

Children and the Family



Parentless children, an orphanage, 1913.

When speaking of the type of family community in Southeast Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, it must be stated that there were differences in types depending on specific cultural, historical and religious traditions and degrees of development as well as between rural and urban environments. Even within the countries themselves there were regional differences in family types.

Between 80% and 90% of the population in Southeast Europe (Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and Montenegro) lived in villages at the end of the 19th century. Virtually the same can be said of those regions that were then under the rule of the Hapsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire (Bosnia

and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Thrace, Albania). Those were societies where the patriarchal family of the central and western Balkans was the custodian of tradition, of customs, of child raising – all of which was passed from generation to generation. The family was the “ultimate protection” from the “dangers of the external world”, which was penetrating deeper and deeper in various ways into that once inviolable area. In parts of the western Balkans families were large during the 19th century and, in part, up to the first half of the 20th century, and they formed parts of broader related communities (brotherhoods and clans), linked by family ties, solidarity and family obligations. In those difficult times,



A "typical" family from a small town, taken between the two world wars

they also had an important defensive role, and boys were received into the ranks of adults when they grew "big enough to carry a rifle", that is when they were able to use weapons. The families of that type in remote mountainous regions, far from state influence, in Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo and eastern Herzegovina also had the role of "meting out justice" (maintaining the institution of "blood feud"). In such families, only sons could be heirs and "continuers of the ancestral blood line", while daughters were regarded more or less as "burdens", who would leave the home when they got married. An important link with other families was also maintained by presence at the

baptism of children. The institution of *kumstvo*, a *kum* corresponding approximately to a Godfather, was considered of vital importance. There was another type of rural family in the northern and northwestern borders of this area (Slovenia, Hungary, northern Croatia) as well as in the coastal regions.

Rural families had many children, but the death rate was high due to bad living conditions and disease. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, for example, even in the period from 1927 to 1933 the birth rate was between 34.2 and 31.14 per thousand, while the death rate was 14.4 per thousand. The average rural family in Bulgaria in 1910 had 6.1 members, and the average urban family –



An ideal image of an urban family in the inter-war period

4.5, but this difference had decreased considerably by the middle of the 1930's.

People got married at a very early age up until the middle of the 20th century, and the transition from childhood to adulthood was sudden and dramatic.

The 19th century saw the gradual disintegration of these large, extended families. Such families had comprised a number of generations, usually parents and sons with their wives and children). In such families the division of labour was quite clear, even children having their specific chores depending on their age and sex. Children had to become involved in the various jobs involved in crop growing and livestock rearing at an early age.

In the last two decades, the patriarchal family has been subject to the influences of great political, economic and cultural changes. Instead of the rural family community, which met most of its own require-

ments by producing the necessary commodities (material for clothes, footwear, food, tools...), there emerged families with fewer members, and there was sometimes the division of formerly common land, the fragmentation of property and greater dependence on money and the market. Many impoverished villagers moved into towns with their families in search of work in industry, thus deciding upon a huge and dramatic change.

Changes in relations in traditional families, and therefore also in the role of the child in the family, were caused by the incursion of the contemporary European economy, the evolution and consolidation of the state, the growth of towns, the gradual modernization of the society and the expansion of education. Women no longer had their traditional role in society; they gained political rights; they joined the workforce in greater and greater numbers, as a result of

which family structure changed, as did relations within the family and, what is most important, they bore fewer children. In the towns and their environs, families became smaller and usually comprised one or two generations. Children in urban families have more time to play, as they do not have the chores that rural children have to perform. Furthermore, access to education is easier, new cultural influences are more readily available and children themselves become involved in specific forms of cultural life (theatres, choirs, cultural associations...).

Nonetheless, social origin and living conditions, regardless of whether the urban families are rich or poor, cannot but have an impact on the quality of education, children's everyday life and their future prospects. Since the middle of the 19th century, children from richer rural families have been sent for further education to towns (grammar schools, primary teacher-training schools) and have later become part of the intellectual and political elite of the young Balkan nation states.

That process was particularly accelerated towards the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. The political changes after 1945 have led to further deep-seated changes in rural and urban families (the abolition or limitation of the right to land ownership and collectivization, nationalization, industrialization, the expansion of the education system, state welfare for children, etc.). As a result of the strengthening of the influence of the state, particularly in communist societies, the state and the "party" entered into family life and even interfered in the sphere of parent-child relations. Children ceased to be "family property" and became "general" and "state property".

The decrease in the number of children over the entire area of Southeast Europe (with the exception of some regions that have retained a high birth rate up to the present day) has been particularly evident since the Second World War, as a result of which families with one or two children are typical in this part of Europe, both in rural and urban regions.

