

## GENDER AND PUBLIC EXPENDITURE POLITICS.

### Applying care theory in post-communist Romania - is there an East- West divide? <sup>1</sup>

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*"We are tired to wash with cheap soap and detergent. We dream of a true perfume and a true soap. Now, that we have them, leave us alone. We don't share your story, we have our own. We also have our own frustrations and desires"* (Miroiu, 2006, p.121).

Throughout the recent years, care has become an important topic in feminist studies and was integrated in analysis of welfare state, democratic theories, and gender justice theories. Care theories were developed mainly by Western feminist who proposed a series of explanations for why care represents a marginal issue in politics. Eastern feminists (Miroiu, 1995, 2004, Funk, 1999, Roman 2001, Băluță 2013) draw attention to the difficulty of applying western-developed concepts and theories to eastern-specific contexts. Throughout the proposed paper I plan to explore if care theory represents such a case. I will begin with a very brief literature review on care. In the second section I will present the main explanations that western feminist theorists offer in regards to the lack of politicization of care and explore the differences between Eastern European context and the West. I will discuss whether these theories can provide appropriate theoretical tools needed to explain the lack of care on the political agenda, in post-communist Romania.

#### Care theories: Brief Literature Review

Carol Gilligan ([1982], 1993) is considered to be the founder of the ethics of care. In her influential work *In a Different Voice. Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Gilligan ([1982], 1993) argues against the idea of moral superiority of boys<sup>2</sup> and advocates for an understanding of different, and not hierarchal, moral development between boys and girls: while boys are prone in following rules and standards, girls' moral judgement was

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<sup>1</sup> "This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-2097".

<sup>2</sup> As was developed by her professor Lawrence Kohlberg (1966)

made according to the particular context of each situation. Also, the author shows that girls go through stages of moral development, with a penchant for empathy and attention to the needs of others. She also underlines the fact that care plays an important role in their moral development (Gilligan (1982), 1993, p.22).

Joan Tronto (1993, 2004, 2013) is recognized as the first theorist that brings care in political theory and fructifies Gillian's work in relation to the political and public life (Miroiu, [1996] 2002, p. 94 ). Tronto (1993) proposed a political conceptualization of care. Her book, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* represents an essential reference point in the debate on the politicization of care. The central argument of this book is as follows: for the ethic of care to achieve its potential and not to generate inequalities for women, it is important that care ethics principles and assumptions be placed in a political context.

Other important care theorists are the following: Sara Ruddik (1980) who is considered by Virginia Held, a pioneer in the field of ethics of care (2006, p.37) and who proposed "outsourcing" maternal practices and standards into the political sphere, Grace Clement (1996), who explores the relationship between care, autonomy and justice, arguing not only for compatibility, but also their interdependence, Eva Kittay Federer ( 1999) - who devote her work to dependency issues, arguing for a reconceptualization of political theories and society in general, so that dependence and care work would occupy a central place, Nell Noddings (2002), which proposes the construction of social policies based care model "ideal family".

In regards to Romanian literature, to my knowledge, research on care is narrow compared to western developments in the field. However it is important to mention the contributions brought by feminist scholars like Mihaela Miroiu ([1996] 2002) who incorporates care as part of her convenability theory. Issues related to the ethics of care can be found in the works of Alice Iancu (2010), who looks at how care was addressed in Romania during the economic crisis. Mihaela Frunza (2009), Anca Gheaus (2009) also wrote extensively on ethics and philosophy of care. The latter frames the discussions about care in terms of social justice and argues that

distributive justice requires a fair distribution of care in a society (Gheaus, 2009, p. 63)<sup>3</sup>.

### **Why care fails to become a political priority? Western answers and their applicability in an Eastern space**

Why has care, despite its importance for all human beings, failed to become a political priority? Throughout this section, I will explore some of the answers provided by Western Feminist theorists, and discuss to what extent these responses may explain the lack of politicization of care in the Romanian context. <sup>2</sup>

#### 1. "Irresponsibility privilege"/productive work vs. care work

An explanation provided by Tronto (2004, 2013) for lack of politicization of care is *privileged irresponsibility*. Irresponsibility privilege is a concept proposed first by Joan Tronto and Julia White (2004), and further developed by Tronto (2013). In (2004), privileged irresponsibility was defined as a result of the traditional division of labour and of social values that enable certain people (men) to "extract themselves" from the responsibility to care, because they have more important things to do. The authors exemplify using the *breadwinner/caregiver* model: the supporters of the family (men) bring money and expects to receive in turn care (from women) (Tronto, White, 2004, p.442).

