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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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"A Modest Soldier in the Great Army of Communists": Visual Representations of Women in Ceauşescu's Romania

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Abstract
My research investigates, using discourse analysis and visual semiotics, the norms and ideological guidelines of Communist propaganda regarding gender identity and sex roles, as expressed in the magazine *Femeia*, between 1965-1989. *Femeia* was, at the time, the official media outlet of the National Council of Women, directly involved in educating and mobilising women. The discourse and visuals of *Femeia* reinforce the idea that, in fact, women were the collective character of women's emancipation, as anonymity was crucial in a totalitarian regime that did not tolerate individualism but advocated abnegation, self-sacrifice and devotion.

Keywords: women, media, Communism, Romania, visuals

Introduction

"I have always thought of myself as a modest soldier in the great army of communists", – Elisabeta Nilca, an engineer, confessed in the pages of the magazine *Femeia* in 1977. "If the Party sent me somewhere or elsewhere, it meant I was needed there! I only tried to respond as well as possible to the trust invested in me"[1]. This quote meaningfully summarises the condition of the individual in an authoritarian regime, where her desires and aspirations are determined and shaped by political requirements. In Ceauşescu's Romania (1965-1989), under the official label of "women's emancipation", women's interests were never truthfully recognised as a specific project but only as part of the larger social revolution. Women internalised this discourse and joined 'the great army of Communists', where their gender identity was slowly erased and

[1] *Femeia*, December 1977, page 4.

replaced by neutral political citizenship: "I want to confess that when it came to my relation to the world, to my professional life, I have always considered myself a person, not a woman. I never had any feminist obsessions or frustrations. I never felt the need for feminist claims"[2]. This quote, from the writer Lucia Demetrius, who portrayed in her work strong female characters, suggests that women's emancipation was never a feminist project but rather a state policy that mobilised women for the regime's specific purposes.

There is a large agreement among scholars of Romanian Communism that, despite predicting gender-neutral citizenship, the regime had, in fact, reinforced traditional gender roles for women, highlighting women's reproductive role and the identity as 'socialist mothers.' This was particularly the case after the late 1960s and, as LaFont has argued, "instead of truly liberating women, state Communism turned into a system that doubly exploited women in their roles as producers and reproducers. Their official glorification […] unfortunately, did not reflect the reality of women's lives"[3]. The propaganda apparatus had, indisputably, a crucial role in the formation of the so-called 'New Man' in educating citizens about their duties, expected behaviour, way of thinking, work ethics, and the required enthusiasm about building a new society - men and women together, on equal ground. Several books on the topic of women's emancipation, magazines and comic books for children and pioneers, brochures for teenagers and, most obviously, the magazine for women, *Femeia*, all contributed to this educational purpose from the early 1970s up until the late 1980s.

Femeia was a monthly magazine with 35-40 pages per issue. It was the official media outlet of the National Council of Women and disseminated the Party's requirements and decisions regarding women. Unfortunately, there is scarce or no reliable information on the circulation of the magazine, number of copies, audience, and impact on readers. One can only assume that it was relatively popular as one of the two 'women's magazines' (the other being *Săteanca*, addressing rural women). Jill Massino described *Femeia* as "an obviously politically involved source for the iconographical construction of the gendered feminine identity"[4]. The editors of the magazine themselves put it like this: "Our entire effort will be dedicated to the multilateral education of women - producers of material and spiritual goods, women as mothers, educators of the young generation".[5]

In this article, using discourse analysis and visual semiotics, I specifically turn to the norms and ideological guidelines of Communist propaganda regarding women's public and domestic roles and gender identity, focusing on the magazine *Femeia* (1965-1989). In previous research[6], relying on content analysis, I illustrated how the magazine *Femeia* shaped, for almost five decades, the role and image of the new Communist woman: as worker, homemaker, mother, and builder of a new society. The purpose of my research was to expose "the intricacies and elusiveness of an

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[2] *Femeia*, August, 1979, 12.
[3] LaFont, Suzanne. 2001. One step forward, two steps back: Women in the post-Communist states. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34, 203-220, 205.
[4] Massino, Jill. 2007. *Engendering socialism: A history of women and everyday life in socialist Romania*. Unpublished dissertation thesis. Indiana University, 4.
[5] *Femeia*, January, 1977, 2.
[6] Teampău, Petruța. 2016. 2016. Women leaders and lead workers in Communist Romania: A discursive approach. *Europolis. Journal of Political Analysis and Theory* 10(2), 131-152; Teampău, Petruța. Women's role in "popular democracies". Mobilization without emancipation?. *Annals of the University of Bucharest. Political Science Series* 19(2), 31-53.

ideological discourse that was self-proclaimed emancipatory while rejecting feminist ideas; that pushed women to rise to a new social and political level while subtly discouraging them through irony, stereotyping, and suspicion; that assigned women complex and contradictory public and private roles that in the end over-burdened instead of empowering them."[7] The novelty of the regime's discourse regarding women consisted of a complex ideological script that managed to re-enforce traditional gender roles while pretending to 'emancipate' women by encouraging them to participate as active citizens on an equal footing with men. Despite the powerful discourse about sexual equality and women's emancipation through work, despite the undisputable improvements in the overall status of women (whether educational, professional or political), the daily reality of women's lives brutally contradicted the propagandistic representations of women. *Femeia* contributed directly to promoting this image of the emancipated woman, oblivious to the huge gap between social reality and propaganda. For the purposes of this analysis, I understand propaganda as all the media (both discourse and practices) through which a totalitarian regime communicates, imposes, and enforces its ideology.