M.R.

Sick Child in the Family

I was born in 1933, Leo, I was born in August, in the former village, the present town of Kozloduy, and I keep thinking I am a remarkable man that I was born there because the foot of Hristo Botev (a national hero) has stepped there in the past times.

Now what? Why was I born? Because of romantic reasons and sad reasons. After I've been born and my elder brother's been 10, his little brother Mikhail's been born, who happened to get a whooping-cough in Kozloduy, an acute one, and because there has been no physician in the village of Kozloduy he's died of a whooping-cough when he's been only 2 years old. Then my mother and my father, my father - a priest in the village, my mother - a telephone operator, have decided that I must be born and suddenly I've been born. Anyway!

On the age of 5 I've got sick of diphtheria. There's been no physician in Etropole, my father and my mother were desperate, very frightened and I've reached, the diphtheria's reached to the point diphtheria „croup“ - I've been choked already and I can't breath. And then it happened that in a colony there, in a school in the neighborhood there were students. A colony, a student colony, it was 1938 and some people have sent there to call a young physician who's been in the colony.

The physician's come and seen the tragic condition of the infant Marin and has asked my father for a written permission to save me, eventually, because I've been dying - by

Questions

- 2.1. How many children did the average family have in the past. Talk about that with your parents and grandparents and compare your findings.
- 2.2. Ask the people in your house what the relationships were like in their families. What were the relations like between parents and children, between elder and younger children and between father and mother?



A prosperous family.

putting a strychnine in my throat. This for child organism has been unsafe but lifesaving eventually, if I don't go and die.

So, my Etropole autobiography actually starts from here. Now, what's happened when I've been a kind of dead I don't know, but I have acquired a special studiousness towards letters and numbers. And for my surprise, for my mother and for my father, I've learned the letters and the numbers very good and quickly in whole words and so on and suddenly I have learned very quickly to

read and to calculate a little bit. And I've turned into a five-and-a-half year old ingenious kid, who can read even newspapers. And in Etropole someone to read newspapers, it's been a very big deal. And they have started to walk me here and there, to read papers and stuff. And that's how I've started gloriously to make my autobiography from my five and a half years - to demonstrate reading of newspapers in that age.

But when I was in 4th grade I fell in love! At that time in Etropole there were exiled

bourgeois people from Sofia and among them a remarkable young lady in my class, who was a daughter of a jeweler from Sofia Manol Goshev. Nadka was her name, the girl I fell in love with, because she was beautiful and rather intelligent student of the famous Sofia French College „Santa Maria“. And I fell in love with her, started to court her, because I was the smartest student she took notice of me. And I was a handsome boy and I fell in love. As I now recall the feeling I've had, then I've been in love.

Oral Gestalt autobiography - Marin, Kozloduy, born in 1933, younger child in a family of a priest and a telephone operator (two children).

*Published in „My Dossier, Pardon, Biography“
by P. Vodenicharov, Kr. Popova, A. Pashova,
Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria 1999*

Story of the Eldest Child

I was born in a village in 1934. My family - 5 people - 3 kids and 2 adults - my mother and my father. I am the eldest one ... and so the whole burden, the duties were falling on the elder child - has to look after the younger children. After I grew up I had to meet a part of the chores, and later on the others.

My father worked as a technician in a factory in Svishtov. My mother and the children, me - the eldest, and the others - my brother and my sister, should cultivate a land, which was given to us. Besides that to the house, which was built by my mother and father of materials at hand naturally, and it appeared to be one big room, in which all of us slept... a big bed, which was - they used the floor these days - covered with boards, some mattress and ... the appropriate for the season blankets. The floor - earth and mould, which was coated with mud, the walls whitewashed, this work was shifted on the eldest child... on me, which could do the job. Everybody slept in one bed, lived in one room, the other room - it was a way in the yard, and it was used for... there was a fireplace, an oven, in which the bread was baked, and pumpkins and all kinds of

things the people have used, but now they don't. In this room, as we call it now „kitchen“, when a lamb is born during a cold winter, it was put up there, sometimes fledgelings were raising. It was both for people and animals.

Ahh ... in school... we had to be good students - otherwise... the thrashing. If you got a poor mark - you'll get thrashed. Besides they didn't place great importance on education, because a child, besides school, when (s)he comes back home, has to meet a part of the chores. For example there were cows, two cows. You can go to school, you can go, but you have to graze them too. You come back home after two, three or four classes, you put down your textbooks, get the cows and go out to graze them. And when you come home, you have to study for the next day. But there was no electricity and all that was done using an oil-lamp or an icon-lamp... You want to read some book... when we were bigger already and we started to interest in Main Reed, and some others of that kind. These days some western writers' books were banned... but they were handing over, „under the desk“ and were put down to read them. You put them in the textbook when you're home, 'cause, if your mother catches you to read, she can thrash you again and find you an additional work to do.

