

“MOTHER’S DAY” IN THE YEAR 1939 – OPPORTUNITY FOR CELEBRATION AND PROPAGANDA: OLT COUNTY*

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Abstract: “Mother’s Day” represented a festive and propagandistic episode during personal regime of King Carol II that can be fitted into the category of the celebrations dedicated to creation, in population’s ranks, of a mentality favourable to increase of life’s quality, through propagation of some messages that targeted the concern for environmental, for human’s health and, especially for the children’s. Reconstitution and analysis of the mentioned festive moment are focused on realities of 1939 on the Olt County level. The analysis of studied documents sustain the affirmation that: the celebration called “Mother’s Day”, beyond the declared purpose of stimulating the increase of birth rate and prevent the infantile mortality, offered, through his ceremony, the propagation of King Carol II’ image as architect of a new national solidarity.

Keywords: “Mother’s Day”, propaganda, celebration, King Carol II.

In the period of 1938-1940, application of King Carol II’s vision regarding reformation of Romanian state and shape the Romanian society reached the peak. In the same time with adopting all the measures that had as result on one side “the affirmation of authority” of the head of state over any possibility of control, and on the other side the severe erosion of

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democratic structure, a powerful propaganda machinery¹ was set up, with the purpose of masking the real situation in Romania in those times.

The celebrations played an important role in the popularisation mechanism of carlist's ideology. These events have been organized by the carlist regime's supporters after an well established pattern, pattern in which King Carol II was the centre of the celebration. The public officials had speeches – pleads reserved in the favour of reformatting opera of the king, and the participants, picked from the “favourable” elements, give the image of a happy nation.

The Romanian youth, considered to be one of the key elements in “the new” society planned by the promoters of the carlist regime², was implicated in the organisation of different celebrations in the studied period. *Straja Țării* [Country's Sentry]³ had in a year programme, amongst other activities, also involvement of the youth in the organisation of 23 legal and sentry's celebrations (religious, great national holidays, Royal Family's holidays and those specific to Sentry)⁴.

According to “The Calendar for the year 1939-1940” of Country's Sentry, the festive moments were: January 1 – St. Vasile, January 6 – God's Baptize, January 7 – St. John the Baptizer, January 24 – Unification of the Princedoms [*Principate*] and All the Romanians, February 2 – Welcoming of the Lord, March 25 – Good News, 3 days of St. Easter, April 23 – St. Gheorghe, May 1 – Labour Day, May 10 – Nation's Day / Proclamation of Independence and Kingdom, May 21 – St. Emperors Constantine and Helen, June 6 – Hero's Day / Rise of the Lord (40 days after Easter), June 8 –

¹ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*, vol. III, *Carol al II-lea*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2001, pp. 260-261, 269-270; *Istoria Românilor*, vol. VIII, *România întregită (1918-1940)*, coordinator: Ioan Scurtu, secretar: Petre Otu, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2003, pp. 396-397, 401-402.

² Diana-Mihaela Păunoiu, *Aspecte privind cenzura cinematografică în cadrul Ținutului Olt (1938-1940)*, in “Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria Istorie”, year XIV, no. 2 (16)/2009, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, pp. 301-308.

³ *Straja Țării* [Country's Sentry] was a state institution that had as goal “moral, national-patriotic, social and physic education for all youth of both genders”, were joined all the boys with ages between 7 and 18 (inclusive) and all the girls with ages between 7 and 21 (inclusive). Other youth's organisations were forbidden in Romania. The Supreme Commander of Country's Sentry was King Carol II, “Marele Străjer al Țării” [The Great Sentry of the Country] (Articles 1 and 16 from “Legea pentru organizarea și funcționarea Străzii Țării” published in “Monitorul Oficial”, year CVI, no. 292 from December 15, 1938, pp. 5942-5943).

⁴ *Straja Țării*, Direcția Îndrumării, *Program și Instrucțiuni. 1 Sept.(embrie) 1939 – 31 August 1940*, Vreamea, 1939, no number (following, will be quoted: *Straja Țării*, Direcția Îndrumării, *Program și Instrucțiuni. 1 Sept.(embrie) 1939 – 31 August 1940*, ...).

Youth's Celebration, June 17 – St. Trinity (50 days after Easter, Sunday), June 29 – St. Apostles Peter and Paul, August 6 – Days of the Romanian Glory (Mărăști, Mărășești) / *Schimbarea la față* [Change of the Face], August 15 – Assumption of the Virgin, September 14 – The Rise of the Holy Cross, October 16 – Birthday of King Carol II, October 26 – St. Dumitru, November 8 – St. Archangels Mihail and Gavril / Birthday and name's day of Principe Mihai (The Great *Voievod* of Alba Iulia), December 6 – St. Nicolae, December 25-27 – 3 days of Christmas⁵.