The aim of this paper is to show how women were represented visually, according to propaganda, as part of the endeavour to define the ideal of the Communist female citizen (as woman, mother, wife, and worker). The symbolic and normative power of images is undisputable: "[P]ictures signify the world in graphically perceptible forms. They are always structured according to specific cultural patterns of meaning and perception, and thus they transmit normative attitudes towards the world."[8] Consequently, I analyse these images as complementing the discourse in creating the normative icon of the Communist woman. In the past almost two decades, I have been interested in how the Communist regime in Romania used discursive practices and propaganda to (re)shape the social status and gender identity of women (and men). I have used discourse analysis to investigate books and various propaganda publications for women and youth, focusing only on the textual level. This previous knowledge has helped me decode and accurately interpret the visual representations of women.

As per the methodological aspect, I have organised extensive visual material (collected from more than 10,000 pages of the magazine published between 1965 and 1989) into categories of representations of women according to relevant codes: working woman, motherhood, family (the couple), attractive woman, the woman in her political role, woman as a consumer, and under-represented women (elder women, peasants, single women etc.). For the present study, I chose some of the most representative images from the magazine for each of the codes described above, and I identified the visual elements that convey the propagandist discourse correlated to the textual messages that accompany them.

My findings show that women were represented (discursively and visually) in a paradoxical way: although omnipresent, they seem to be 'invisible'; although praised and individualised through success stories, they remain anonymous; although encouraged and pushed to emancipate, they are constantly undermined through irony, mistrust, and half-jokes. While this duplicity is a

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[7] Teampău, *Women's role*, 51.
[8] Dölling, Irene. 1993. *"But the pictures stay the same …" The image of women in the journal Für Dich before and after the "Turning Point"*, in *Gender politics and post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (1st ed.), edited by Funk, Nanette and Magda Mueller. London & New York: Routledge, 168-179, 181.

general feature of the Romanian Communist propaganda regarding women's promotion in society, it is also noticeable in the way women were represented visually in *Femeia*. Also, I argue that since the magazine targeted socially and economically active working women as objects of ideological socialisation, other categories of women – too young, too old, single women, childless women, etc. – slightly disappear from the pages of the magazine.

Visual Representations of 'Invisible' Women

A quick overview of the issues of *Femeia* reveals the changes in the tone and the colours of the magazine over my analytical timeframe: if, in the 1960s, the magazine portrays colourful images of young (visibly attractive and slightly sexualised) women, sometimes in a bathing suit, laughing or smiling, by the late 1970s the content becomes more and more politicised. President Ceaușescu appears more often on the pages or on the cover of the magazine, almost always accompanied by his wife, Elena. Women are more frequently depicted as working mothers, and the chromatics of the magazine becomes darker and gloomier (mostly photos in black and white of women dressed up to the neck. These images now depict real, hard-working, plain-looking women, not models or actresses). The changes presumably followed the Party's requirements and guidelines. In her own analysis, Denisa Oprea describes five phases identified in the magazine's existence up to 1989: "(a) 1946–1960: hard communist propaganda; (b) 1960–1965: softer communist propaganda; (c) 1966–1971/1972: cosmopolitism; (d) 1973–1978/1979: softer communist propaganda; (e) 1980–1989: hard communist propaganda."[9]

Oprea's observations largely match my own analysis. In the early 1960s, although the decade was marked by the publication of Decree 770, which banned abortions, the magazine still had a 'Western' allure; its content was only slightly politicised, and the images published enjoyed an almost erotic appeal. However, as Oprea suggests,

> *while Femeia's content and design were cosmopolitan, the model of the 'Eternal Feminine' it promoted was quite paradoxical. On the one hand, in line with the official discourse, there was a modern call for emancipation and equality with men […]. On the other hand, the way the women were represented remained very close to the traditional values associated with femininity, like intimacy, concern about the way they look, being a support for men.*[10]

In the mid-1970s, the content of the magazine became visibly politicised, focusing on women's status in the domestic sphere and their reformed political role. Permanent sections in the magazine read: "Promoting women is not a favour, but a right", "The pages of young women", "Ethics and life", "Family today", "The woman and the home", "Strategies for domestic work", "Women around the globe" and several pages of fashion, as well as cooking recipes and crocheting patterns for the leisure time. Pictures become predominantly black and white, usually in very low quality, and their focus more domestic and gloomier (ironically, a more accurate representation of the reality of daily life). Although the tone of the coverage was obviously

[9] Oprea, Denisa-Adriana. 2015. Between the heroine mother and the absent woman: Motherhood and womanhood in the Communist magazine *Femeia*. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 23(3), 281-296, 285.
[10] Oprea, *Between the heroine mother*, 287.

propagandistic and politicised, the stories of 'real' women brought it closer to the public and encouraged the readers to identify themselves with those women.

