in which productive labour and care are related to them, re-considering care as a womanly job, which is invisible and mainly done in the family/domestic sphere, is a political, social and economic stake of major importance for our modern times.

2. Gender and Unequal Division of Labour – a Structural Imbalance

Thematizing the dichotomy between the public and the private sphere puts forward the gender division of labour, the separation and hierarchy between productive labour, which is mainly

masculine, and reproductive or domestic labour, considered to be typically feminine. Issues related to the aspects of the gender division of labour, care and domestic labour, the way in which they are transferred and reproduced in the sphere of public activities (resulting in the weakening of women's position on the labour market (inequality of access, maintenance and progress in the labour market), directing them towards womanly fields of activity, the segregation of labour market both vertically and horizontally, thus perpetuating and reinforcing the structural inequalities in the social relations between women and men are crucial to this analysis.

Domestic or reproductive *labour* (including housework, house maintenance, cooking, caring for and bringing up children, caring for dependent persons, administrative tasks, a.s.f.) is considered to be the labour behind productive labour (which is paid and visible); it is performed, in most European countries, as unpaid labour and it is almost exclusively the responsibility of women as "double labour day", even when they are active on the labour market. Even if theorists are divided as far as the economic stakes and identified solutions to domestic labour are concerned, they share views with regards to its specific contents, domestic labour comprising any type of labour, performed for the benefit of others and free of charge, within the couple and family, in the name of nature, love or maternal duty (Bereni et al. 2011, 114).

Revealing the mechanisms that generate gender inequalities, the research in the field of gender studies has highlighted several aspects related to domestic labour and mainly the fact that it does not enjoy the same social valorization as paid labour, it generates and maintains relations of power and structural gender inequalities within the couple and family, preserving the woman's economic dependence, isolating her in the private space and being the cause of rendering her inferior and oppressed. Labour performance and the income associated with labour are, in the contemporary society, criteria measuring social success and personal success, while *domestic labour*, although being the women's ancestral contribution to economic activity, *remains in the invisible, unpaid and socially low valorized area*. Ignoring the wealth generated by domestic labour and its contribution to the economic welfare, as well as the fact that this type of labour is not included in the classical statistics and in the enforcement of social rights, have negative impacts at several levels: a) it generates and maintains situations of *economic dependence and impoverishment* for several categories of women, mainly housewives, women living in rural areas, uneducated women, women without any qualifications and diplomas, women doing part-time jobs, women suspending their career, single-parent families led by women, etc. b) it underestimates women's economic contribution to the social production/welfare, although women ensure, even in the 21st century, two thirds of the whole of domestic tasks; c) it generates distortions in the economic analysis and in the projection of public policies by ignoring the correlation between domestic labour and professional activity; d) it shows the limits of GDP calculus and of the procedures which determine other indices of measuring social welfare and economic growth (Méda, 2008, 155) .

Research focused on reconsidering and revising the border between the public and the private sphere shows that running public life according to the principles of democracy cannot be achieved without enforcing those principles in the private sphere in the first place, and approaching the issue of the political participation of women and promoting women's employment without paying heed to the constraints of private life is pointless and it also implies a very narrow and restrictive outlook with regards to democracy (Phillips 2000, 405-416). Women's low participation in the political life, as well as the frequent interruptions of their careers can be largely explained by the private constraints which exert a pressure upon their public engagement (e.g. the time budget of women and especially those who are mothers is different from men's, the subordinated roles in the domestic sphere which generate and maintain the women's lack of self-confidence, as well as the low-esteem representations of women).

