

Family Values and Modern Identities

by

Jelena Djuric

The Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

Abstract: This paper will consider the problem of identity which reflects ‘family values’ transmitted usually to the child in its first cultural environment. That's why the family is substantial factor of enculturation: internalization of culture, developing a social identity, providing an ascribed social status and early gender socialization – the child usually socialize by getting used to routines of the family members, receiving signs of their needs and expectations. Hence, the personal life experience of father and mother are crucial to the resultant parental values that would be transmitted to the child. But apart from parental identities, their upbringing practices and educational patterns also depend on cultural worldviews and social policies. The collision among the two is present in Serbia where cultural recognition of family values, originating from the traditional society, still seems resilient to modernization policy (since the period of socialism with its ‘state feminism’ that promoted women rights as ‘equality in employment’). Provoking paradox in the issue of women rights, modern values also assumed a need to harmonize both of women's roles – as industrial and as domestic labor force. Waiting for the idea of that harmonization to spread globally, as the reconciliation of family values and modern identities, one should know that mostly women (mother) mediate child's early self – development, and that modern emancipation made that task even harder for her requiring greater engagement of men in the child's care and domestic activities. Basically, it demands both halves of humanity to emancipate as well, just this time maybe not so outwardly, from traditional and modern roles, but inwardly, from egocentric drive to dominate. Only that could mean shifting the paradigm from the obsolete age of domination towards the appealing age of partnership.

Key words: personal identity, culture, values, change, family

Modern age brought to human life considerable changes that affect experience of values in all domains. Vanishing traditional habits changed the thinking and lifestyles of individuals as well as of most societies. This was founded on a need for liberation from the limits of system on different levels of society. However, it became observable that after significant demands are fulfilled, new limits and contradictions arise inviting to be overcome again.¹ That is how the current transition to global society, which lasts for decades, is directed towards the articulation of new ways of transcending an unsustainable system.

Reflecting at the experience of previous epoch and the destiny of common need for Justice, expressed through demands for the rights of man, child, woman, animals, or environment sustainability, we should try to understand why complications are repeatedly faced over and over again. As time is passing by, former achievements transform into new limitations that trigger crises followed by needs for the new change. These modifications of values and identities, whether in the individual domain, or in domains of different sorts of communities, should serve for achieving the resilience to different conditions of life and strengthening innovative capabilities for change.

In the book *The Third Wave* (1980), Alvin Toffler pointed at the crisis of whole system of previous “waves”. New milestone values begun to change family, church and state causing confusion in all areas of life: the social and the personal as well. The traditional “authoritarian” values are drawn into the vortex of plurality. Without coherent evaluative criteria and thus fragmented, they had been fueling the crises of all social systems, ranging from the nation-state to other institutional subsystems (related to: food, health, education, finance, politics and culture).

Rejection of traditional paternalistic relationships between the sexes, and between parents and children, coincide with questioning of family values. In this regard, the so-called “sexual emancipation” is woven into the pursuit of liberation and transformation of identities. Issues of woman liberation, launched and developed in various stages of the feminist movement, culminated with broader gender issues and requests for the acceptance of the alternative (“queer”) sexual orientations.

Despite half a century of efforts (from sixties to the present time) sexual emancipation

¹ For example, technological progress created by workers, make them redundant, thus tricking labor and syndical movement. Since the industrial age made people lose their connection with the soil (where many of them undeniably toiled, but which also was the opportunity of relative independence from the wider social system) that was particularly hard for them. At the political level, the liberation through democracy contributed to the weakening of the state and its protection of the culture thus empowering the corporate influence on economy. That is how the state, like the democracy itself, became redundant.

has not progressed enough. It seems that combined spread of pornographic content, ideas of acceptability of homophilic lifestyle, and attitude that women should enjoy their own life did not exactly support a higher purpose of sexual emancipation. Perhaps, this is mainly because it is troubled by ambiguity of criteria, like other struggles for liberation. While cultural discourse of an “open society” globally takes place, everyday practice is loaded with nontransparent decision making on social, political and economic matters. This contributes to the impression that, by reproducing dyad authoritarianism/infantilism, certain “engineers of society” continually take control and repeat a system of social relations which make people “passive subjects”. This creates a gap in minds of individuals, caught by the dominant trends that globally infiltrate in human beings. Degrading propaganda of the media is based on the profit principle as it is an ultimate value in itself. Its continuous spread challenges the quality of life which media attempt to reduce to the external dimensions of existence and consumers’ power (reflected in the lack, or the pointlessness of free time).