The iconography of the new woman was disseminated through success stories of faultless, hard-working heroines presented in the pages of *Femeia*. These stories often seemed fictionalised, as if their protagonists were not even real individuals. In fact, many of the stories or "Letters from our readers" were invented or embellished by the editors in line with the propaganda requirements, which makes it very difficult for the researcher to distinguish between language and meta-language. Even if *Femeia* always struggled to publish reports about successful women who met the requirements of the Party (good workers, perfect mothers and wives) and presented them with full names and photos, the stories and the characters were so faultless that they seemed fictionalised. The trajectories were always the same: working in the factory, at the bottom of the hierarchy, from an early age, making their way up through honest and diligent work. Consequently, presenting successful stories failed somehow to portray individuals, but rather potentialities: this Viorica or Maria might be anyone who reads it. By failing to individualise persons, these stories only added to the perceived anonymity of women during Communism. Visual representations of women in the pages of *Femeia* also seemed to contribute to this overall inconspicuousness of women: we see either women who looked dull and common, usually in black and white photographs, or simply drawings, sketches, or pictures of statues, representing the *Feminine Eerie*.

In Figure 1 below on the cover of the magazine, in 1966, we have a typical allegory of women's roles in society. This type of graphical representation[11] is quite common in magazines and suggests a preference for a neutral depiction of women, endorsing the idea that what they do is more important than who they are.

Figure 1

Source: *Femeia*, June,1966, front cover.

[11] Unfortunately, we have no information on the author of this image. In fact, this was very common at the time; many articles have no clear authorship, sometimes a name is mentioned on the bottom of the page, with no other information.

All the four women represented here are busy, oriented towards the others (the child, the object of work, the work environment); subtle differences between characters suggest their social and occupational status through their outfits and hairstyles: mother, care-taker, agricultural worker, industrial/lab worker, and weaver in a factory. In fact, this epitomises one of the benchmarks of women's representations in the Communist media: their anonymity. Women were spoken of as either "the millions of women in our country" or with the singular but generalisable 'the woman' (*Femeia*); in pictures, they appear in groups, in similar factory outfits, or in a domestic background, doing what millions of other women do in comparable environments. Jill Massino argues that while "depersonalising the individual is a trademark of totalitarian art, in order to minimise individual differences and hide social, racial and/or sexual inequalities", the communist woman is represented as rather an "allegory with abstract qualities than a live being."[12] Moreover, she suggests that women were invisible both as workers and as mothers, while there was only one woman who focused the entire visibility: the leader's wife, Elena Ceauşescu, who, starting from the early 1970s, became a regular presence in the pages of the magazine. In a cynical manner, women's inconspicuousness in visual representations relates to the status of real women, "helpless victims of socialist policies"[13] and never citizens with their own subjectivity and agency. As Libora Oates-Indruchova emphasises, "[W]omen are not agenda-setting participants in building socialism, they are the auxiliary other of 'society', helping to implement an agenda they did not set."[14]

True to its propagandistic role, *Femeia* presented the image of a woman of many qualities and huge energy, all in the service of the Party: "a hard-working, almost asexual activist, for whom the man is just a comrade and marriage only a framework within which she performs her main duties towards the Party. For this ideal comrade, love, pleasure, and fashion are just capitalist lures, as her entire being is dedicated to one goal only: building the communist society."[15] Communist propaganda did not bother to clarify its ambiguities regarding women: attractiveness without eroticism, political participation without agency, work without individual gratification, beauty without self-esteem, and emancipation without empowerment. In the pages of *Femeia*, women smile, tired but happy, in pictures with their children (especially in the 1970s) or at their workplace, in work outfits, with dirty hands and faces. They never complain, never feel overwhelmed, and always express their deep gratitude to the Party and its leader for providing the conditions for their new lives.

> *Pictures of women in hard hats, women technicians, and women doctors supported the illusion that women in the communist countries had, indeed, been liberated. Yet, rather than experiencing complete emancipation, communist women were forced into pseudo-emancipation mainly because their labour was needed for communist industrial development*[16].

[12] Massino, *Engendering socialism*, 7.
[13] Massino, *Engendering socialism,* 21.
[14] Oates-Indruchová, Libora. 2012. The beauty and the loser: Cultural representations of gender in late state socialism. *Signs* 37(2), 357-383, 364.
[15] Oprea, *Between the heroine mother*, 285.
[16] LaFont, *One step forward, two steps back*, 205.

What the magazine never wrote, while showing women fulfilling their multiple roles, was just how difficult and exhausting real life was for women in trying to deal with the so-called 'triple burden' (motherhood, employment, and social duties).

