

THE DENOTATION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL INFANTILISM IN THE CONTEXT OF RA DEMOCRATIZATION

Sona DUMANYAN ^{1,2*} 

1 Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia

2 Khachatur Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University, Yerevan, Armenia

* *Correspondence*

Sona DUMANYAN, 55/5 Tsarav Aghbyur st., ap. 126, Yerevan 0052, Armenia

E-mail: sona_dumanyan17@alumni-uaa.am

Abstract: The primary goal of this article is to highlight the connection between socio-political infantilism and civic subject culture. Some realities of Armenian family life contributing to the occurrence of socio-political infantilism are discussed. The analysis of the results of the research done by the in-depth interview method confirmed that social infantilism makes political infantilism inevitable and subject culture is a consequence of socio-political infantilism. Thus, it also becomes clear that socio-political infantilism is an unfavorable factor in democratization processes.

Keywords: socio-political infantilism, subject culture, democratization, civic culture, family, leadership, political perceptions.

Introduction

In the modern world, democracy has become one of the most important categories for characterizing a number of advanced or developing states and societies, if not the most important. The continual process of democratization adopted by many developing and developed countries, faces various obstacles, the full study of which requires interdisciplinary approach. Among the socio-psychological obstacles to democratization, the phenomenon of socio-political infantilism is remarkable and topical. The spread of socio-political infantilism in Armenian society is caused by very different realities; a typical Armenian family, for example, is one of them.

It is important to distinguish between democracy as a system of governance and democratic value system or culture and civic consciousness, which are necessary prerequisites for the smooth operation of a democratic system of governance. Civic consciousness is not the same in any two

different societies, and even in the same society it has internally disharmonious and fundamentally distinct layers. Despite such differences, the generation of ideological ideals is vital to the establishment of democratic institutions. In which societies is the democratic system of governance concordant and effective with the given society? What are the responses of civil societies to democracy or what are the established political cultures? What are the obstacles to the establishment of participatory democracy? It is the incompleteness of the answers to these questions that once became the basis for political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's work "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations" (1963, p. 13), which "represents a study of the political cultures of democracy and their underlying social structures and processes".

The work (Almond & Verba, 1963) has also become the theoretical basis of our research, not to do the same research in the Armenian society,

but to understand what is the socio-psychological basis of the formation of one of the types of political culture described by the authors: subject culture.

References to Socio-Political Infantilism in Almond and Verba's Work "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations"

According to the authors, the work (Almond & Verba, 1963) is based on the thesis that "along with political, economic and social factors, subtle and inherently complex values, attitudes and skills play an important role in democratization and democratic stabilization" (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 10). As a result of a comparative political analysis of the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico in the context of the establishment of democracy, Almond and Verba identified three main directions of political culture, the different combinations of which in turn lead to different variations of political culture. According to the authors, the main types of political culture are: parochial, subject and participant (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 33). Types of cultures were distinguished according to four dimensions: cognitive, value, emotional, practical.

As a vivid example of parochial political culture, the authors mention a number of African tribes. "This community does not have clearly defined political roles and the scope of responsibility of the political, religious and economic leaders of the tribe is quite blurred. The political orientations of the members of that society are equally unclear. They are difficult to separate from religious and social orientations. Parochials are also characterized by indifference to any changes in the political system, by and large, the parochial does not expect anything from the political system" (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 34). Both this and the other two forms of political culture almost do not exist in the "modal" state: the authors argue that there are no absolutely parochial, absolutely subject, or participant societies. It is also noteworthy whether being a bearer of a given political culture is an emotional or a normative or a conscious act for that society or one of its groups.

Participant culture bearers generally tend to have an active role and involvement in public

and political life. Individual representatives of participant culture have extremely different positions towards this or that political object (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 36). Western developed democracies typically have a developed participant culture. The existence of a participant culture is one of the best prerequisites for the successful integration of the democratic value system and civic consciousness, especially in the case of Western democracies.