In (2013) Tronto frames this concept within the broader theories of privilege and highlights the invisibility of care (Tronto, 2013, p. 104). Also, Tronto (2013) developed the following idea: men benefit from a "the protection and production permit" that allows them to evade their responsibility of care. This permit is provided given the prevailing participation of men in productive work. Here it can be observed the dichotomy between productive and reproductive work. This distinction represents an explanation that Tronto (2013) provides for the marginalization of care on the political agenda.

Regarding the relationship of women with productive work in Romania, Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu (2015) point out that in Romania's history, women have largely been engaged in productive work and that this represents a key component of their identity (Bucur, Miroiu,

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<sup>3</sup> Although not as central topic, care occurs as part of other recent feminist research. Oana Băluță (2007), addresses issues of care in her research on the political gender interests Alina Dragolea (2007,2011) shows the impact on care-giving gender roles, the impact of lack of care facilities and care appropriate policies to explain different career paths of women and men in the labour market

2015) Furthermore, research on women in Eastern Europe, underline the fact that paid employment was, under the communist regime, not only a right but also an obligation. Doina Pasca Harsany (1993) argues that in addition to an obligation, work was also a place to socialize, given the lack of other options - there was no television, no place to go out and socialize.(Harsany, 1993, p. 45). Therefore, scholars who study gender relations in Eastern Europe (Einhorn, 1993, Funk, 1999) recommend a specific approach for this space in regards to paid work of women.

*The public/private dichotomy*

Eloise Bucker (2006) provides the following explanation for which care is missing from the public agenda and does not receive the same amount of political attention as other areas such as defence: this work was performed almost exclusively in the private sphere, by women away from the public eye. This was possible because of the public sphere/private sphere dichotomy and women being associated with the latter.

Public/private dichotomy represents an intensively debated topic in the feminist theory and not only. Barbara Arneil (1999), for exemple<sup>4</sup> noted that the distinction between public and private is a central theme in political theory (Arneil, 1999, p. 41). Also on the dualism public/private Miroiu (2004) writes:

*"The private area has "feminine" characteristics: it is a space of feelings, intimacy, care, a contextual and particular space. The public space has "masculine" characteristics: it is a place of reason and rationality, justice, neutrality, arrangements objectives of the deployment, the universality and impartiality (Miroiu, 2004, p.71)*

Following this line of argument, it cannot be surprising that care lacks political attention. As long as care is perceived as an activity specific only to the private space -as a *non-political* theme - it cannot make it on the public-policy agenda. I would also like to mention that the distinction private/public represents one of moral boundaries that, according to Tronto (1993), prevented care to enter the political vocabulary.

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<sup>4</sup> This topic has received considerable attention in political science Given space limitation , I will not go into the details of this debate. For excellent theoretical presentations of this subject, see Arneil (1999) Okin (1979), Gal (2002)

Nannette Funk (1993) points out that research on this distinction public/private space in Eastern Europe, shows that we cannot talk about *public versus private* distinction in this space, but rather about *State versus family* (Funk, 1993, p.5). The same thing is underlined also by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2003) who mention that the household as seen rather as a refuge against the totalitarian state. So the private sphere was of real value in individuals lives (both men and women). (Gal, Kligman, 2003, p.73). Moreover, on this subject Bucur and Miroiu (2015) argue that:

*"In our opinion, in the former communist states, we cannot operate with the public-private distinction in the same manner as in countries with democratic tradition for various reasons. The public sphere par excellence was confiscated by the party-state that did not allow freedom of association, freedom of expression and dramatically limit movement, fully controlling the media."* (Bucur, Miroiu, 2015 Politics I, p.1)

Moreover, during the communist period, care was provided extensively through public service (Bucur, Miroiu, 2015 Politics II. P2) and was not attributed exclusively to the private sphere. This does not mean that care was not a source of inequalities between men and women, as the responsibility of care work and domestic work was still attributed to women (Miroiu, 2004, Miroiu, Bucur, 2015, Bucur, 2011, Hasulentiener, 1999, Pascall and Manning, 2000 Smith, 2004). Moreover, Miroiu (2004, 2007) points out that in Romania, despite some progress made regarding gender equality (access to education, labour market participation, political participation), the communist state was a patriarchal one. One of her arguments is that the communist regime kept traditional gender roles intact roles and added state patriarchy to a traditional form of patriarchy. The result was that women became "*Servant of Two Masters*" (Miroiu, 2004, p.188). Mariana Hauslenitner (1993) stresses the fact that gender roles have not been challenged even after the fall of communism, and that despite the high number of women being employed, there is a social expectation that the main achievement of women should be motherhood (Hauslentiener, 1999, p.56).