Behind the issues of correlating productive labour with care, professional life with family/personal life lies, more or less overtly, the stake of equality between women and men in the public and private space (Walby 2000, 51). Failure in striking a balance between professional labour

and domestic labour and family life has a negative impact upon performance, efficiency and the satisfaction derived from one's work, and at the same time it is considered to be a *factor of indirect discrimination against women on the labour market* for at least three reasons: a) women's access and maintenance on the labour market, as well as quality work places (which entail constant professional investments) are limited in the absence of caring services for minor children and for other dependent persons in the family (who usually become women's responsibility); b) the difficulty of striking a balance between the two labour spheres reduces women's participation in all the other components of social, cultural, political and economic life; c) it leads to maintaining the gender stereotypes and asymmetries in terms of resource and power distribution, of playing gender roles in the public and private space (they maintain the unequal division of labour in the family; lower positions of dependence for women (Dragolea, 2007).

The balance ("reconciliation") *between professional and personal life*, between productive labour and domestic labour respectively, is defined as "the situation characterized by satisfaction, minimum role conflict and optimum capability of the employee both in the tasks and roles at the work place and those in the personal/family life," aspects which can be measured with the help of subjective/qualitative and quantitative indices of work satisfaction (www.cpe.ro, 2007). How can this balance be struck? What are the factors responsible and the examples of good practice recorded in the European space so far? – these are only a few questions thrown by the researchers on this topic in the last few years[3].

The policies of equality among women and men (from equality of access to the labour market, from payment equality to the policies of correlating professional life with personal and family life) have been and still are essential to the social and economic policies of the European Union (Lisbon Agenda and post-Lisbon Agenda). In their context, the issues of correlating the social time – as family, personal, professional time – are of major concern because they have implications both at an *ethical* and *social* level (the purpose being the founding of a fairer society, centered upon the principle of equality between women and men), as well as at an *economic* and *demographic* level (increasing women's employment level on the labour market; demographic increase; "reconciling" family and professional life) (Silvera 2010, 63). Equality between women and men on the labour market "restera uniquement formelle tant que la question des soins informels aux personnes dépendantes ne sera pas résolue" (Jenson, 2001).

The strategic development directions at a European level, also supported by the development of research in this complex field, shows that equality on the labour market and in relation with labour does not concern only women/mothers, nor is it a problem of the individual or of the family. The role of the state, of the market and of employers, as well as the manner and the extent to which these key factors get involved are elements of maximum importance in devising proper and efficient gender equality policies. In this context, regulations generically called *reconciling policies* between professional labour and family or personal life have been developed.

Initially centered upon the rights which result from assuming parental condition (maternity/paternity leave; parental leave), reconciling policies at the present moment consist in the totality of the measures designed to support the employees with a view to harmonizing the social roles they perform in the space of public and private life, i.e. the balance between professional and family life. Therefore, apart from the rights provided in relation with parental leave, the "reconciling"[4] policies include childcare services (at least for age groups between 0-3 years from 3

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[3] For a discussion of this aspect, please see Moller Okin S., 2008; also: *Revue Française de Socio-Économie,* 2008/2 - n° 2; *Travail, genre et sociétés,* 2001/2 - N° 6; 2010/2 - n° 24; 2011/2 - n° 26; *Cahiers du Genre,* 2009/1 - n° 46.

[4] The terms of "reconciliation" – used in relation to the policies of the EU which aim at striking a balance between the professional sphere and the family and personal sphere – are considered, within the feminist research of the present, as improper because they preserve the idea of "natural" division and segregation between women and men. Alternatively, the concepts of *balance* or *correlation* among all the components of our labour, time and activity are preferred (professional time/family time/personal time; productive work/reproductive work) (Silvera 2010, 63).

years - compulsory school age), after school programs, family friendly programs for organizations, flexible working arrangements (part-time, flexible hours, career breaks, although these measures are considered "false" conciliation measures, viewed in terms of the risks posed by long-term) and financial grants, subsidies, tax rebates, social care (Bereni et al. 2011, 122-124). All these regulations and intervention methods can be found in a set of correlated public policies – *policies of education, of labour market, family policies and social policies* – which, in connection with one another, could offer sustainable solutions to the issues of the correlation/balance between professional life (labour market; the sphere of public life) and personal/family life (the sphere of private life) (Letablier, 2001).