The next type of political culture identified by Almond and Verba is subject culture. The bearer of this culture may have active demands addressed to the bureaucratic system, but his orientation toward active political processes, active entities and his perception as an active participant is close to zero (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 35). Moreover, those who generate the subject culture can have a clear awareness of the specifics of the existing political system, have a strong emotional orientation about it, which is mostly a feeling of complete hatred or pride. The government is legitimate or illegitimate for them, but the existence of this orientation does not make them active citizens participating in political processes (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 35).

As an example of a subject culture bearer, Almond and Verba describe someone who prefers monarchism to a democratic system: "In those political systems where there are developed democratic institutions, the subject culture will be more emotional and normative, rather than cognitive. Thus, the existence of democratic institutions is well known to the French royalist: he just doesn't perceive them as legitimate". It can be concluded that even in the most developed democracies there are gaps and they mainly appear in the form of communication gaps between the political system and its holders. As a result, the cooperative character of this interaction relatively decreases, the level of overall efficiency of the political system-society as a whole declines. Especially in countries where democratic institutions are far from being established and power is de facto inherited, the need for a subject culture to ensure the smooth running of such a democratic farce is obvious. With all that, even the establishment of participant democracy implies the existence of a subject culture, with the difference that the subject of subjugation changes.

Putting aside the proportion of cognitive and

emotional bearers of subject culture in advanced democracies, the authors do not hesitate to point out that the continuous development of democratic institutions is also met with resistance due to various realities arising from subject culture. Why are there relatively more or less manifestations of political subject culture among a person or a group of people? This is an indicative circumstance marking the existence of such a reality, which determines the degree of dissemination of subject culture, as well as the cognitive or emotional outcome of its manifestation.

In 2010 Samvel Manukyan found out in the framework of his dissertation that “6.3% of Armenian society belongs to participant, 88% to subject and 5.7% to patriarchal political cultures. Therefore, the society of Armenia has mostly subject political culture” (Mkrtichyan & Ver-mishyan, 2018, p. 375).

The above-mentioned reality also has a socio-psychological character and coincides with the content of socio-political infantilism. From the socio-political infantilism of a person, groups of people and society, subject culture is formed. In their work, Almond and Verba implicitly allude to socio-political infantilism, but sidestep it by saying that they consider “the phenomenon of political socialization and not child development or parenting in general”. At the same time, they emphasize that they do not deny the psychological and anthropological theories that confirm the connection between a person’s political positions and a number of other personal characteristics. The authors state that their “research would be impossible if there were not all those social philosophers, sociologists, historians and psychologists who saw this connection also in the context of the communications of countries and their peoples” (Almond & Verba, 1963, pp. 26-27).

And yet, the work does not specify which socio-psychological feature of a person or society resonates with the given political culture and to what extent.

Socio-Political Infantilism; How Does That Happen?

In the professional literature, infantilism (lat. *infantilis*-childlike) means slowing down or stopping of development. Originally, the term was used to refer to the presence of a number of

childlike physical and psychological characteristics in adults. Later, a more differentiated approach was formed and various forms of infantilism began to be distinguished: psychological, personal, political, social, etc. Thus, infantilism has both a physiological and a sociocultural nature.

Infantiles should not be confused with those who have preserved the healthy and natural spontaneity in adulthood, freedom of thought, and creativity specific to children: these are powerful safeguards of maturity, but have been suppressed among many adults for various reasons. The latter are different circumstances and also stereotypes, one of the most prominent of which is, for example, the widespread stereotype of associating maturity with artificial seriousness.

Russian researchers Sabelnikova and Khmeleva (2016) state that infantile people “are characterized by immature emotions (childlike reactions, lack of will, lack of self-confidence), an external locus of control (everything is to blame for others), high self-esteem, not being demanding of oneself and egocentrism” (pp. 89-105). It turns out, however, that this is not always the case. It happens that the lack of will is replaced by supernatural manifestations of will, self-doubt by fighting spirit; without such transformations, the realization of great social movements and revolutions would be impossible. During the Armenian “Velvet Revolution” in 2018, a large number of people eagerly and absolutely rejected a number of political figures and their regime. However, it is noteworthy that some of the rejecters supported those they rejected with the same enthusiasm in the next elections. This is an example of the signs of more entrenched infantilism hidden under the guise of self-confident and self-willed behavior.