Working Mothers

Undoubtedly, women were to play an important part in the new social and political order, and the corresponding ideological scripts would require them to fulfil a complex set of roles as Communist citizens. The very concept of work was reconfigured by the propaganda. "Work has become an honorary duty of each citizen."[17] Despite its powerful rhetoric and message, this official egalitarian discourse only added to the "ideological and political incoherencies of the communist power concerning women's social status"[18], as Heinen suggested. According to propaganda, socialism entails a new revolution in gender relations, one, however, not based on woman's "sexual liberation", but on "that true and authentic love, that kind of respect that a man and a woman owe each other as human beings, especially since their status in society does not force anymore either of them to support or accept the false values of femininity and virility."[19] The new sexual revolution will undress the two sexes of the coat of gender, inserting them into a new social, political, and moral order in which "the false values of femininity and virility"[20] will become utterly irrelevant. However, when it came to challenging traditional male professions, gender ideology stepped in to put women in their place and direct them towards feminised - usually poorly paid – sectors of the economy: "There are some particular professions (education, taking care of the ill, as well as painstaking jobs that require patience, perseverance, attention) which are more adequate for the physical, psychical and nervous structure of women", argues Dr Ana Koppich, at the Institute for Work Hygiene and Protection.[21] This was officialised in the late 1970s in a classified list of jobs recommended for women.[22] Still, most women were excluded from jobs that required physical work or night shifts that would impede on their role as mothers, for instance. Also, traditional male domains (the army, the navy, and the mining industry) remained mostly opaque to female presence despite their best efforts. The image of the tractor-driving woman of the 1950s persisted as a myth of their equality with men. Decades later, women were indeed more educated and specialised and more present in the workforce, but somewhat guided towards feminised domains (textile industry, education, intellectual jobs).

The caricature in Figure 2 apparently mocks this situation, by stating: "Factory with 10 000 women workers seeks urgently a MAN as director" and showing a lot of possible candidates, all endowed with the symbols of their qualification for the job: the leather suitcase and the hat.

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[17] *Femeia*, September, 1965, 5.

[18] Heinen, Jacqueline. 1997. Public/private: Gender-social and political citizenship in Eastern Europe. *Theory and Society* 26, 577-597, 579.

[19] Buzatu, Stana. 1979. *Condiția femeii, dimensiune a progresului contemporan* [*Woman's status, dimension of contemporary progress*]. Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 252.

[20] Teampău, Petruţa. 2011. The Romanian red body: Gender, ideology and propaganda in the construction of the "new man". *Etnologia Balkanica* 15, 207-225, 212-213.

[21] *Femeia*, November, 1965, 1.

[22] Jinga, M. Luciana. 2015. *Gen şi reprezentare în România Comunistă: femeile în cadrul Partidului Comunist Român: 1944-1989* [*Gender and representation in Communist Romania: women in the Romanian Communist Party: 1944-1989*]. Bucureşti: Polirom, 329, Annex V.

Whether or not the caricature had a moralising intent, the fact that the message is conveyed as a joke seems to rather describe than criticise the existing situation.

Figure 2

Source: *Femeia*, March, 1979, 15.

Moreover, the drawing was published on the bottom corner of the page, with no author, no context and no connection to the article featured on that page. However, it matches the tone of other coverages that apparently criticised the situation but failed to have an impact or make a real change. From time to time, some articles had a moralising tone, seeking to expose situations of discrimination or injustice (for instance, women's unfavourable employment, domestic violence, imbalance of household choirs, etc.), paying lip service to the magazine's progressive and educational mission.

During the Communist regime, for many women, paid employment represented the promise of a better life and a new identity, along with other more visible improvements. In fact, work signified an important component of women's gender identity and citizenship.[23] Massino points out that "work offered women alternative identities as workers, agitators, and equal socialist citizens, and thus new ways of imagining their lives."[24] All these new identities and lifestyles had to be advertised, discursively and visually, through mass media, and *Femeia* led the way. From a certain perspective, women in Communist Romania seemed to enjoy many Western feminist dreams: access to free education and any kind of job, state support for childcare, political implications, freedom from strict family oppression, etc. This accounts for the ongoing debate in the literature on whether women in the Communist bloc were really emancipated.[25] Ghodsee and Mead make a relevant point in their discussion: "Although the socialist state never fully eradicated patriarchy in the home, or explicitly dealt with issues of sexual harassment or domestic violence, it did strive to provide […] some semblance of social security, economic stability, and work-life balance for its citizens."[26] Adding to the inherent inconsistencies of the official propaganda about women, we get a complicated image of the status of women in Communist Romania.

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[23] Bucur, Maria and Mihaela Miroiu. 2019. *Naşterea cetăţeniei democratice. Femeile şi puterea în România modernă* [*Birth of democratic citizenship. Women and power in modern Romania*]. Bucureşti: Humanitas.
[24] Penn, Shana and Jill Massino. (eds.). 2009. *Gender politics and everyday life in state socialist Eastern and Central Europe*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 30.
[25] Miroiu, Mihaela. 2007. Communism was a state patriarchy, not state feminism. *Aspasia* 1, 197-201.
[26] Ghodsee, R. Kristen and Julia Mead. 2018. What has socialism ever done for women?. *Catalyst* 2(2),101-133, 131.

"Professor, wife and mother" is the description of the image below, a typical portrait of a woman fulfilling all her duties equally and joyfully.

Figure 3

Source: *Femeia*, March, 1974, 9.