My father worked in Svishtov. And really when I hear now, that the capitalists were „blood-suckers“ and „exploiters“ I'm surprised. He worked in the factories of Kirovi brothers, down there, somewhere close to the bus station, there was an factory for macaroni, the oil factory and some other productions... He was a technician. He's brought me there, and the boss and the workers have made me welcome. Even I recall the boss has brought me in his house,

Recommendation

- Look through the literature and memoirs of your country for excerpts describing children's family life in the various periods of history. Talk to members of your family about what you find to show them how such relations have changed over the passage of time.

to play with his daughter - she was almost my age... always when my father comes home, he'll bring sweets, or some fine vermicelli, some fine macaroni, so. When we were still little kids he has cut letters out of newspapers or books, he's pasted them on cards and thought us the alphabet. So it's interesting why people say that the bosses were „blood-suckers of the people“.

*Oral Gestalt autobiography - Milka, a village in Svishtov region, born in 1934, the eldest child in a family of a technician and a housewife (three children)
Published in „My Dossier, Pardon, Biography“ by P. Vodenicharov, Kr. Popova, A. Pashova, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, 1999*

Family in Exile

„Every war is a war against children“ - said Eglantyne Jebb, the founder of the International Movement for Child Protection after World War One. These words were provoked by the suffering of the refugees' children from Macedonia, and the fate of the children of the Russian refugees.

Sofia Gutova and her sister were among the thousands children which were forced to

abandon their homes in Macedonia during 1913, and once again after 1918. The memories of that time and experience in these years put mark on the whole future lives of many of those children.

Sofia Gutova (1908-1995) was born in Kukush. Her family has been moving from town to town, pursued by the misery of exile. After the graduation of high school in Sofia, Sofia Gutova studied law, but she had to break off her education because of sickness. Then she studied typing and in the beginning of 1930s she started work in „Philips“, Sofia. She was a representative of the first generation young women, which have entered in the administrative field because they have been forced to rely on themselves, and also to take care of their relatives. Her little sister graduated physics and became a teacher.

In 1991 Sofia Gutova described her childhood on her old typewriter from the times of her job in „Philips“.

*Autobiography of Sofia Gutova - (1908-1995) daughter of a school-teacher and a house-wife (3 children)
Published in „Balkanistic forum“ issue 2/1997,
Journal of International University Seminar for Balkan Studies and Specializations, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria 1999*



Metohija, 1912

Presentation of Sofia Gutova

„We lived as nomads from town to town... At the moment our life was getting better, something would happen - now sickness, then war, then...“

I was born in 1908 in the town of Kukush; I've had a brother, seven years older than me, but he has died when he's been five out of pneumonia; my sister was two years younger than me; my grandmother Tanka (my father's mother) lived with us. I have a slight idea about our house, but I know that there has been a big orchard next to our place and I recall a poring rain, but the sun is shining, we stand at a high window and rejoicing the bubbles made by the heavy drops. There was a box-tree in the yard close to the gate, where often other children came to play with us. My father has graduated the First male high school in Sofia - these days there've been 10 grades - and he has been a teacher in Kukush (even Prof. Stanishev and his brother Hristo have been among his students, Hristo told me in a accidental meeting how once he's asked my father why he'd left him to repeat his 6th grade, so in the next year he's had to be in the same class with his brother Alexander, who's been a year younger. My father's replied that he'd been a physically weak boy, so he'd done it to strengthen him a little bit); then he's gone into business - we've had stores and he employed a twelve-year boy, who mostly played with us, he used to take us to the store, we played on the yard and he would say: „Let's dig in the garden, we may find some money“ and we really found some because he's dug them in beforehand, and we were running to our mother to show her the Turkish small mitiliks (coins) we've found. We've gone to aunt Tanka's factory (it seems that is was close to our place) and Milosh, who hasn't been two years old yet, when he's come by himself and starts to yell „Liko, Liko!“ and we laughed a lot. And my mother has already come back from Solun (Thessaloniki) and has brought very nice patties and we've brought them to and here he comes to his aunt Lika for more.

And now some Kukush talk - in the morning my mother shall wake us up: „C'mon, lassies, get up, look under the pillows if the mouse brought you something - here again there're chocolates, c'mon now on the table to drink a glass of milk from our cow: Lenko, grab your glass tight not to drop, it'll break, your milk'll spill, your dress'll get wet and you'll cry“. Our father used to play „odd or even“ with shikli (I've never realized what was that - they looked like a cornel-cherry's stones), and in that way we learnt to count.

