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Abstract

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This paper looks at the concepts of “orphan”, “abandonment” and “adoption” from a cross cultural perspective through the critical exploration of the social, political and economic reasons for and impacts of the institutionalization of Romanian children on Romanian society. Taking an anthropological perspective rooted in psychological anthropology, I examine institutionalization of children within both socialist and post-socialist contexts of Romania. Based upon a review of scholarly research, this paper aims to explore the causes of institutionalization and its effects on Romanian children and society its children and to understand what it means to be an “orphan” and take care of an orphan within this context. It will also explore international controversy surrounding “adoption” as it pertains to this unique situation during the time period between Ceausescu’s reign and the current day. I will collect data on both broad social trends and specific case studies by examining published reports and documentaries and conducting original interviews with experts in which I aim to unearth current information on topics I am unable to find in print. In reviewing a broad range of scholarly and grey literature on the topic, I have found that institutionalization has greatly damaged the cognitive and social development in most of the children who lived in Romanian orphanages, as well as the society at large. I intend to show how the impacted children are now ill-equipped as adults with regards to the basic skills necessary to act as a properly functioning member of society in marital and parental roles, as well as in work and community contexts. Nearly twenty years since the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu’s reign, Romania continues to cope with the devastating effects sown through institutionalization as the former orphans age and try to form relationships, families, careers, and lives as citizens in new post-socialist reality.