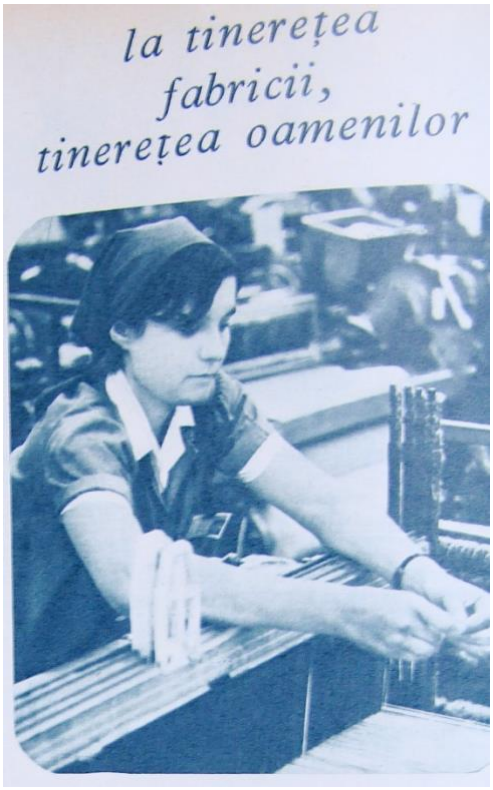
The middle-aged woman in a white coat, with a simple hairstyle and no make-up, absorbed by the reading of the books in front of her, is first presented by her profession/career and then by her gender roles of wife and mother. Even if the order of the labels might suggest she is a career woman first, the overarching message is that the three roles are equally important (to her and to society) and that she would not be one without the others. The woman is, in fact, Professor Felicia Cornea, Prorector of the University of Bucharest. In an interview by Aneta Dumitriu, titled "Woman of the present time", she argues that "a woman should be more sober-minded and wiser, even than she really is in real life. And terribly lucid, always in self-control. Nothing should, however, take away from her warmth. Because, above anything, this is a woman's greatest advantage."[27] In other words, regardless of her having a career, a woman must keep her traditional features of femininity.

One might claim that the young working women did enjoy a sort of liberation from their parental families. Attracted to the city by the mirage of employment, living independently in dormitories with other girls, meeting boys and being able to choose a future companion without the pressure of the family – these factors gave the girls a feeling of emancipation, of having their fate in their

[27] *Femeia*, March 1974, 9.

hands: ""just imagine how important it is for my life, a young girl from the countryside, the possibility of learning a profession and of working in a modern factory." A young girl is quoted in reportage by Elisabeta Moraru, titled: "Do you love your profession?"[28] Also, earning a living on their own, apart from the strict medium of the traditional family back in the village, was a new experience: "It is a great happiness to have a job, to be independent materially."[29] These young girls had new hopes and new priorities: "First, your own way in life, a dignified job, and your own money, and only afterwards 'the great love'. Only afterwards, marriage."[30] However, social pressure and the patriarchal mentality eventually forced most young women to blend in and conform: marry and have children.

Figure 4



Source: *Femeia*, February,1973, 6.

Young, beautiful, joyful women are often portrayed at their workplace in a factory, together with other colleagues, enjoying what they do. The image above (Figure 4) is a picture of Lidia Banteș, a young weaver of only 19 years old, working in one of the biggest textile factories in the country, in Giurgiu. She is displayed here as an example of hard and skilful work but also a symbol of the regime's vigour and enthusiasm. We read in the accompanying article that the average age of workers is less than 20 years old. The caption, "human youth for the factory youth", implies that the Communist regime has opened new opportunities for young people, especially women, and it is thriving on their vitality and willingness to be up to the task. The woman in the image, very

[28] *Femeia*, May, 1969, 3.
[29] *Femeia*, May, 1969, 3.
[30] *Femeia*, July, 1977, 6.

young, performs a typical job for many young girls: repetitive work that requires diligence and attention to detail. Based on her own work on the GDR, Dölling's observation applies to the current analysis also:

> *Many photographs show women performing the same work, one after another in apparently endless rows on assembly lines and at check-out counters, identical in postures and in movements and individually interchangeable. […] Men have special assignments and abilities, and the photographs seem to say men are not immediately replaceable or interchangeable.*[31]

This supports my argument that women are represented as a collective being, and not as independent characters, with specific interests and lives. In the factories, they represent "the masses of workers", and even when they have a specific job, they are just one of the many women doing the same job. Moreover, in any picture with a man and several women, the man usually explains or commands something, teaching and guiding women as the ultimate representation of authority and expertise.

Figure 5

Source: *Femeia*, November, 1972, 8.

In Figure 5 above, we see a man who supervises, from behind, the work of many young, tired workers with typical outfits and head covers that suggest unfavourable working conditions in a factory. The caption notices this aspect but without further elaboration or explicit critique: "Working in the factory, in an electrical device section. 100% women. But the foreman is a man". Whether or not this was an intentional critique is rather difficult to assess, as we have no knowledge of the possible consequences of this 'exposure.' Efforts were indeed made to showcase women who managed to make it to the top of the hierarchy in different leadership positions or in politics. But they remained exceptions.

[31] Dölling, *But the pictures stay the same*, 285.