The climate of value pluralism doesn’t encourage family values by enabling their perception from different points of view. It provokes a competition of values, as representations of different kinds of motives for actions, and threatens family values as such. Moreover, the meaning of family values depends on the context. Politicians idealize them in order to attract voters. Sociologists consider them as necessities for the social cohesion or as social constructs. Psychologists interpret them as starting point for the personality development.

As persons, we experience family values in ourselves, psycho-emotionally, as expressions of the need for belonging through feelings of intimacy and confidence – the ground for coexistence and community. But, given that, describing the feelings requires concepts and given that practice often imposes something different from the ideal, an external perspective is inevitable. Thus, we use a sociological viewpoint from where a marriage is the official protection for its family members in everyday life and for the inheritance. From biological perspective, family values are expressions of a need for the continuation of species.

All these views are positive and supportive for family values in their ways. Nevertheless, they contribute to the dissociation of personal relations from the evaluation of a family as such. Since the influence of the theory of evolution on shaping of the modern paradigm reduced human beings to the biology, social Darwinism has emerged with its interpretation of family as the shelter from generally hostile society. These kinds of scientific positivism denied earlier theological and philosophical interpretations of biological needs as basic material foundation of culture which requires evolution of emotional and spiritual

dimensions of human beings for its development. By reducing culture to the biological feature, the natural science viewpoint asserts that “nature of culture” is only the component of (physical) nature. In that view, particularity of culture is only *ex post* rationalization of the fact that culture is not essentially different from nature. That is how it became possible to simultaneously justify the utilitarian relationship toward nature and critique of its instrumentalization, which is attributed to “anthropocentrism” as it is the source of nature/culture division, while the responsibility for its materialistic interpretation is ignored.

Explaining the inherent contradiction of question: Whether the opposition nature/culture is an “artificial creation” of culture or a “natural disposition” of the human mind? Žarana Papić examined the view of Levy-Strauss according to whom the world is constituted by innate human structures and spiritual functions that are unconscious (Papić 1997, 183). This anthropological sprout of Kantian teachings on transcendental apperception and schemas of imagination, allows, according to Levy-Strauss, the sense of the world based on human mind instead on “nature of the object itself”. However, if the human mind is an integral part of the “kingdom of nature”, than it is vital to understand a nature of the relationship between unconscious functions of the brain and the “reality” itself (Ibid 184). In other words, it is to understand the relationship between “nature” and the “human nature” that is identified with “culture”. The ultimate solution may mean reduction of human nature (which is the human mind, i.e. the culture) to the nature (i.e. to the biological function of human brain).

However, this naturalistic implication Levy-Strauss was not derived, but rather opted for thesis that “the opposition nature/culture is the artificial creation of the culture” (Ibid 186). This option coincides with the concept of history of Western civilization from pre-modern era to late modernity initiated with Freud’s psychoanalysis. The acceptance of natural origin of human nature should not mean that all creations of human nature are “natural” in the sense of physical nature. This kind of thinking tries to eradicate a meaningful distinction between nature and culture. An inherent sense of human nature is denied, while rationalized gambling with nature is empowered. Examples of this are plentifully present in possibilities of dangerous rapid development of biotechnology.

Reducing human being to the biological mechanism negates its subjectivity and consciousness as decisive aspects of internally experienced values and qualities of life. This is a denial of consciousness in its sublime sphere, which includes human values and emotions, and interpretation of consciousness as the mere rational phenomenon instead. It is also overlooked that it actually allows anti-conscious authoritarianism and discrimination, led by

the arrogant and selfish interests to dominate, and leading to the disappearance of human values that incorporate family values as they are perceived with the soul.