In the context when the official celebrations took place with the participation “of the nation” as a result of compulsoriness of everybody with a paid income from the state's budget or receiving public money (case of the youth) the legal holidays⁶ were the same with the ones of sentry.

To all of these occasional and annual celebrations added, borne from the intention and desire of authorities to make propaganda for the exact problematic situation, with the purpose to create certain mentality in the ranks of population. For these were organized either festive events only, or festive events combined with different activities. These kind of events have been organized to popularize the environmental protection (“Planting of the Trees”⁷, “Day of the Waters”⁸), correlation of the idea of hygiene with health in population's ranks (“Hygiene Week”⁹), consuming of some aliments needed for normal development of children

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Codul General al României. Legi noi de unificare (1922-1926)*, vol. XI-XII, written and completed by C. Hamangiu, with the assistance of C. St. Stoicescu, București, Editura Librăriei “Universala” Alcaly@Co., pp. 421-422

⁷ *Straja Țării, Direcția Îndrumării, Program și Instrucțiuni. 1 Sept.(embrie) 1939 – 31 August 1940, ...*, pp. 167-169.

⁸ “Ziua Apelor” [“Days of the Waters”] started to be celebrated, in the last day of June, 1932. The celebration had the role to produce in population's ranks (“all the citizens, small and big”) a sentiment of love and cherish for “the value of Black Sea, Danube and Romanian waters” (National Archives, Dolj, fund Rezența Regală a Ținutului Olt, Administrative Department, files no.: 187/1940, f. 445v.; 288/1940, f. 85).

⁹ “Săptămâna Higienei” [“Hygiene Week”] was organised with the purpose of improving the environmental conditions, that influenced the health of individuals and create a mentality, in the rank of urban and rural population, favourable to apply, in every day's life, a minimum of hygienic conditions (National Archives, Vâlcea, fund Prefectura Județului Vâlcea, file no. 33/1940, f. 20; National Archives, Dolj, fund Rezența Regală a Ținutului Olt, Administrative Department, file no. 288/1940, f. 58).

(“Milk Week” / “Milk Day”¹⁰) or propaganda in the favour of children’s protection (“Child’s Celebration”¹¹) etc.

In this context, “Mother’s Day” fits into a wider assembly of celebrations dedicated to propagation, in population’s ranks, of some messages that were supposed to create a mentality that targeted the increase of life’s quality, through care of the environmental, for wellbeing of the population and, especially, of the children.

In 1939, the leadership of Country’s Sentry propose to organise, during celebrations of “Youth’s Week” – according to documents of the time the complete name of the celebrations was “Week of the Restoration and Youth” (June 1-8) –, “Mother’s Day” with the purpose of making propaganda for the increase of birth rate and prevention of infantile mortality¹².

Therefore, on May 3, 1939, the Commander of Country’s Sentry, Teofil Gheorghe Sidorovici, issued an address to Ministry of Internals with the objectives from the programme of this institution regarding the solving of the demographic problem. It was specified that this last issue

¹⁰ “Sărbătoarea laptelui” [“Milk holiday”] was celebrated, between June 12 and 19, 1938, in Bucharest under the form of “Milk Week”, and in the cities that were county’s residency “Milk Day”. The initiative belonged to National Committee of Milk, set up in 1930, part of the National Zootechnic Institute, having over 40 members, and the president was university professor G. H. K. Constantinescu. Some of the means used by the respective committee were cultural propaganda using brochures, conferences, advices, cinema, etc. for the rational increase of cattle that can produce milk, rational, hygienic and economic food, conservation, transportation and production of milk, and also the propaganda using some annual manifestations regarding milk holiday, that celebrated in 1938 in the same time with child’s day “who’s health and life is strictly related with the consuming of a good milk and sufficient”. (“Torța Olteană”, Craiova, year IV, no. 47-48, June 26, 1938, p. 2).

¹¹ The news paper from Craiova “Jurnalul” from 1937 wrote the fact that “Child Celebration” was: a celebration completely new. It will be a celebration truly unique. In this celebration will stir up a special sensation child’s defilations grown and cared for by the societies of child culture, a real pride of Romanian assistance”; regarding the role of this celebration, that was organised in “Month of Bucharest”, in the specified news paper was mentioned: “Is the case that great masses of Romanian public opinion to understand that the child is the guarantee of the future. The base of the country sits in the generations of children, or in the middle of these children are also the ones grown and take care of by the Societies of assistance” (“Jurnalul”, Craiova, year IV, no. 808, Sunday, June 17, 1937).