These kinds of images accurately represent the reality of many factories where most workers were women, and the lead workers and foremen were always men. Luciana M. Jinga makes a convincing case, based on official statistics, when she claims that "by 1977, at national level, women represented less than 10% of foremen and technicians, including in the textile industry", where women were a majority.[32] Even President Ceauşescu himself noticed, in a public speech in 1980: "It is utterly unjust that in factories where women represent 90% of the staff, the directors and leaders should be almost all of them men!"[33] There were several compounding factors in these situations: women were encouraged to join the workforce, but most vocational schools were not really eager to have them enrolled, so they arrived at the workplace in a lower position, with minimum education and, consequently, lower incomes. It was extremely difficult for them to climb the hierarchical ladder as young workers, and later, after starting a family and birthing three to four children, it was quite impossible.

Family Life

With the criminalisation of abortion in 1966, "women's public identity was reformulated: motherhood, like work, became a civic duty and women were evaluated according to their productive as well as reproductive output."[34] Pictures of women with at least one child, even breastfeeding or sometimes overseeing children's homework, show women doing an important part of their gender roles: motherhood and wifehood. Men are rarely present in these pictures or appear as a kind of occasional guest. Every single story or coverage of women's works must also include their private lives, where children are mandatory.

The proud worker was, from now on, a working mother, and maternity took over the public role of women. Even when women speak about their work, they use maternal references: "I am like a mother to my younger co-workers/subordinates." Maternity became compulsory in the last decades of the Communist regime for the greatest good of the woman and society alike:

> *After a pregnancy, the body of a woman works on a superior level, the woman-mother possessing both spiritual and physical greater powers. And since active participation in the entire complexity of socio-economical life is characteristic to a modern woman, maternity is absolutely necessary for perfecting a woman,*[35]

argues Dr Dan Alexandrescu, gynaecologist, in an interview by A. Costin titled "Biological perfection through motherhood." After all, "without sun, flowers do not bloom, without love there is no happiness, without children, life is dull, empty, like a garden after drought. Everything that means beauty in life comes from sunshine and mother's milk."[36]

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[32] Jinga, *Gen şi reprezentare în România Comunistă*, 237.
[33] Jinga, *Gen şi reprezentare în România Comunistă*, 239.
[34] Penn and Massino, *Gender politics and everyday life*, 19.
[35] *Femeia*, October, 1966, 9.
[36] *Femeia*, September,1966, 9. "Motherhood", a reportage by Tania Tudose and Elisabeta Moraru.

Figure 6

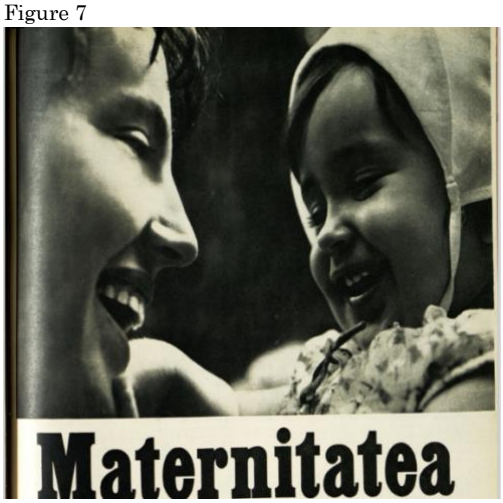
Source: *Femeia,* January, 1967, 14.

In the image above, we see a staged family picture of a heroine mother, Sofia Melinte. Younger and older siblings, as well as some grandchildren, each dressed according to their social status (pupil, intellectual, Militia officer, etc.), signifying their success in life. In an interview Elisabeta Moraru, the mother of ten, proudly states: "They are all mine". She lives in the countryside and has managed to turn all her offspring into useful members of society. The image is centred around the presence of the mother, in the middle. We learn from the article that she is a widow. She becomes a symbol of motherhood that prevails through all of life's hardships, alone, managing not only to give birth to ten children but also raising each of them to be a valuable Communist citizen. She remains an anchor of the family and a moral standard and example for her children and their new families.

With the same tenacity required in factory-work, women were encouraged to 'produce' children, as many as possible, glorified through the bestowing of the title of "Heroine mother" for women with more than ten children. Starting with 1966, almost all images of women include at least one child, and women are represented with a motherly attitude: warm, caring and protective. The joy of being a mother shimmers through in all the pictures of women with children.

Figure 7, below, captioned simply: "maternity", depicts the visual language of a blissful and gratifying bond between mother and child; both smile happily, without worries, no sign of tiredness or sleep deprivation of the young mother.

Figure 7



Source: *Femeia*, September, 1966, 5.

Figure 8

Source: *Femeia*, August, 1966, 25.

Figure 8 displays the ideal family, reconfigured as the space for producing, raising, and educating children for the greater good of the nation. In the image, we see the oversized face of a man, represented as an authoritative (protective?) figure presiding over the family, consisting of a woman and her children: a boy and a girl – the ideal situation. Under the title "The family and the patriotic education of the child," the text accompanying the picture actually states that one of the most crucial duties of women, as mothers and educators, is to teach their children to be good patriots and sacrifice their lives for Communist ideals. Even if 'the family' is mentioned in the title, the message is addressed exclusively to women in their roles as educators and caregivers.

Figure 9

Source: *Femeia*, September, 1969, 6.