Although these different aspects of family values suppress their categorization by the consensus, we intuitively know their sense is based on the soul's quest for intimacy (between spouses, parents and children, and siblings). If it could be the rationalization of biological need for procreation of the species, than it is simultaneously the food for the soul and subjectivity. Subjective experiences of family values are internal factors for the stabile family environment, which turns out to be an exterior condition for healthy upbringing and child care. It is known that internally perceived values are true foundations of any successful community. The family has long been regarded as a prototype of the society. Without shared values the institution of marriage is usually dis-functional and become the source of suffering for an individual (Moore 2009).

Materialistically oriented social environment ignores higher dimensions of human abilities. For that reason human values in general and family values in particular are devoid of meaning. As Thomas Moore described, a modern age family is a loose and problematic institution which is difficult to heal because of the worldview that supports domination, greed and selfish individualism. As a contrast to that, the nurture of family values rather involves the values for the soul. Experience of family is precious for the soul even in most cases when it is not ideal at all.² The notion of family from the perspective of the soul situates us "down to earth where the principle gives way to life in all its beauty and horror" (Moore 2009, 43).

However, it is also truth that the meaning of family values principally depends on ideals that symbolize the Golden Age. As Lawrence Stone said in the lecture *Family Values in Historical Perspective* (1994), somewhere in the past, certain values had been held in high esteem, as a result of which the society as a whole had been prosperous. This discernible idealization points out on crucial relationship between family values and social condition. When the disintegration of society became unbearable because of the crime some people think of "good old days when the family was sacred", while in reality families have always been both good and bad, offering support and threat.

"Today professional psychologists are very much concerned with the 'dysfunctional family', but all families are dysfunctional to some degree. No family is perfect and most of them have serious problems. The family is a

² Family life is full of greater or smaller crisis (...) It is related to the places, events and histories. With all this experienced details, life engraves itself in memory and personality. It is hard to imagine anything more nutritious for the soul (Moore 2009, 41).

microcosm, reflecting the nature of the world that works on virtue and evil. Sometimes we are tempted to imagine that the family is full of innocence and good will, but the real family life resists such romanticism. It usually has a whole range of human potential, including the evil and hatred, violence, sexual confusion and madness. In other words, the actual dynamics of family life reveals the complexity and unpredictability of the soul (...) (Moore 2009, 41-42).

The issue of personal identity is linked with family values that are transmitted to the child within the family circle. That's why family portrays basic cultural environment and it is the substantial factor of enculturation. Internalization of culture, developing a social identity, providing an ascribed social status and early gender socialization, initially take place in the family. The child socializes by getting used to routines of the family members, receiving signs of their needs and expectations. These signs are directed toward realm of the soul which complex nature is able to transmute most of complications of family life in the path of individuation.

Basically, family is sphere where many different sides of personality and culture, ideas and politics, feelings and myths are interwoven. They are developed from marriage that is not only the social institution but also the symbol of the mysterious quest of the soul. Personal experience of father and mother in their own family lives design the resultant parental influence on the child. That influence proceeds from one generation to another in the long-lasting continuum of the history of humankind.

Remains of pre-modern ways of thinking are mainly absent from modern worldview, and anthropology initially has had its share in it. But eventually even conservative scientist have to admit that for understanding of the symbolical level of family values it is essential to leave the drive for sociological, biological, political, and other kind of modern rational analysis, and to open stories and myths for meanings that offer space for the imagination and sacredness.

This doesn't mean exclusion of rationality. Ancient principle of macrocosm-microcosm that identifies recurrent patterns everywhere in the cosmos, including human being and the society, was approved rational in political philosophy. It considered family as the model for the state (the *polis* in Socratic/Platonic period). That principle was used for centuries. Monarchists argued that the State mirrors the family, with subjects obeying the king as children obey their father. Obviously they subsumed the notion of patriarchal family that in

turn helped them to justify their rule.³

Collapsing history of these values doesn't mean that they completely cease to exist. They are present until the present-day – embedded in the unconsciousness from where they will arise all over again until we make them conscious. Centuries ago Durkheim recognized that family values deeply affect the social and political system, thus announcing that the time for transformation of paternalistic principle is coming.⁴ Presumably, modern family values challenged that principle as they become means of middle class to obtain self-respect through self-discipline and responsibility for the work, the society, the self and the family while struggling to educate the children and make success available for them. Modern transformation of cultural worldviews and social policies was innovative indeed together with the conception of modern values. It created new patterns of educational practices, which inescapably commenced to transform identities.