The universally high level of infantilism was probably the reason for the separation of a new layer of society, which is called “kidult” (*adult/-kidult*). Kidult is a relatively new term, which was first used by journalist Peter Martin (1985), however, such a phenomenon was described earlier by Jung: *Puer aeternus* - eternal youth - avoids responsibilities, does not want to take responsibility. Modern psychologists embodied this image in such literary heroes as Peter Pan, The Little Prince, etc. As a rule, the infantile does not have a clear idea of what he/she really wants, instead he/she has local and sometimes senti-

mental desires, which must be achieved for the sake of survival. This can be seen everywhere; in the store, school, church and elsewhere. At the store, when they jump the queue for no good reason, the infants get a little euphoria of victory. After answering a lesson in school, a student may not study the next lesson, thinking that it is unlikely that he/she will be asked again during the next lesson. The scenes of demonstrative faith tell about infantilism in the church: for example, whoever stands closer to the altar is closer to God and, therefore, will be punished less or may not be punished at all. A person who steals goods from a supermarket is mean to an infantile, but he can applaud big thieves.

It is difficult to give a single definition of socio-political infantilism, but today it can be understood as a concept that characterizes the gap between biological and socio-political maturation of a person (Koroleva et al., 2017).

Socio-political infantilism is more than relevant today and is the intersection of all types of infantilism. *Socio-political infantilism is the manifestation of infantile reactions and judgments in an individual's or community's perceptions, interpretations and corresponding behavior of socio-political realities.* Socio-political infantilism is, in a sense, one of the expressions of nihilistic tendencies in the modern world. The socio-politically infantile rejects the need to mature.

In order to reveal the manifestations of socio-political infantilism, research field work was carried out using the in-depth interview method. Qualitative methodology is preferred for this research, since the primary objective is to study the relationship between the infantile principles of integration in social institutions and the fundamental principles of political consciousness among the youth, and also to understand what the phenomenon of socio-political infantilism and the political subject culture defined by Almond and Verba have in common. The interviews were conducted in an informal environment, which was facilitated by the efficient approaches employed by the interviewer to collect complete and unbiased research data.

Socio-political infantilism is a multifactorial phenomenon, one of the primary links of which is the family in which the child grows up. The Armenian family is based on the paternal-authoritarian model, built on authoritative rela-

tions, where the unerring principle of the older generation is the basis of the relationship between the older and younger generations. Within the family, young people are prevented from participating in important family decision-making and sharing responsibility. The older generation has a myriad of responsibilities, which include the solution of almost all issues related to the life of the younger generation. In this environment, authoritarianism and paternalism take the first steps of their formation.

One of the respondents (male, 27 years old), to the question whether the man should make decisions in the family, answered: *“Yes, decisions in the family should be made by the man of the house alone”*.

It is also important to consider his response to another question, namely, whether democracy is the best way to govern the country. The answer was: *“For Armenia, democracy is not the best way of governing the country; it depends on the current state of the given state. Because Armenia is facing great challenges and the issue of border security is paramount... In this case, it is preferable that there be a monarchy, that there be a person, like Vazgen Sargsyan once was, who will gather strong politicians and soldiers to his side. Democracy is not good because dissent is not good and hinders the struggle for security”*.

These responses emphasize the importance of the image of the sole male decision-maker for the respondent in relation to family and state matters. It is also obvious how paternalistic notions of family life are projected onto perceptions of political realities.