At present, there are no unitary political practices concerning the equality between women and men on the labour market and in relation to labour at the level of the EU member countries. In order to meet the objective of gender equality, some countries adopt mainly anti-discriminating policies (which are necessary, but not suffiecient in order to ensure a sound equality), while other countries lay stress upon correlated policies, which support the labour market (« reconciliation » policies, family and social policies, which are characteristic of the welfare regime). In other words, the policies regarding the labour market must be projected and analysed in correlation with the social policies (ensuring, warranting social rights) and with family policies (the system of care for children and dependent persons; supporting birth policies), which should integrate the dimension of gender equality, because a real increase of the rate of employment for women and men on the labour market – considered to be the essential condition for economic progress at the EU level – cannot be achieved without ensuring some institutional and financial mechanisms of correlating professional life with family/personal life, adapted and contextualized according to the profile of each country (Letablier, 2001). The insufficient correlation of these policies, as well as the scarcity of services and support structures in most of the European countries do not only prevent the achievement of the labour market objectives, settled at the level of the EU, but they also maintain and reinforce the inequalities between women and men, as well as those among various categories of women.

3. Cultural Models Underlying the Relation between Labour and Family in Post-communist Romania

In today's Romanian society, as well as in other European countries, there are many inequalities/disparities beween women and men on the labour market, as well as in the public and private life. Despite the considerable changes in women's status in society in comparison with previous decades, *women and men do not have equal chances* in terms of their educational and professional trajectory or family life. The gender asymmetries and inequalities are social constructs, being generated and maintained by conservative social and cultural mentalities and mechanisms, largely perpetuated in the communist period, which maintain the traditional roles and gender stereotypes, thus restricting women's choices, opportunities, development and participation in the social and professional life.

The analysis of family policies, labour market and social protection policies from the perspective of the cultural models endorsing them, and the conjugated effects they generate upon the dynamics of gender relations offer new tools for getting to grips with the national realities in the European countries, and they may indicate adequate intervention methods through public programmes and policies. Reflecting the social gender relations existing in a society at a given moment in history, as well as the prevailing cultural models, public policies contribute, in their turn, to building and regulating gender relations in the public and private sphere, while their allegedly neutral nature only disguise and more often than not deepen existing gender inequalities in the sphere of the two social sectors.

This *complex interconditioning between cultural models related to gender roles in family/society and public policies* is considered relevant for a contextualized analysis focused upon public policies (Lazăr 2010, 113-116). Identifying the mechanisms by which the state, through the

public policies it promotes, reproduces and deepens the traditional cultural models with regards to the gender roles and social relations between the sexes, as well as the restrictive force of the classical dichotomy between the public and the private sphere, productive and reproductive work is an important objective. Despite the declared principle of gender equality, public policies may maintain gender-based hierarchies and disparities. However, the figures and statistics which are usually invoked and which may indicate a more or less acceptable reality concerning the equality between women and men on the labour market cannot explain the social and cultural mechanisms underlying the social relations of gender in relation to labour, which maintain the structural gender inequalities.

Therefore, in order to reach "the heart of the matter" and account for the differences among the European countries, as awell as perceive the difficulty of conceiving and enforcing a shared plan aimed at solving the issues at EU level, we need to look into the values and attitudes of the population in relation to gender roles, the problem of equality between women and men and the relation between the public and private sphere. The international research of the values and attitudes of the population (the World Values Survey (WVS), the European Social Survey (ESS) have facilitated the development of the studies focused on the correlations between the cultural models/national cultures, public policies, welfare regimes[5].

In today's Romanian society women face the difficulty of striking a balance between the two spheres of labour (professional/paid labour and domestic labour), resulting in social constraints and pressures, which means difficult and sometimes radical life options of the "*either...or*" kind (either professional life/career or family life), the success in either of the two fields being achieved to the detriment of the other. Because of the cultural and socializing models, striking this balance is more imperative for women than for men and it consequently puts more strain on women than it does on men because it is precarious, threatened by the role conflict and the eternally awkward negotiation on the distribution of reproductive labour in the private sphere. This state of affairs actually typifies countries in which the major social actors (the state, the market, the business company) fail to involve in the social welfare system from the point of view of gender equality in relation to labour, labour market, family.

