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**Faculty of History and Philosophy**  
**Doctoral School Population Studies and History of Minorities**

**Thesis**

**Demographic perspectives on illegitimacy in Sălaj County**  
**(1858 - 1918)**

**SUMMARY**

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**Keywords:** illegitimacy, birth, Sălaj County, child, morality, woman, cohabitation, divorce, mortality.

### **Argument**

The end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century bring important changes for Transylvania, whether they are political, economic, religious or social, influencing largely the way of the processes and phenomena related to the evolution and development of the Transylvanian family. The period studied is one that is largely made up of rural communities, with the exception of only certain urban areas and immediate neighboring regions. Thus, we can say that we have to deal with a world of constraints, in which the community and even more the church controls and follows the evolution of the family since its establishment. Given that any family disturbance affected the entire community, it was to avoid such situations. In this sense, major events within the family such as birth, marriage, including prenuptial relationships of the two spouses, baptism or funeral were closely monitored by the community.

The space under investigation is highlighted due to its peculiarities of a confessional, social but also economic nature. Researching the phenomenon of illegitimacy in Sălaj County we consider an approach of the theme necessary from the point of view of its historical-geographical dimension in order to highlight its specific features, but also the general framework in which this phenomenon is highlighted. Thus the geographical position, the ethno-confessional characteristics, as well as the political evolution of the studied region come to directly influence its evolution.

In this sense, the choice of the research theme was based on the purpose of improving and completing the already existing information on how the phenomenon of illegitimacy influences the good flow of the community and, in principle, of the family in Transylvania, as well as the impact of this phenomenon in the localities of Sălaj County. The problem is less researched, but historically important because, a more complex analysis and an in-depth investigation of the aforementioned events and phenomena, reveal possible changes that were not brought to light by Romanian historiography and which would provide a new image on the perception of the Romanian society regarding the problem of illegitimacy and why not, of the morals and customs of the social life of the village.

The proposed subject attracts attention, being still totally unclear regarding the region of Sălaj in the period between the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.

Thus, a research of this nature will contribute, by studying the mentalities and observing the slippages within the family (cohabitation, divorce) in discovering the family and everyday realities of the village. They are important sources, which by their approach and their particularity make a significant contribution to identifying the perception of the family and its evolution at a universal level.

The period studied extends over two centuries, so in our research, firstly, we will study the manifestation of the phenomenon of illegitimacy in the parishes that fall into the research period, from 1858 until the end of the First World War, 1918. Secondly, we will follow the development of this phenomenon in the second half of the nineteenth century (1858-1900), the case studies on the parishes of Sălaj being essential in this regard.

Along with the Greek-Catholic confession, which represents the central landmark of the present study, another important aspect considered is the ethnic approach. Due to the archival material available, we could not accurately identify the existence of other ethnic groups who lived in this space except on the basis of the observations made by the priests. Thus, we limited ourselves in our study to analyze the manifestation of the phenomenon of illegitimacy within the Roma communities, which were mentioned in the source.

It should be borne in mind that our study is carried out in a mostly rural region, or in these conditions the social constraints of the community are extremely strong.

Another surprising aspect of our study was the existence of cohabitation in the local communities. Starting from the wealth of information provided by the archived material we researched, we tried to reconstruct families of concubines from the community of Sălaj. Thus, the image of the traditional family changes significantly over the centuries studied, and under the effect of modernization, a series of shifts that affect the society and, above all, the family appear. By reconstituting these families we can identify the family and everyday realities of these communities.