In an Armenian family, the elders have the “right” to punish the child, mainly if he makes a mistake according to the elders. Hence the fear of the elder, the almighty. But the feeling of fear is accompanied by the right not to take responsibility, given to him by those very same adults as the greatest authorities in the child's life. He can make mistakes and be punished, and yet he will be punished by those who also care for him and love him. This is a beneficial reality for the child, it also looks fair, which is important to the child as well. Along with all of this, the child hears the phrases “enjoy while you are little”, “why are you in a hurry to grow up”, “childhood is the best period of life” from the adults around him/her, the meaning of which he/she still does not understand very well. The difficult period of

maturity is coming closer, and yesterday's child and today's teenager faces the task of becoming mature, which requires a lot of effort from him. With all the external and internal conditions, some are relatively successful in maturing, some are not. The latter represent a conscious or unconscious rejection of the imperative to mature and make efforts to recreate the times when maturity was not necessary at all; a person seeks to return to childhood. After that, the one who does not want to grow up joins new platforms of socialization: communities, state. Regardless of his or her will, he/she tries to adapt the rules and manners here, thus remembers that for his or her previous life activities he/she needs the same elders, authorities, punishers, but also lovers, those who take responsibility. This is where the demand for leaders of any kind is born. Children cannot self-organize, and neither can a society dominated by "children".

One of the participants of the interview (female, 21 years old) answered the same question whether democracy is the best way of governing the country: *"Democracy is not a bad option for us, but it is not the best. I would prefer something between democracy and authoritarianism, their golden mean. A lot depends on the head of the state and democracy is not needed everywhere. It can interfere with many decisions and in many situations. Therefore, there must be a leader who uses democracy at the right time, because it seems to me that this does not help our people, but hinders them"*.

The importance of the super-responsible person who also may not be democratic "at the right time" is emphasized again, which is similar to the "mandate" given by the child to the parent to punish him/herself.

It is quite predictable that the higher the level of socio-political infantility, the greater the sympathy for the authoritarian model of governance and the dominant political subject culture.

Thus, one of the interviewees (female, 28 years old) answered the question whether she is in favor of punishing the child: *"Yes, in some cases I am even in favor of physical punishment, hitting"*.

The same participant gave the following reaction to the idea of joining a powerful state: *"At the moment, I would prefer to join a powerful state for security reasons, because we are also under a lot of stress right now and it cannot go*

on like this".

Her observation of the most difficult types of work for her is also noteworthy: *"Very responsible jobs are difficult, for example, doctor, judge... those jobs that are very responsible and decisive"*.

A high level of infantilism in communal life is also manifested by a low level of initiative. This is the result of a highly centralized government that stifles human and societal creativity, masking social degradation under the facade of stability. Half of the interviewees were not ready to organize a gathering that they could organize and would like to attend. And so in a reality where infantilism is inevitable, the structures serving it are also inevitable. From the family to the community, from the community to the state; one of the most basic missions of these institutions is the maintenance of social infantilism.

According to Ilya Latipov, the starting point for the formation of social infantilism is paternalism, an ideology based on the legend "the elders will take care of the younger ones" (Latipov, 2018). And obviously it is not about the age difference, but about opportunities of different scales, and therefore, also about the scope of responsibility. Weber's definition of paternalism presents it as a form of political tradition in which the "patriarch" using authority protects his subordinates, in return for which the latter repay him with subordination and dedication. It is this dedication and subordination, which seem to be good things for the sake of security, that give birth to numerous dangers and risks arising from not taking responsibility for one's own actions, even at the cost of blind self-denial. Should man's security be given to him at the price of irresponsibility and self-denial, dangerous for her/himself?

If the "child" does not have the level of abilities, knowledge, skills to be able to defend himself and remain loyal to her/his self, has her/his "father" been effective?

One of the survey participants (female, 27 years old) was sure that no argument could change her decision regarding her preferred candidate in political elections.

"Even if he kills or brutally beats his employees. Of course, it is not desirable to have a leader with such values, but if the leader presents our country well abroad, strengthens the army, strengthens the economy, I do not care about his

personal qualities. If the leader brutally murders his employee, but builds a powerful army, I will vote for him. I do not deny the fact that when my close friends were killed, my emotions would prevent me from taking the right direction in the governance of the country. No matter how severe it is, all perfect leaders in history have corpses behind them. You may be a priest and with your purity you can lay solid foundations in your activities, but the state governance must have severe moments. Let's remember Napoleon, Stalin ... I don't know, all of them had it in their activities ... all of them have ... of course I would like justice, purity ... but no".