Centuries of modernization extremely changed the world, up to the point from where humanity should find the way to prevent collapse that threatens all by perpetuating feebleness of obsolete system. In the age of global corporatism, it is unknown who would exactly stay behind the rights of humanity, as well as behind other rights that are increasingly degrading – especially those of the environment, but other rights are endangered as well. Knowing that behind every right is some kind of value that has to be respected, we could consider what is of true value for the sustainability of the whole, and recover values of other things that belong to that whole. In the same sense, concerning family values, the problem would be treated in the function of question if the family is a whole (as well as if it is the autonomous whole)? Otherwise, in the light of the global vanishing of human values as such the collision among

³ According to Plutarch, a government resemblance of a family is the reason for not establishing democracy in [Sparta](#). [Aristotle](#)'s schema of authority and subordination that he holds to exist in the whole of nature is based on the principle that "the government of a household is a monarchy since every house is governed by a single ruler". [Arius Didymus](#) in [Stobaeus](#), 1st century [CE](#), witnessed that a primary kind of association (*politeia*) is the legal union of a man and woman for begetting children and for sharing life. From the collection of households a village is formed and from villages a city, so, just as the household yields for the city the seeds of its formation, thus it yields the constitution (*politeia*). Further, he claims that "Connected with the house is a pattern of monarchy, of aristocracy and of democracy. The relationship of parents to children is monarchic, of husbands to wives aristocratic, of children to one another democratic" (Boring 1995; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_as_a_model_for_the_state, pristupljeno 12.03.2013.)

⁴ Paternalism is suited to keep rough order in the society, assuming that the domestic arrangements of society are created just as that of the nature or the universe, that is, according to the principle of hierarchy, by which some were more powerful and richer than others, mostly through control of more property.

traditional and modern approach to family values is going to the background.⁵

Cultural recognition of family values is mainly traditional because of its origins in patrimonial society. With modern family values, as we stressed before, more responsibilities for women were included thus triggering the change of patriarchal principle. That is why societies that are modernized lately as it is case in the society of Serbia, still seem resilient to modernization policy (since the period of socialism with its 'state feminism' that promoted women rights as 'equality in employment'). This is especially the case in the view of modern family values, because they provoke paradox in the issue of women rights. Namely, modern values also assumed a need to harmonize both of women's roles – as industrial and as domestic labor force. Waiting for the idea of that harmonization to spread globally, as the reconciliation of family values and modern identities, we have to keep in mind that mostly women (mother) mediate child's early self – development, and that modern emancipation made that task even harder for her, requiring greater engagement of men in the child's care and domestic activities. Basically, it demands both halves of humanity to emancipate as well, just this time maybe not so outwardly, from their traditional and modern roles, but inwardly, from the egocentric drive to dominate. From context of family values that could mean shifting of paradigm from the obsolete age of domination towards the appealing age of partnership.

Literature:

Boring, M. Eugene, Klaus Berger and Carsen Colpe (1995) *Hellenistic commentary to the New Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Lamanna, Mary Ann (2002) *Emile Durkheim on the Family*, SAGE Publications

Mur, Tomas (2009) *Nega duše*, Beograd: Mali vrt

Papić, Žarana (1997) *Polnost i kultura*, Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek

Stone, Lawrence (1994) „Family Values in Historical Perspective“, *Speech delivered at the Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University

Toffler, Alvin (1980), *The Third Wave*, USA: Bantam Books

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_as_a_model_for_the_state, pristupljeno 12.03.2013.

⁵ Unless we ascribe to the notion of “modern” (values) something that is indefinable because of its constant change with time, as this is literally the meaning of word “modern”.