### **The devaluation of women's work**

I believe that an explanation which can be applied to Romanian space is related to valorisation of women's work, or rather its lack of it. Tronto (2013) defines production and protection activities as "*masculine forms of care*" (Tronto, 2013, p.70) and argues that all political theories include care in one form or another. According to Tronto (2013), if we accept protection,

for example, as a form of care, then we can say that all societies offer some type of public support for care. She questions the manner in which care is politically supported from a gender perspective and argues that care activities which, ideologically, were seen as part of men's duties – production and protection- have benefited from public support and have been politicized (see for example defence activities).

From my point of view, a topic of interest for the Romanian space is *the devaluation of women's work in the public space*. As previously mentioned, in Romanian history women were an important part of the labour market. However, this does not mean that there was no gender inequalities related to the work force. Referring to the communist era, Barbara Einhorn (1993) argues that women were the majority in underpaid and lower status lines of activity. The industry occupied mostly by women was named "light industry", as opposed to the predominantly occupied by men and called heavy industry. The latter has been a priority for the socialist state (Einhorn, 1993, p. 122, Miroiu, 2004 Roman, 2001). More, Gal and Kligman (2003) mention that heavy industry was politically privileged and despite the egalitarian discourse, gender hierarchies and men monopoly on resources and prestige could be easily noticed (Gal, Kligman, 2003, p. 71).

In concern to the post-communist period, feminist scholars point out that one of the problems regarding women's work is increasing unemployment (Einhorn, 1993, Harsanyi, 1993, Bacon & Pol, 1994). I believe that, at least for the last 15 years, this is not a significant issue for gender equality. For example, data from the period 2000-2013<sup>5</sup> indicate minor differences between the unemployment among women and men. As can be seen from Table 1, over the recent years, differences are reduced, and even more in 2013 the unemployment rate for men is higher than women's.

Gender	Year													
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
M	10.7	9.2	8.9	7.8	7	6.4	5.7	4.2	4.4	8.4	7.6	5.5	5.9	6.2
F	10.1	8.4	7.8	6.8	5.6	5.2	4.6	3.9	4.4	7.1	6.3	4.9	4.9	5.1

Table 1 The unemployment rate by gender, during 2001-2013,  
Source: National Institute of Statistics

<sup>5</sup> Data for 2014 were not available at the time of writing this article

Moreover, Miroiu (2001) argues that the problem of unemployment in Romania represents a "*paradox of transition*": despite the fact that there are more unemployed men than women, men have double incomes than women (Miroiu, 2001, p.11). Bacon and Pol (1994) in their analysis of the economic state of women in Romania, note that even if they are employed, women are adversely affected by wage differences between fields, working mainly in the lower paid areas: education and health (Bacon and Pol, 1994 Loc. 1317-1318).

Therefore it is important to mention another problem related to gender inequalities in public work: *the gender pay gap*. During the empirical documentation on income inequalities between men and women, I have noticed major differences between gender gap in the public and the private sector. If in the western area, the largest inequalities are in the private sector, in Romania, as shown in Table 2, gender inequalities are significantly higher in the public sector<sup>6</sup>.

Form of property / Years	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Public	10.9	11.3	12.8	21.0	22.8	:
Private	12.3	11.6	8.5	4.9	2.9	:

Table 2 Wage differences by gender, Source: Eurostat

Considering all the above, I argue the following: 1) wage inequalities between men and women are not mainly the result of market and capitalism, but of wage discrimination by the state and 2) in terms of women's work, Romania faces less unemployment and inequalities resulting from the market, but more the problem of inequalities resulting from the redistribution of public resources.

In conclusion, the merits of Western feminist scholars on introducing care in political theory are, in my view, undeniable. However, as I have previously argued, I believe that the answers they provide for explaining the marginalization of care in Western societies do not apply entirely to Romanian realities. Therefore, to have a clearer picture of this reality and to provide a better understanding of the place that care issues occupy in Romanian politics I propose to frame the issue of care into a broader discussion regarding redistribution of public resources in Romania, following its particularities and the implications for gender equality. I

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<sup>6</sup> Data were available only for this period of time

believe that an analysis of public expenditure could provide answers that would reveal a gender hierarchy in terms of redistribution of resources, that in turn, I believe it can be used to explain the lack of political prioritization of care in the Romanian context.

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