The rate of rejection of paternalism is directly proportional to the rate of de-infantilization. It turns out that the opportunity of the political agenda is determined by the existence of social realities, in this case infantilism. It is at this stage of describing infantilism that the parallel existence of social and political infantilisms becomes clear: social infantilism makes political infantilism inevitable.

One of the surveyed participants (male, 27 years old) mentioned: *"If you have a good relationship with your boss and he/she helps you, then he is right for you in everything".*

The same participant answered the question whether he prefers to live in an independent Armenia or whether it is better for Armenia to join a powerful state: *"I'm not interested in politics at all, it's the first time I have thought about such issues..."*

Another man (male, 32 years old) answered the question as follows, whether the boss with whom he has a good personal relationship should undertake sponsoring him at work as well.

"If you personally have a good relationship with your boss, she/he is somewhat obliged to help you, there should be a difference with whom she/he is close and with whom she/he is not".

Political orientations and political behavior cannot exist independently of and beyond the stratified and boundless domain of socialization of the individual and society.

Family, school, workplace, community, associations of different scale and nature, and the state: the processes of communication with all these institutions and human integration in them have common patterns. Behavioral and cognitive models of being effective in these domains are consistent, and there is similarity in the destruc-

tive instances leading to failure. Socio-political infantilism is the expression of the individual's and society's unconquered social infantilism in the political domain, in the context of the hypothesis of the inseparability of social and political infantilism. The latent motivation of the socio-politically infantile individual's choices based on faith is the search for unquestionably regarded, incontestable and unconditionally accepted authority, according to his characteristic behavioral model of avoiding responsibility.

Among the respondents, the following answers were given to the question whether there could be someone who would influence the change of their preferred candidate in the political elections.

"My father has always been the person whose advice I followed regarding the election, considering that he is experienced and intelligent" (female, 31 years old). *"I think only my father can influence me to change my preferred candidate in the elections"* (female, 24 years old). *"Only my father's opinion can influence my choice, because I think he is smart"* (female, 28 years old).

The socio-political infantile subject lacks rational motives for critical reflection on the authority and ideas accepted by him. *Socio-political infantilism is a phenomenon of insufficient cognition, where its bearer lacks the components of self-reflection, critical analysis, and true judgement, from which his appropriate behavior in social and political domains is derived.* It is the projection of childish reactions and domestic judgements onto the political perceptions, orientations and behavior of an individual or community. Socio-politically infantile will find it difficult to assimilate democratic participant culture.

Comparing the analysis of the interviews with the results of the research done in Armenia during the different years of independence (Mkr-tichyan, 2006), we also reveal interesting details related to the relationship between subject culture and socio-political infantilism. It is obvious that the importance of the "decisive", "strong", "responsible", "intelligent" and sometimes "severe owner" is accompanied by the awareness that great responsibility is a difficult thing to avoid, or the same as more a great deal must depend on the decisions of significant others rather than one's own, and therefore the decisions of

others are more important. The search for that type of “owner” is also accompanied by political absenteeism, because in the case of artificial devaluation of one’s own person, both aggressive or dismissive behavior and indifference to what is happening are expected.

An example of political absenteeism. One surveyed participant (female, 23 years old) said the following about leadership: *“Perhaps the leaders know better what is good for us, in any case if they are the leaders they probably know better”*.