## Historiography

The problem of illegitimacy, whether it is treated as part of the demographic phenomenon or simply as a deficiency of human behavior, has always been at the center of interest of the researchers, who did not endeavor to present this phenomenon both in terms of collective mentalities, as well as religious life. The phenomenon of illegitimacy, without just and maybe, has manifested itself at all times, not being isolated in a certain period, so that the historical demography only brings to light another side of human behavior. However, the demographic statistics made over time were relevant. Thus, both the universal and the Romanian historiography offer a variety of articles and studies in which the family's shortcomings are more or less surprised, whether we talk about cohabitation in cohabitation or whether we focus on casual, extra-marital relationships, all leading to a significant number of illegitimate births. Demographic historians treat with particular interest the problem of birth illegitimacy and due to the impact this phenomenon has on the collective mentality, identifying new perceptions on this phenomenon. Thus, from this perspective, the phenomenon of birth, but also marriage are perceived from a different angle.

The idea is also supported by P. Laslett in his work *Bastardy and his Comparative History*, which recalled, among other things, that one of the main causes of social decay was the increase in the number of illegitimate births. European historiography presents the extent of the phenomenon of illegitimacy generated by sexual relations prior to marriage, casual relationships or incestuous relationships. Thus, for Central and Eastern Europe, the phenomenon of illegitimacy in communities is signaled, while in Southern Europe and in Mediterranean countries this phenomenon is presented through the prism of abandonment. Adam Wilson identifies in his work *Illegitimacy and its implications in mid-eighteenth century London: The evidens from the Foundling Hospital* that most of the children abandoned in London were illegitimate. His idea was countered by Valeria Fildes, who argues that the illegitimacy of children was just one of the many reasons why children were abandoned, another being widowed.

In the studies regarding the age of the marriage and the methods for its conclusion, or in the ones related to the infant mortality, carried out by Scumböhm Jürgen, *Social differences in age at marriage*, in the volume *Historiens et populations* or Richard Meckel with *Infant Mortality* is also presented this phenomenon, of illegitimacy. Also found in international historiography are

studies on the development of illegitimacy by Sogner S, Oldervoll J, *Illegitimate fertility and the marriages market in Norway 1800-1850*, in *Marriage and Remarriages in Populations of the Past*, edited by J. Dupaquier, Et Helim, P. Laslett, M. Livi-Bacci and S Sogner, London 1981, as well as the study by Shorter Ed. Rondel J. Et von de Walle, *The Decline of Non-Marital Fertility in Europe 1880-1940*, in *Population Studies* 25. No. Nov 3 1971, through which we can make a certain image regarding the development and perception of illegitimacy from an international point of view. The English historian Edward Shorter in his paper, *The Making of the Modern Family*, London 1976, deals with the situations in which a marriage ends, but also the attitude of the young people towards the new marriage. Thus, based on its findings, we can easily identify the causes that lead to the enhancement of relationships that have not received the blessing of the church and which lead to a significant number of illegitimate births. He especially notices and identifies the superior role of the man in his relationship with the woman. Indirectly, it shows how to form a family, based or not, on feelings. Most of the times, the author observes, that the affection is absent at the time of the conclusion of the marriages, these being constituted due to the social status of the grooms or on the basis of the material interest, taking into account the feelings or wishes of the grooms. The status of the woman is one of obedience to the duties acquired following the marriage. With the nineteenth century, at the level of the collective mindsets, a change occurs, in the sense that a greater emphasis is placed on feelings, affection and why not love, in the case of the conclusion of a marriage.

The image of illegitimacy from an international point of view is complemented by the numerous studies in Romanian historiography. Romanian historians have given a special interest to the historical-demographic research on the family from Transylvania. Legitimacy has often been treated in demographic studies, as well as in studies regarding the formation and evolution of the family. Thus, Romanian historiographers make the most of this unique source, namely the parish registers, completing a series of studies on the reconstruction and evolution of the family. Family life cycles are also tracked, leading to the formation of an important demographic database. Many studies have been published that deal with the phenomenon of birth, but also that of mortality. A number of studies also address the problems related to the daily life of the Transylvanian Romanians. These include studies on peasant hygiene or the importance of management in society. Thus, Emanoil Elefterescu in his studies addresses such problems. The work of *Popular Hygiene* or the *Necessity of Religion in Humanity* bear witness in this regard.