Autobiography of Sofia Gutova - (1908-1995) daughter of a school-teacher and a house-wife (3 children)

Published in „Balkanistic forum“ issue 2/1997, Journal of International University Seminar for Balkan Studies and Specializations, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria 1999

At Variance with the World

- A boy crawled unnoticed into an old, overgrown vine plant and sat there on a thick leaf-covered branch.

He was in the habit of listening to his elders talking. That was not because of what they were saying, because he did not understand much of that, but because of their gesticulations and the way they spoke. Unable to follow what they were saying, he would watch them, thinking his own thoughts and coming to his own conclusions.

Those bewhiskered men would sit like that with his father in the shade of a juniper-tree every Sunday, from time to time clinking their glasses filled with white wine, speaking loudly, interrupting one another and, flushed, banging in their hands on the table. He did not like them, and his mother did not like them either. She would often reproach her father because of those Sunday gatherings and the money they cost. And those men were both alien and incomprehensible to him.

But, even so, that grown-up world attracted him. It seemed his rightful place, and only through some kind of injustice was he

sitting unseen, amongst leaves on a hard vine branch.

(From a story by Bosnia-Herzegovina writer and Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić At Variance with the World)

Relations of Power

But, whatever the relationship in the house, it was not father who ruled. (Perhaps the domestic empire was petty and unimportant to him). It was the women who actually ruled, and they were remembered as rulers. That matriarchy within a patriarchy (all power in the hands of the master of the house) was firm and inviolable. And it was all the surer as it brought nothing into question; it removed the very thought of rebellion before it could even be conceived.

(Bosnia-Herzegovina writer, Meša Selimović: Sjećanja (Recollections))

Beatings

- First the dark (or to me it seemed dark) figure of my father would rise, straighten and come so close to me that it shut out everything else; it was so close I could not even see it myself. Unable to hear her child cry out and trying to defend me, my mother would sometimes become involved in that scene...

In the throes of a fury incomprehensible to me, my father had beaten me hard and frequently before and after that, as he did my brother as soon as he grew a little. (We have been trying to cure ourselves of such a childhood all our lives!) But I think that I have never felt such pain and humiliation as I did from the beating that morning, while everyone else in the house was asleep and while, through the broken window, there entered the first light of the outside world, full of senseless evils and incomprehensible, intricate responsibilities.

(From a story by Ivo Andrić: Prozor (The Window), Bosnia and Herzegovina)



Fear

- The children of ill-matched parents very often take the side of one or the other. Here that was not the case. Roza feared both her father and her mother as if they were one single, enigmatic, vile and dangerous creature. If her childlike feelings had been complete and had a specific content, form and name, it could be said that she hated her father and despised her mother. But, as it was, she felt shifting and unequal waves of some sickening sensations, in which there were also lulls, forgetfulness and merry days of untainted pleasure and reconciliation with her parents and the entire world. But fear of her parents and their undefined but unequivocal



A wedding in a Roma settlement

animosity never disappeared completely, but returned, sooner or later, on strange and unexpected occasions. Even when it seemed to be vanishing and healing like a wound, that fear would rear its head again. Quite unexpectedly, in the strangest of places, in the muffled sound of gypsy mills or the hoarse cry of a frightened crow in the open fields, all of a sudden she would hear her parents' voices, remembered as if in a dream, her father's: furious, interjected with oaths, and her mother's: wicked and indistinct, like dull shrieks...

She listened absent-mindedly to what she was told to do at home and did what and as much as she wanted. Her parents had no real influence on her or any true contact with her, especially her father. She accepted their gifts and affection without any particular joy, just as she accepted their admonitions and warnings without emotion.

(From a story by Ivo Andrić: Na obali (On the Riverbank, Bosnia and Hercegovina)

The Family and the Child

- It is evident that the family today is in a state of great turmoil and is seeking for new ways to organize family life that are appropriate to the demands of the contemporary age. The grafting of the "old" family model onto modern living conditions is not a solution and leads to such families coming apart at the seams. It would therefore seem that the family is in greater danger than ever before. But that conclusion can only be true in the case of obsolescent family models that wish to locate themselves universally in any social context.

(Prof. Dr Adila Pašali-Kreso, text: Majčinstvo ili roditeljstvo /Motherhood-Fatherhood or Parenthood/ in Porodica i dijete /The Family and the Child/, a magazine dealing with the care of children of pre-school and primary school age, XLVI, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1999, No. 4).