¹² To see, regarding the demographic problem from the period between wars, Keith Hitchins, *România 1866-1947*, Translation by George G. Potra and Delia Răzdolescu, București, Editura Humanitas, 1996, pp. 360-362; and for the period 1938-1940, “Buletinul Statistic al României” – official publication of the Central Statistic Institute, director: dr. Sabin Manuilă, București, 1938, 1939, 1940.

was in the attention of many of the world's countries, everywhere measures being taken with regards of increasing the population and, especially, prevention of infantile mortality.

Country's Sentry having written in his programme a vast activity regarding that problem which was "*obviously...at the beginnings (our underline)*", Teofil Gh. Sidorovici considered that, until the achievement of this great desiderate from sentry's programme", "we have to, using well though measures *to realize a stimulant, in our concern for the Nation's children (our underline)*, seeking through all means to highlight the good mothers and stimulate them to take care of the children's food and supervise their growth"¹³.

Was considered that "Youth's Week" could have been the opportunity for "a feminine demonstration in the entire country: mothers with a higher number of live children should be gathered in Bucharest, where they will be celebrated by the Country's Sentry, and with this occasion prizes in money and objects will be given"¹⁴.

For achievement of propaganda in favour of demographic problem, the Commander of Country's Sentry proposed a detailed program, which had three stages. First, in every *county* of the country were organized, on *May 21*, by the legions of sentries with the assistance of local authorities, celebrations dedicated to all the mothers from that county respectively that had eight living children raised in the parents house. During these celebrations three mothers from every county were chosen, and they participated to other celebrations organised in the residency cities of the *Counties*¹⁵.

The day proposed for these kinds of manifestations was *May 28*. This kind of festive events had to take place under the patronage of royal residencies. With this opportunity, a mother had to be chosen from every county with the purpose of participating in the day of *June 7* at the celebration of these mothers during sentry's manifestations that took

¹³ National Archives, Dolj, fund Reziidența Regală a Ținutului Olt, Administrative Department, file no. 86/1939, f. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 8.

¹⁵ *Ținutul* [County] – territorial-administrative unit created through administrative law from August 14, 1938. It was ruled by a royal resident that had wide powers; was the representative of the King in a delimited territory; have been set up 10 counties in the country. Olt County was formed from 6 smaller counties: Dolj, Gorj, Olt, Mehedinți, Romanați și Vâlcea, the residence being the city of Craiova ("Monitorul Oficial", part I, no. 187, August 14, 1938).

place, under the patronage of King Carol II, in *Bucharest* during “Youth’s Week”¹⁶.

Celebration of mothers with eight living children raised in the parents house was considered an unique event in Romania and for the good deployment of the event the Commander of Country’s Sentry requested the support from authorities for the following matters: identification of the aimed mothers, transport and accommodation for them in residency cities of Counties, and also prices in money and object to the most “deserving mothers”¹⁷.

Considering the proposals done by the Commander of Country’s Sentry, The Ministry of Internals has send on May 9, 1939, to the royal residency of Olt County, Dinu Simian, a document informing him about the purpose for organisation of the celebration called “Mother’s Day” and ask of him to give dispositions to administrative and police authorities under his command to achieve, with the possibilities, the project proposed by the Country’s Sentry. Was also specified that, the *manifestations dedicated to”Mother’s Day” had to receive a special fast*¹⁸.

In his turn, the royal resident fulfil the requests mentioned above, giving orders on May 17, 1939, to prefects, mayors of cities that were county residence, police and gendarme inspectorates to take necessary measures to materialize the project started by Country’s Sentry¹⁹.

At the same date, the head of Financial Service notified the royal resident that the amount of 290.000 lei, in Olt County’s budget for county’s sentry legions, were destined for summer camps and colonies, destination that coordinating Commander in the county wanted to keep. Therefore, the financial solution for the prices was the utilisation of some founs specified in the budget at the chapter “Child’s Assistance”. In these conditions, the prices for poor mothers could only be given as clothes for the children²⁰.

Therefore, the prices that had to be given on “Mother’s Day” were symbolic and do not represented a long term solution for the problems that families with many children had. That is way, can be appreciated that the celebration had, mainly, an accentuated propagandistic side.

¹⁶ National Archives, Dolj, fund Reziidența Regală a Ținutului Olt, Administrative Department, file no. 86/1939, f. 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 4-4v.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 5

²⁰ *Ibid.*, file no. 72/1939, f. 4v.