In Romania, thematizing the issues related to domestic labour occurs in academic research and a few European financed projects, but it is absent from the public debates and the analysis of public policies. Even if in the official documents the principle of "reconciliation" or harmonization between profession and private life/family is often referenced, there are no specific regulations concerning this issue, which might also indicate the means by which this balance can be struck. This means that it is there merely as an abstract statement with no concrete support.

Comparative research shows that in most of the European countries, as well as in Romania, a cultural pattern has been preserved, and according to that pattern family is regarded as the main provider of welfare, which means that the issues of correlating productive labour with activities of care have not been solved. Explicit gender equality principles (antidiscrimination laws which ensure legal access to education, employment, political participation, as well as assertive measures designed to favour women in order to give them the opportunity of redressing past injustice) fail to contribute to an increase of the actual level of gender equality in a society/country, unless they are endorsed by the set of public policies of implicit equality (those policies which, although they are not focused on the equality between women and men, *implicitly* generate significant effects upon social relations among genders by maintaining or diminishing structural gender inequalities).

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[5] Two seminal research studies are worth mentioning: R. Inglehart, 1997, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies,* Princepton University Press; G. Hofstede, G.J. Hotstede and M. Minkov, 2012, *Culturi şi organizaţii. Softul mental. Cooperarea interculturală şi importanţa ei pentru supravieţuire* (Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival), Humanitas, Bucharest.

This category includes labour market policies, family policies, social protection and education policies, which from the point of view of the conjugated effects they produce upon the dynamics of gender relations, implicitly increase or reduce gender inequalities. If there is no correlation between the two sets of policies from the point of view of gender equality, then the latter will be merely a formal (legal) equality and not a real (concrete, substantial) one, and the problem of reconciling one's profession and private life remains unsolved.

The social attitudes to and representations of domestic labour gravitate around a dominant tendency: care is not considered to be work, it is confined to the private sphere behind closed doors, and it is thus seen as women's "natural duty", something which occurs naturally and gets sorted out only through individual or family arrangements. The culture of partnership, of negotiating and sharing tasks and roles, of equal valorizations of the differences between the sexes, of accepting an open competition based on equality of chances is very litlle developed in the Romanian society, both at the level of couple and family life, and in the sphere of public life. Inequalities in the sphere of private life are plentiful, but they are not addressed publicly and nor are they perceived as social issues of public interest. The public-private separation, considered a "natural given", is very clear cut, like the gendering of the two spheres, correlated with the "inferiorization" of the private sphere and the invisibility of domestic labour. The significance of these correlations owes a lot to life experience during the communist regime.

The relation between the public and the private sphere was correlated in the Romanian society during the communist regime, when the private sphere and family haven were particularly valorized, being considered a "refuge" protecting the individuals from the hardships of political power, which gave them some room to enjoy freedom as well as a necessary support network (Heinen 1996, 249). Therefore, the significance of the relation between the public and private space was far from the formula "le personnel est politique" of the feminist movement in the 1970s. The way in which the private sphere was valorized in communism explains, to a large extent, the attitude of rejecting feminism and its slogan in the post-communist period, an attitude which has its origins in the fear of blurring the borders between the two spheres, which might deny the individual's access to an important refuge area (Heinen 1996, 259).

Social rights of a universal kind were an important safety net, but they were accompanied by the individual's submission towards the omnipotent paternalist and intrusive State (Heinen 2009, 106). Ensuring *welfare socialist* mechanisms and reinforcing social citizenship was achieved at the price of breaching the civil and political rights and freedoms (Dorottya and Dorota 2009, 77).