Inevitably, in studies on major demographic phenomena, such as birth or marriage, problems such as illegitimate births or cohabitation have been reported or in some cases intensely debated. The same Emanoil Elefterescu treats in his work *About the evil of the concubinage in our people*, this scourge. The problem of cohabitation was also addressed in Corneliu Pădureanu's study, for the region of Transylvania in concubinage and illegitimacy in some settlements in Arad County in the second half of the 19th century. Thus, an approach of cohabitation in the Sălaj region comes as a contraction in increasing the existing demographic fund. Other similar studies, in which aspects related to the family and the transformations within it are widely dealt with, are those of Ioan Bolovan, Sorina Paula Bolovan in *The Family in the Romanian village of Transylvania, Aspects of the family life cycle in the Romanian village of NW Transylvania in the mid-19th century* or the study on the *Legitimacy in Transylvania in the second half of the nineteenth century: documentary contributions*, in the Population of Romania. Past, present, future. The evolution of the family, but especially the aspects related to the degradation or, as the case may be, its completion, all bring with it a large number of illegitimate children is the idea that has been caught in numerous specialized articles.

Beyond all aspects of family evolution, during our approach, our attention will be focused on the elements that adversely affect the family. Due to the modernization of the society, illegitimacy, cohabitation or divorce are increasingly common in the traditional village. Through these slides we can discover family and everyday behaviors that are often no more or less than the clear reflection of the individual's behavior.

### **Sources**

In order to carry out this work, we used a variety of sources and specialized bibliographic sources that were of real use as a starting point in the research carried out. The information from the sources held at the deposition varies depending on the period and region, which is why they must be analyzed very carefully because a detailed analysis and comparison of information from several sources will reflect the achievement of the proposed purpose. The interwar period is one with a significant number of demographic studies. Numerous researches are carried out that are based on the information provided by the parish registers of civil status, offering an image as complete as possible on the demographic realities.

Thus, one of the most important sources, with a unique character that we will use in the elaboration of the work will be the Civil Status Registries within the Sălaj County Directorate of

the National Archives. The system of civil status registers, extended from the West and the Transylvania area in a first instance among the Catholic parishes, then reformed, and from the eighteenth century and in the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic parishes, being also taken over by the priests from Sălaj, contributes in our research. With their help, gathered in a collection for a period from 1703 until around the First World War and not only, depending on the parish and the way of organizing the priest, we have quantified several important facts of the present study. Along with these, the press of the time represents an important source in this research because it completes the overall picture of the phenomenon of illegitimacy in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Aspects related to the evolution, and especially to the combat, the cohabitation were dealt with in periodicals such as: *Church and School*, *Eugenic and biopolitical bulletin*, *Romanian Telegraph*, *People's Tribune or Union*.

### **Methodology**

Regarding the research methodology, we have proposed a combination of the methods for better clarification of the proposed theme, opting for the research methods specific to history. Thus, the present study has as a basic method the analysis of documents, trying both a qualitative investigation of information and an interpretative one. The multidisciplinary approach offers a complex perspective on the events and the attitude of the Romanian society in the face of illegitimacy. For this purpose, one of the methods that we will approach in our research will be the longitudinal type, aiming to capture and analyze the facts and events in their evolution to identify the factors that influence the development of this type of behavior. We also opted for the comparative method for a clearer highlighting of the similarities and differences between the communities of the studied region.

### **Structure**

The paper is structured in 6 chapters, to which are added the introduction and the related conclusions. Also, the bibliography used complements the present study. Thus, a first chapter deals with the historiography of the problem so far, which is quantitatively restricted, but informationally significant, is used as a starting point in the study. The types of sources used as well as the working methodology are also presented.