Then, while expressing her ideas about raising children, she said: *“It’s not always necessary for the parent to go ahead and let the child wear what she/he wants, so that she/he doesn’t think that it will always be as they want”*. Then she was asked whether she will participate in the upcoming elections and the answer to that question was negative. It is important to notice another circumstance here. As a parent, the respondent already has a clear concern that the child must learn that it does not always have to be what he/she wants, and at the same time, as a citizen, she becomes such a “child” in her relations with the state, even refusing to express any of her desire in the governance of the state. The latter is a collective example and is fundamentally similar to all cases in which the following pattern applies: if as a parent a person subjugates, as a citizen he is being subjugated. People making socio-politically infantile judgements are also often similar to the French royalist described in Almond and Verba’s work, as in the example above, where the respondent states that she wants purity and justice, but at the same time believes that particular brutality in the character of the leader is almost mandatory.

Similarly, another participant (female, 26 years old) stated: *“The man should have the final word in all matters in the family. If you trust your husband and start a family with him, you can be sure that he will make the right decisions”*.

Then, during the conversation, she expressed another opinion, which shows the fear of the absence of a figure who makes sole decisions and takes full responsibility in the political context: *“Democracy is very inappropriate for us. In my opinion, it disturbs us”*.

Among the factors of delayed maturity, Sabelnikova and Khmeleva bring forth phenomena that are the result of the changing world and the

formation of a fundamentally new socio-cultural environment. Among them are the modern virtual forms of communication, the unknown future of professions, and therefore the difficulties in choosing them, non-traditional conceptions of married life due to the need for a more long-term process of self-knowledge. In the background of all this, the authors of the above mentioned work describe infantilization as a completely natural phenomenon.

A person’s or society’s perceptions of childhood can also be a factor influencing the prevalence of infantilism. An analysis of the scientific literature reveals two main and conflicting approaches to the issue. According to the first, childhood is a unique and extremely important period of life, and the people who are already deprived of the right to be a child (over 18) are responsible for its flawless and effective course. After all, if a person turns 18, it still does not mean that he/she is mature. The 20th century political philosopher Hannah Arendt recorded and thoroughly analyzed the fact that childhood is very special in her works. She believed that “children should be allowed to be children, to be fearless, to have the space to discover themselves, to make mistakes, to have secrets and to be childish” (Topolski, 2011). “Children should not be forced to grow up early, their childhood is wonderful both for them and for the world. It is in that sheltered stage of their lives that children should be able to discover themselves without having to deal with the harsh realities of public life” (Topolski, 2011).

Arendtian approaches to childhood in a sense tend to fetishize childhood, and the latter can undoubtedly interfere or delay the period of productive adulthood. A child should also have a range of responsibilities in line with his/her development and the transition from childhood to adulthood should not be abrupt. Therefore childhood should be a preparatory stage for effective adulthood and not a period of life separated from adulthood and fetishized.

Blaming older people for immaturity and simultaneously emphasizing the sweetness and uniqueness of childhood, in the context of the child’s unlimited freedoms and right to be absolutely irresponsible, create a suitable environment for the modernization of socio-political infantilism. “Many modern social theorists, based on the fact that maturity is necessary and desirable, have noted an antagonism between

social development and childhood” (Neustadter, 1993). This group of thinkers stands in stark contrast to romantic and Arendtian approaches to childhood. “According to Freud, the child is nothing more than a homunculus, a primitive form of the complex and higher being represented by a mature individual” (Neustadter, 1993).

Conclusion

We can state that nowadays the legitimization of infantilism is as relevant as the concerns about its undesirable consequences are. There are also many people who have come to the conclusion that the infantile lifestyle may be a conscious human choice.

Knowledge, as a highly effective tool of enlightenment, is a decisive factor affecting political ideas and orientations. The majority of the respondents had not read or watched anything about democracy and as a result, a small part of the respondents were able to define the term democracy precisely. For one third of the participants, the responsible jobs are the most difficult and these participants do not accept a number of fundamental democratic principles of governance.

Let us also state that socio-political infantilism is a multifactorial phenomenon. The existence of civic subject culture is conditioned by the latter. Democratization is a multi-layered process, the feasibility of which depends on diverse factors, including the content of the civic culture of a given society.

Evidently, young people who make “infantile judgements” about family and leadership similarly have infantile principles underlying their political judgements.

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