The emancipation of women through labour did not entail an equivalent gain in the sense of an increased autonomy for them, an aspect which should raise the issue of today's strategies and national and European policies, which insist unilaterally upon a higher rate of employment for women on the labour market, without correlating it with family and social policies.

Previous research on this topic emphasizes the coexistence of several cultural (normative) models which regulate (prescribe, pre-establish) the social relations between men and women with regards to labour and the labour market, family life and gender roles.

The criteria used/dimensions analyzed in the studies focused on the survey of cultural models and gender regimes, which regulate the social relations between the sexes are: women's investments in their profession and/or children, family; their interest in professional formation; continuity or discontinuity on the labour market (Magyari-Vincze 2004, 29-48); the flexibility/non-flexibility of the border between public and private sphere, as well as the roles performed in these activity areas (analysis dimensions aim to identify whether the two spheres and associated roles are seen as interdependent or separated and separately/unequally valorized; public/private correlation versus segregation; productive/reproductive labour) (Sainsbury 2000, 233); family model and gender roles or "family and gender ideology" (in this respect, there is the traditional model, based on role segregation; the family in which the man is the head of the family and the main breadwinner, while the woman's responsibilities are entirely focused on housework and children upbringing; the modern

family model, which is mainly egalitarian, the family with two income sources and "the double career family"; celibacy; single parent family, etc.) (Badinter 2010, 31-37); feminine ideology (the practice of autonomy and the assertion of the subject-woman; autonomy versus submission/dependence) and masculine ideology (career, success versus family/personal life) (Lipovetsky 2000, 171-176).

Correlating the existing research results with direct (exterior and participative) observations of several categories of women, I applied and developed the pattern proposed by Elisabeth Badinter in her contentious book published in 2010 *Le conflit: la femme et la mère*, thus configuring a few models (ideally types) of correlating between profession and family life, professional labour and caring labour, which outline a certain horizon for women in the Romanian society, at the crossroads between personal options and social constraints. Thus:

a) **the traditional cultural model**: may include women with three or more than three children, who interrupt their labour on the labour market for a long interval of time or even irreversibly in order to commit themselves to the full-time job of being mothers. The model is characterized by: clear segregation of family roles ("male breadwinner / female care"); public-private separation and opposition; women are economically dependent upon their partners; this is a patriarchal model based on relations of power and "the complementarity of roles"; it is a model which may be identified both in the rural and in the urban environment, as well as in the couples with a high level of education;

b) **the neo-traditional cultural model** (or the modernization of the previous model): may include mothers with two children, active on the labour market, with low income or more often than not part-time jobs, or working without a work contract. This model includes women who pay more attention to family life than to their profession. It also includes the family with two income sources, but it fails to bring essential alterations to the previous model with regards to women's autonomy and the division of domestic labour. Nevertheless, this model is not always identified with the patriarchal model of couple relations, since there are also partnership relations between the members of the couple; this category might also include women who, although childless, "choose" to refrain from working on the labour market in order to look after their spouses/partners or to accompany their partners as "decorative objects";

c) **the modern cultural model** : like the previous model, this tends to « reconcile » maternity, family, personal and professional life ; the model includes couples/families with two income sources and double career couples/families, in which the partners invest in their professional formation and development and both perform domestic labour (« deux pourvoyeurs de revenus/deux pourvoyeur de soins » (Méda 2008, 119); women are interested in the dynamics of labour market and the opportunites it offers, they institute a partnership with regards to domestic roles and/or they outsource them (from the larger family : grandparents and/or access to paid services) ;

d) **the postmodern cultural model** : includes childless women ; some of these define themselves as independent ; their ideals in life do not match marriage or family patterns ; celibacy is an assumed life model, but there is also the « unintended » celibacy, perceived as failure or as resignation ;

e) **the model of single parent families led by women** ("femmes au singulier ou la parentalité solitaire", Gaulejac and Aubert 1990): is characterized by the diversity and heterogeneity of its social and professional types and categories ; their marginality or marginalization is not the same and it is not perceived as such by all the types of single parent families (Gaulejac and Aubert 1990, 47); there are relatively few points they share : the fact that they involve women who bring up their child/children on their own or they involve intended single parenthood (the celibate women) or unintended single parenthood (separation, divorce, the partner's death) differences are numerous : the single parenthood which is coped by social services and not by assisted categories ; transitory single parenhood and lifelong single parenthood, etc. The situation of single parenthood depends very much on the cultural and social capital of the single mother/parent : cases vary from adolescent mothers