In most images depicting families, mothers have a domestic outfit (apron), and fathers have a suit as if they have just arrived from work (outside the home). A good illustration is Figure 9. Under the title "Life in two", we see a modern family man, divided between his office job (symbolised by the outfit and the suitcase) and his home duties (the child, the milk bottle, the duster), while the woman is positioned behind him, beautiful, elegant, in a rather supportive posture, as if she would say: "I've got you, I am right behind you." Both the man and the woman are young and good-looking, a couple just at the start of their family life, trying to figure out how to divide domestic chores. The image accompanies a text by Geta Dan Spinoiu (psychologist) and Elisabeta Moraru, who interpret and comment on the results of a short questionnaire on "the equality of the couple." People wrote to the magazine answering questions about the spouses' roles in a family. There appear to be slight changes in how men see their roles in a household beyond being the head of the family: they start helping their wives with domestic chores and the children's education. Having being asked: "Do you help your wife? How?" out of 182 respondents, 143 help with the groceries, 118 with cleaning, 87 with cooking, and 69 with dish-washing. The article mentions that four years before only 29% of men helped their wives. However, these are the results of a self-administered questionnaire, and we might expect some degree of social desirability.

A few images try to broach the subject of men helping around the house, but again, unconvincingly. In real life, most women remained burdened with their gender role of care-taker

and mother. The topic of the sexual division of domestic labour is only timidly approached, mostly through jokes, caricatures, small ironies, innuendos, and such. Sometimes women are expected to 'educate' their husbands into being more cooperative, but they rarely have the open support of the regime.

Figure 10

Source: *Femeia*, May 1973, 26.

Figure 10 explicitly advises women: "Accept the help of others! We suggest changes in the work division in the household, for the sake of women's time, with effects on the education of children and … husbands." The text above implies that it was women who were reluctant to 'accept' the help offered by the family. However, there are no realistic instructions on how to change things around the house in a traditionally patriarchal culture, where most men are expected to be served and nurtured by women. When things improved in the household, it was probably the result of a lucky partnership. Otherwise, women accepted their inherent duties of cooking, cleaning, and caring for their family members. And even took pride in it. When images depict men and boys, sometimes with matching aprons, *helping out* the woman (as in Figure 10), they seem out of place, infantilised, and clumsy. Overall, women are presented performing their 'natural' roles as homemakers, mothers, cooks, shoppers (staying in long exhausting queues), homework supervisors, etc. – always with ease and joy and a smile on their faces. Commercials presented in *Femeia* (discussed below) contribute to depicting women's chores as easy and fun (of course, with the help of the vacuum cleaner or cooking machine advertised).

Women as Consumers

Advertisements are a special category of visual representations of women when using either female models or just some sketches. Women were addressed in their specific capacity as housewives and homemakers when it came to products such as vacuum cleaners, washing

machines, and washing products. These products were intended to make 'women's work' easier, thus reinforcing the idea of 'women's work'. The purpose was to advertise the easy and well-to-do life of working-class, 'normal' people enjoying the comfort of their new lives – courtesy of the Communist Party. With the right appliances, women's work is not really work but relaxation.

Figure 11

Source: *Femeia*, October, 1969, 35.

The text on the picture (Figure 11), a commercial for a washing powder, says: "A woman's dream: easy washing, for a sparkling white." Dressed as a bride, the woman in the image holds a traditional embroidered towel. One possible reading is that she is a newlywed young woman, just taking on her new duties as a good wife, in this case, the laundry. But she seems delighted both at the easiness of the task (with the right products) and the joy of fulfilling it. Another reading might be that she inherited the traditional towel from her mother/grandmother (as many women did) and managed to preserve its original colours with the washing powder. In other words, passing down traditional wisdom but also the burden of women's roles in the family.

In the fashion pages, the magazine presented the image of an elegant, well-dressed woman, looking completely different from real women, who were compelled to sew their own dresses or knit and crochet for themselves and their children. The most fashionable ones would buy one-of-a-kind clothes from *Consignatia* or different outlets for artists, but most women wore plain, modest, uniform clothes. "While preaching modesty in personal appearance, the socialist regimes were fascinated by an elitist, haute couture type of dress. The elitism and exclusivity that lies at the core of high fashion suited the high-minded aspirations of totalitarian ideology."[37] Fashion pages in *Femeia* display an additional gap between women in real life and the propaganda ideal. The commercials reinforce the idea that women's works are not that hard, and the regime is trying to help by providing the modern appliances (as if replacing the almost non-existing help from the male partners). Most advertisements have in common the idea of saving time on domestic choirs, time that women might otherwise use to spend with their families or read to improve their knowledge on different topics.

[37] Bartlett, Djurdja. 2010. *FashionEast: The spectre that haunted socialism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 10.

Figure 12

Source: *Femeia*, December, 1969, 46.

In Figure 12, we see a drawing of a young and gracious woman, resembling a ballerina, taking a bow to the qualities of a new stove that is "economical, modern and enduring." The woman is, in fact, a housemaker, as symbolised by the apron and headscarf, but one with an attractive figure: we see a bit of cleavage and a bit of underwear, as well as the high heels and the mini-skirt. It is an unusual outfit for a housemaker, but this suggests again the easiness of domestic chores and the extra time women can invest in taking care of themselves.