In order to be able to capture, in the most original and correct way, the manifestation of the phenomenon of illegitimacy in the parishes of Sălaj County, it was necessary to present, in the second chapter, *General Considerations regarding the illegitimacy in Transylvania*, general

aspects regarding the dynamics and the national structure, both at the Transylvania level, especially at the Committee level. We have thus followed the evolution of illegitimacy on a sample of parishes that have stood as a case study. The annual, monthly and gender distribution of illegitimate births was analyzed, carefully monitoring the specific behaviors of the phenomenon in both the rural and urban areas. Our study extends over two temporal dimensions, so the evolution of this phenomenon was followed on samples of parishes only in the second half of the 19th century, as well as on samples of parishes that also include the beginning of the 20th century. Another aspect reached in this chapter was the one regarding the evolution of illegitimacy among the Roma ethnic council. Even the aspects that define the evolution of illegitimacy in the parishes of Sălaj during the First World War have not been omitted. It is more or less whether this phenomenon is expanding or not during the war.

The next chapter, *The evolution and structure of mortality in the parishes of Sălaj*, focuses on a similar analysis of the phenomenon of illegitimacy, but this time from the perspective of mortality, in the parishes of Sălaj. The main causes of death among children are presented, as well as case studies in the parishes with the highest mortality in the Committee. With the help of the records from the parish registers we make an analysis of the deaths of children born illegitimate by sex, by age groups, emphasizing the high values of infant mortality.

The next chapter, *The image of illegitimacy between the moral and the immoral*, deals with the problem of illegitimacy from an imagological point of view. It is also tracked how the image of children born out of wedlock is reflected in the folklore. In the subchapter *The illegitimate child between ecclesiastical authority and secular authority* emphasizes the status of children born as a result of these links. Thus, the image of these children from the ecclesiastical perspective from birth to death will be followed. By bringing to the fore the image of illegitimacy, we notice that the most affected by this phenomenon were children. They, in addition to the fact that they had no active role in the development of this phenomenon, are forced to bear the stigma of illegitimacy throughout their lives. If in the case of the mother, the acceptance of illegitimacy proves to be a choice, in the case of the children it cannot be a choice of their own. In these conditions, the hypostases in which the illegitimate child appears, undoubtedly suggest the condemnation of a marginalization on the part of the society, which affects their entire existence.

The fifth chapter, *Slippages of matrimonial life in Sălaj County*. Cohabitation and divorce give us an image of the forms of social deviance, which lead to a change in the perception of the family.

Highlighting the factors that influence the constitution of the family, as well as its evolution within the communities, gives us an image on possible divorce cases or in case of the marriage of the spouses living together. With the second half of the nineteenth century, in Transylvania, a series of changes of both socio-economic and legal nature, which influence to some extent the Transylvanian community, especially the family. But the most important changes occur at the level of the society's mind, with the diminution of the ecclesiastical power in the private life of the family, by introducing after 1895 the secular education in the civil status problems, which had as a consequence the multiplication of divorces, the cohabitation in cohabitation and, consequently, increased illegitimacy.<sup>1</sup>

Starting from the wealth of information provided by the archival material, we tried to reconstruct the families of concubines from the parishes of Sălaj. The cohabitation itself proved to be by its approach, an important feature of discovering family and daily realities. Thus, following the reconstitution of these families of concubines I discovered another side of illegitimacy. In this chapter, we have tried, within each analysis of the groups of parishes in which there were families of concubines, to offer an overview of the Sălaj family coming from under the strictures and documents of the church, which through the status of concubines of its members contributes to the development of the phenomenon of illegitimacy. In order to be able to appreciate as accurately as possible the development of this phenomenon within the families of concubines, we identified the number of children born in each family, as well as their lifetime. To our surprise, we note that the entry into legality was not among the objectives of these young people who did not rush to legalize their relationship, there were cases in which up to 9 children were brought into the status of concubines.

I paid special attention to a phenomenon, as controversial as it was so complex at the time, namely the divorce, analyzing in a subchapter its evolution in the Sălaj County, because

some of the divorced women bring children without engaging in another marriage, in these conditions giving birth to children with illegitimate status<sup>1</sup>.