(who are « deviant » or not trained in contraceptive methods and sex life) to the category of « mothers in distress » (who lack the skill of planning their life/have no life project, who see no prospect in surviving/developing outside of the married couple, and who had no alternative models in this respect) and the voluntary celibate motherhood (characterized by social innovation ; high school and professional capital ; economic independence; age above average maternity age; high self esteem, etc.) (Gaulejac and Aubert 1990, 47-51).

Applying this typology to the Romanian social reality, we notice that the group of women is very heterogenous in relation to the way in which they combine labour with family life (the men's group is more homogenous). Heterogeneity depends upon living environment (rural-urban), education level and degree, professional formation (higher education, further education, no education or incomplete education), regions, age, ethnic belonging. Despite the absence of statistic data which should indicate with accuracy the proportion of these models characterizing the feminine population in Romanian society, observing the behaviours and « options » around us, we may say that, in spite of the heterogeneity of individual options, the traditional and neo-traditional models prevail for a diversity of social and professional categories, and especially for the age group (35-50), which shares a certain socialization pattern, more exactly the differentiated/stereotypical gender socialization, characterized by dichotomy and asymmetry, which induces an imbalance of power in gender relations, generates multiple social disparities, prescribes specific trajectories for women and for men, thus considerably reducing the equality of development chances for the two groups.

There are few educational messages encouraging girls/women to become independent by investing in their school and professional formation in the first place. Even if girls outnumber boys at all levels of education (with certain variations of profile) and their school results are often better than the boys', more often than not they have to cope with the social pressures of defining their identity by getting married and having children. These social pressures are supplemented by economic constraints generated by the labour market in Romania (low salaries ; different salary for women and for men) and the absence of child care services, which make mothers « opt » for the « smaller evil. »

The postmodern model of the independent woman is not particularly encouraged, especially in certain social environments and country regions. The socializing factors send contradictory messages, family ideology and pleas for maternity (social pressures for being a « good mother » are numerous) co-exist with the ideology of « attractive womanhood » and « successful manhood ». Women's identity in Romania is closely connected with marriage and maternity, considered to be key factors in a woman 's life. The state also endorses this through its public policies (two year parental leave) and through the lack of care support, care remaining the families'/women's responsibility. The labour market failing to be particularly attartcive for women (in terms of salary and promotion), success through marriage is considered to be a « sound » option, just like the « option » of being a housewife and looking after one's own children.

Conclusion

Promoting gender equality in the post-communist Romanian society faces a paradox: many of the policies and programmes run in the name of gender equality (equality of chances; equality with the masculine standard) actually continue and reinforce the gender inequalities typical of the traditional gender order. That is an apparent paradox, which becomes explicable (albeit not acceptable) if we analyse in its depth the invisible „mental soft" (concepts, values, attitudes, behaviour characteristic to Romanian society and culture), which underpins the enforced laws and regulations and the created institutions and organizations.

In the mainly patriarchal/masculine cultures, the idea of gender equality itself is perverted and becomes equality with the masculine standard. The gender inequalities and imbalances are continued in a more subtle and paradoxical form, even in the guise and through the ideal of gender equality, figured out at the level of common sense within certain public programmes and policies (Magyari-Vincze 2004, 29-30). Running governmental programmes, public policies and European financed

projects aimed at promoting gender equality does not mean that these will also yield sustainable effects in the field of concrete life. These only reproduce the cultural patterns and gender stereotypes at the level of the collective mindset.