At Olt County level, “Mother’s Day” was organised on June 5, 1939, in the Theatre Hall of “Carol I” College from Craiova, hall placed at their disposal for free by the school’s authorities²¹. Invitations for the officials from the city have been given by the director of the host college, who was appointed for that on May 31, 1939, by the Commander of Olt County Sentries.

At the same date, the college Director was asked “to allow that a delegation of sentries, equipped prefects, accompanied by a commander, to be the guard of honour at the entry in the theatre. On the stairs going to the lodges, on right and left, the guards will be the sentries from El[ena] Cuza High school”²².

The programme for this celebration²³ (See the Annex) shows that, although most of the time the event had literal and artistic moments dedicated to Mother, the moments reserved to glorify the king Carol II did not miss. Therefore, after singing the Royal Hymn (compulsory on every celebration), Quotation [*Deviza*] and Creed [*Crezul*] were spoken “*out loud, rare, outright and accentuating the words in such a way, that every time will produce powerful effects (our underline)*”²⁴.

The sentry’s *Deviza* was the following: “Faith and work for the Country and King!” and the *Crezul* had the following content:

I believe in God and the church of my forefathers.

I believe in the Country’s King, the Great Sentry [and] the ruler of Romanian people’s destinies (our underline).

I believe in work and sacrifice, devoting my entire being for the elevation and prosperity of the Country.

I believe in Country’s Sentry, the guarantee for the unity of Romanian people, boundaries and soul health²⁵.

Also the speech given by the Coordinating Commander of the Sentries from Olt County

had to produce a powerful educative impression (...).

This word will have a national, moral, social content, being achieved either by short suggestive stories (without drawing explicitly conclusions and learning,

²¹ Idem, fund Carol I High School, file no. 7/1939-1939, f. 349.

²² *Ibid.*, f. 350.

²³ *Ibid.*, f. 349v.

²⁴ Straja Țării, Direcția Îndrumării, *Program și Instrucțiuni. 1 Sept.(embrie) 1939 – 31 August 1940*, ..., p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*.

because these had to come implicitly from each), either by enthusiastic and raising exposures (our underline)²⁶.

Regarding the impact that the “Mother’s Day” celebration had on women’s ranks, it was not the one expected by the authorities, because, according to statistic data of those years, the demographic problem continued to exist²⁷. In the researched period, most of the women in rural areas had multiple duties: agriculture, housekeeping and family care. Many of them worked on the fields even while pregnant, sometime until the moment when they give birth to the child. In these conditions, can be said that given symbolic prizes to a reduce number of mothers could only be a populist measure, not even close enough to solve, real and on long term, the demographic mater.

The “Mother’s Day” represented a celebration that, beyond the declared purpose, to stimulate the increase of birth rate and prevent the infantile mortality, offered, through his ceremony, the propagation of King Carol II’s image as architect of a new national solidarity.

ANNEX

MOTHER’S DAY JUNE 5, 1939

PROGRAME

Report

Royal Hymn

Quotation [Deviza]

Creed [Crezul]

The speech of Missis Coordinating Commander of Olt County

The speech of Mister Royal Resident of Olt County

“Mama” [Mother] – quire – Normal School’s “Stol”

National Dances – Girls Industrial High School’s “Stol”

“Mama” [Mother] – Carmen Sylva – recitation – School

Application

National Dances – School of Housewifery “Stol”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁷ “Buletinul statistic al României” – official publication of the Central Statistic Institute, director: Dr. Sabin Manuilă, București, 1938, 1939, 1940.

“Mama mea” [My Mother] – recitation – Urziceanu Girls High School’s “Stol”

Solo violin – Carol I College’s “Stol”

“Rugăciunea Soarelui” [Prayer of the Sun] – V. Eftimiu – Girls Commercial High School’s “Stol”

“Mama” [Mother] – quire – Normal School’s “Stol”

National Dances – Girls Commercial High School’s “Stol”

“Mama” [Mother] – V. Militaru – recitation – Elena Cuza “Stol”

Tablou – “Mama lui Ștefan cel Mare” – Stolul Șc. primare Otetelișanu

“Șease pui și-o biată mamă” – V. Militaru – recitation – Elena Cuza “Stol”

“Tablou” – “Momente din viața mamei” [“Moments from mother’s life”] – recitation – Elena Cuza “Stol”

“Mama cerne” – recitation – Commercial High School’s “Stol”

Granting the prices

Elections of mothers that will be send in Bucharest on June 7
(our underline)

Our Hymn

The Prayer

Lights Out

National Archives, Dolj, fund Liceul Carol I [Carol I High School],
file no. 7/1938-1939, f. 378v.