In a final chapter, *The Woman, a factor of immorality*, we discuss the image and status of women in the Transylvanian community, especially in the Sălaj County, as the main factor in the development of this phenomenon. Our research is structured in seven directions according to their status, such as from "wrong girl" to "deflowered", concubine, prostitute, divorced, widow or servant, all bringing children into the world, who are not conceived in a legal framework, it acquires the status of illegitimate.

Broadly speaking, illegitimacy was seen as an imbalance that marks the Transylvanian society being accounted for by the diminution of ecclesiastical authority in family life, by the demographic growth at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also by the changes that occurred in the society's mind.

Bringing to light these aspects of the social life of the Romanians from Sălaj contributes to the discovery of the local particularities of these communities, giving us an idea about the way of survival, but also of the way in which events such as birth, marriage or death are perceived. Our contribution from the perspective of this research comes to highlight a lifestyle and thinking discovered through these sources that present a world guided by tradition under the auspices of faith.

Thus, it can be ascertained from the research carried out so far that the life expectancy of these children is generally low, probably due to the social conditions of the family or the mother's disinterest in some cases. Thus, based on the parish registers, we observe in the case of these localities a high number of deaths, the majority of natural causes as recorded by the priests. Some of those who survived the first weeks of birth died until they were 7 years old. From the analysis of these data we can say that the interest towards these children was lower, this being observed from the baptism, which was most often done in a hurry and without completely observing the customs.

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1.Sorina. P. Bolovan, Ioan Bolovan, "Family and matrimonial behavior in Transylvania between 1850-1914 (between tradition and modernization)", in Man and society. History studies of the population of Romania (17th-21st centuries), Cluj University Press Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 123.

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In conclusion, if we analyze the aspects of illegitimacy in some localities of Sălaj County, whether it is cohabitation or extra-marital connections, they contribute to the development of this phenomenon in general as part of the daily life of Romanians. Although the research based on the civil status registers is constantly used in trying to quantify the main moments of human life, such as birth, wedding or death, we see how they also give us a clear picture of the everyday universe of individuals, as well as of the transformations existing at the level of the collective mentality.

It can be seen from the problems encountered during this research that the attitudes and behaviors manifested by the community from which they belonged and not only, influence the integration of children with this status in the society. Maybe not so much from a legal point of view, because a simple formalization of the parents' relationship also changes the child's status, as much as the collective mentality, because the characterization of *the wrongdoer* comes to influence his relationship with the others.

It is important to mention that, through this study, we have dealt with general issues regarding the identification of behaviors both at ecclesiastical and social level regarding the phenomenon of illegitimacy. Of course, the deepening of the research can highlight new and inerrant aspects in the reconstruction of the realities of the Romanian village and even more so in identifying the particularities of each studied area. These particularities that help us to understand better how the Transylvanian Romanians thought and acted in such circumstances.

Thus we observe how varied and complex the phenomenon of illegitimacy turns out to be. Beyond the illicit links between young people and births outside the marriage, illegality itself is a real stigma. For most women, illegitimacy is, in fact, a reality caused by the social conditions in which they were found. As a rule, they accepted their status as having an active role in maintaining this phenomenon, compared to their children, who are only the victims of unsuccessful attempts to establish a family.

It has been proven from the research carried out that the illegitimacy of births was not only a feature of modern urban life, where with the transformations of the society the social mind also changes, but it was a reality found in the traditional society, the phenomenon being present in the village. As we have seen from the studies carried out, the development of this phenomenon does not necessarily represent an emancipation from the traditional, in the conditions in which

the community, often in contradiction with the church, accepts the relations lacking in the religious union. Beyond all these findings it is noted that, almost absolute guilt, we could say, was attributed to the woman. Expectations from this, both from the community and from the church, were before chastity, fidelity during marriage and abstinence after the husband's death. In a society in which the roles within the family were very well established, the existence of possible "skids" influences its balance without precedent.