Contrary to the almighty and oppressive role (of total control on public and private life) exerted by the communist state, the post-communist state, relying on a neoliberal ideology, has dramatically reduced its economic and social role, and especially its role of redistributing and achieving social justice, which has led to an alarming decrease in the number and quantity of existing support services (nurseries, kindergartens, public care services for persons in need, hospitals), which inflated the amount of labour "to be carried out" by women in the private sphere, the impairment of their freedom of movement and of their chances to combine professional labour with domestic/family tasks. The social protection system at present, which depends on the level of income, is centered upon the most needy categories. In contrast to family-centered ideology, social and family policies are not oriented towards family development and demographic growth, but merely upon ensuring a minimum level of survival. Unlike in the previous period, the gains in the field of civil and political liberties have been achieved at the cost of sacrificing social rights and alarming quotas of inequality and social polarization, thus affecting the social citizenship component.

The equal opportunities principle is double-edged in the sense that the meritocratic side it contains (according to which women are not supposed to be promoted through assertive action), which is part and parcel of the equality of opportunities in its most current meaning in our cultural space as well, allows past injustice and gender inequalities to continue in the present despite the legal frame which provides gender equality (Dragomir and Miroiu 2002, 25).

Ensuring the equality of chances in gender social relations means ensuring equality as a premise, equality with regards to the conditions of one's start in the social competition. In this case, gender equality (as chance equality), related to the liberal principle of meritocracy, ignores *ab initio* the existence of gender equalities in the area of private life and the fact that women, who have the responsibility of work in the sphere of private life, have a reduced access to competition and resources. "*Frozen in their condition of housewives and active mothers, women cannot be equal competitors on the labour market, they have a real deterrent in the competition. Meritocracy invoked as a liberal principle applies to those who are free from feeding and care activities*" (Miroiu 2004, 114).

Experiences which are typical of women (such as pregnancy, abortion, breast feeding, maternity) as well as the experiences which are generally conceived as the responsibilities of women (such as the care for children, the elderly, the sickly persons; single parenthood, sexual harassment, rape, prostitution, sexual exploitation; the experience of subordination and discrimination, etc.) outline a set of *specific interests* despite major differences among women according to age, education, ethnicity, cultural and geographic space, etc. (Băluță 2007b, 46-47). In order for these specific interests to get on the public/political agenda and to be sorted out through the public policies focused on gender equality, women need a group awareness and forms of political activism based on the existence of interests which are different from those of men (Mihai 2011, 9).

Reconfiguring the public space in post-communist Romania has been achieved in mainly masculine terms, both the representation of women in decision-making structures and their public visibility being reduced. In this context, the formulation of specific interests has been and still is rather weak, and the progress made is not consolidated, the risk of regress being a permanent threat. The constraints of everyday life, the cultural models promoting family and maternity-oriented measures as key factors of structuring feminine identity, the absence of civic practice, as well as the "preventive antifeminism" maintain an attitude of resignation from involving in the public and political life on the part of women. Nevertheless, the topics perceived to have an urgent character when related to basic needs (supporting children and women in need) manage to engage women's energies, unlike the strategic and political interests. The question is whether the formulation of the social issues of the private sphere and their constant and coherent presence on the public agenda might generate a more active involvement of women in the civil and political life, thus contributing

to the concrete expression of women's social citizenship (Heinen 1996, 258). In our society, there is an almost paradoxical co-existence of the discourse favouring maternity and the precarious rights and services supporting it (for instance, the child's allowance, received since birth until the child's coming of age at 18, amounts to around 10 Euro). Both in communism and in post-communism, the social protection and family policy system, which is under-financed, stuck in inner contradictions and incoherent approaches, contributes to the maintenance and even the consolidation of gendered labour division: horizontal and vertical segregation, salary discrepancies, gender inequalities in relation with domestic labour and professional paid labour.

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