In the early 1960s, the pages of *Femeia* presented young workers as beautiful, attractive, and self-aware women. Jill Massino called this trend "the glamorization of the female labourer": "Like the cosmetics and fashionable dresses advertised in department stores and magazines, the glamorous, modern worker signified progress without sacrifice."[38] One might add that this 'glamorization' is also related to the fetishisation of youth: these young, fresh, beautiful feminine faces and figures are synonymous with the young, promising and vigorous Communist regime.

[38] Penn and Massino, *Gender politics and everyday life,* 19.

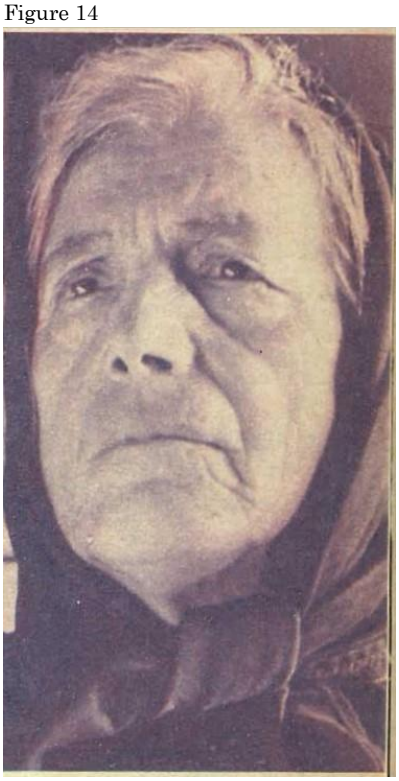
Figure 13

Source: *Femeia*, August, 1965, cover.

Figure 13 epitomises working-class glamour; we see a beautiful, young, smiling woman in full makeup (red lips, fake eyelashes) working in a weaving factory. Her modest factory outfit and the headband, however, remind the reader that she is just one of the 70 per cent of employed women working in similar conditions. However, the make-up, the smile, and the young age – all emphasise the message that women are happy with their condition and will not surrender their traditional markers of femininity and attractiveness.

This glorification of youth could, probably, explain the absence of images of elder women in the pages of the magazine. Since the magazine addresses mainly productive women – those who participate in the workforce and are also mothers and wives, it goes without saying that elder women are not in focus. When they are, they signify a life well-lived, full of work, usually for the benefit of others, and with many children and grandchildren.

Figure 14



Source: *Femeia* January. 1979, 9.

Figure 14 portrays an old woman, probably from the countryside (judging by the head cover); her gaze and posture symbolise hard work and determination but also wisdom and tradition. After all, this image illustrates an article titled: "Mother's image in the people's consciousness." We read here that mothers are supposed to symbolise sacrifice, devotion, and hard work. Moreover, peasant women represented something crucial for the Communist imagery of women: "the traditional connection between sufferance, sacrifice and woman's identity."[39]

Conclusion

Overall, the purpose of *Femeia* was to serve as propaganda in educating and 'civilising' women, clearly framing their place in the new socialist order and helping them comply with new identities and roles. At the beginning of the Communist regime, most women in Romania (up to 70%) were illiterate (with visible differences between rural and urban contexts).[40] This justified the enormous effort of the Communist regime to educate, socialise and employ these women (under the discursive label of women's emancipation). This effort was supported by intense propaganda through text, speech, and images, and *Femeia* was a key element in this process. We could speculate that images and pictures might have also had a direct impact on illiterate women, but, in fact, the magazine was widely read in factories where most employed women also had the chance to improve their education.

[39] Massino, *Engendering socialism,* 11.
[40] Jinga, *Gen şi reprezentare în România Comunista*, 222.

Even if it would be almost impossible to assess the impact of the magazine on real women, we suggest that there was one. For decades, *Femeia* was the only magazine addressed to women, and its distribution (as with any other items of the socialist market) was controlled. Visually, by today's standards, the magazine was rather chaotic, a mix of colours, messages, fonts, and graphics (but we must also consider the limited technical possibilities of the time). The low quality of the print, fading colours, small fonts and bad images make analysis very difficult. Also, a possible limitation of the research is the difficulty of assessing the real impact of censorship, observing strict rules of representation (some of them implicit), and respecting the socialist canon of addressing the 'woman's issue.' Moreover, we have almost no information on the authorship of pictures and sometimes even texts. All things considered, the magazine represents an invaluable source of data about how propaganda viewed women and, to a smaller degree, about how women responded to it. In my analysis, I have exposed the duplicity and complexity of the Communist propaganda regarding women, both in discourse and visual representations; this duplicity might as well account for the intricate way in which women assessed their own status: deeply critical of the regime for their lack of freedoms and for their hard lives, but also profoundly proud of their work, professional identities, families, and personal achievements.[41] However, while the visual representations of women in *Femeia* were marked by the anonymity and uniformisation typical to an authoritarian regime, and while we do know that most of these pictures were orchestrated and pre-arranged to respond to specific propaganda requirements, they still represent a unique insight into the real (not just ideological) life of women who lived and worked under the Communist regime.

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[41] For a more thorough discussion, see Teampău, Petruţa. 2022. *Mothers and daughters in post-Communist Romania: Bridging the generational gap*, in *Perspectives on gender in Romania*, edited by Sabau, Claudia Septimia and Oana Ramona Ilovan. Cluj: PUC, 121-144.

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