

DE-CONSTRUCTING COMMUNIST ROMANIA'S PRO-FEMINIST DISCOURSE. WOMEN'S STATUS AS REFLECTED IN THE *FEMEIA* COMMUNIST MAGAZINE

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Abstract In communist Romania, the official discourse of the state would stretch over all fields of activity irrespective of their contiguity to or remoteness from the leading committees. Women magazines enrol in this general orientation and become insidious voices of communist propaganda spreading with little concern for women, their supposedly main interest, but with much solicitude for the communist party's ideology. The present article demonstrates that the pretended communist concernment for women's rights and equality is a mere cover for the praise of the communist leaders of the country and of the communist party. The 'big story' narrative subversively turns from a construct meant to eulogize women's bravery and determination into a glorification of communism. Discourse is shrewdly used to disconnect readers from reality in what may be considered the creation of a communist utopia in discourse.

Keywords Language practice, feminism, communist propaganda, 'big story' narrative template.

I. Introduction

The present study aims to identify the major discursive strategies taken up by the *Femeia* (The Woman) magazine issued in the 70s and 80s with a major interest in how the communist discourse would reflect the status of Romanian women in the small national and larger international context. The corpus is formed of 7 magazines issued in 1971, 1973, 1976, 1977, 1980, 1983, and 1988 and the method applied to analyse the pro-feminist communist magazines is Critical Discourse Analysis,¹ as it is majorly calibrated for the identification of

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¹ Ruth Wodak, Bernd Matou emphasize the necessity for the analysis of both discourse and context for the disclosure of the political ideology. Ruth Wodak, Bernd Matou (1993) "We are dealing with people

ideological underlying elements in the political discourse. For the reason that all issues in the corpus have sections that are recurrent, they would become the major provider of communist discourse directed at women. Still, there are sections that appear in certain issues and that stand as an indicator that the communist propaganda had a certain number of favourite topics that would not be left out of women's magazines, as well as a number of topics that could be used whenever necessary. As my interest lies with the identification of the discursive strategies taken up in the communist *Femeia* magazine, both major and minor topics will be exploited considering the more encompassing perspective on the discourse constructed by the Romanian communists and directed at the Romanian women.

II. Study Background

The Romanians' nostalgia for communism may seem like a paradox,² given the extensive documentary work that has highlighted the criminal leadership³ of a country that succeeded in eliminating its most important opponents in atrocious imprisonment conditions. Still, two polls carried out in 2014⁴ and 2021⁵ (7 years apart), 25 and respectively 32 years after the anti-communist revolution of 1989, indicate that the Romanians believe that their lives are currently worse than when they lived under communism,⁶ even if some of the respondents were too young (or had not yet been born) to remember the advantages of living in communism. Some blame the current political leaders for their inability and disregard for the country's prosperity, but I hypothesize that the issue may be deeper than the Romanians'

whose origins one can clearly tell just by looking: Critical discourse analysis and the study of neo-racism in contemporary Austria," *Discourse & Society* 4(2), 225–248, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002005>.

² This paradox may actually be explained by the concept of 'habituation' (Fowler, 1996, 12) which stands for the practice of not critically analysing the social message.

³ Claudia Florentina Dobre *Martore fără voie. Fostele deținute politic și memoria comunismului în România* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2021).

⁴ The results of a market research carried out by INSCOP in 2014 which intended to measure Romanians' satisfaction in so far as the progress of their country is concerned compared to 1989. The content was downloaded on August 20th, 2022, from https://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/INSCOP-Dec.2014.-Acum-vs.-Atunci1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2roedVB__aTRfCfymKFCQP8FjHO_b2zOfSys2TaAir6-bVQBpxFijbbs

⁵ This is a replica of the market research carried out in 2014 which intends to measure any differences or similarities in the way Romanians interpret the actual situation of the country. The content was downloaded on August 20th, 2022, from <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/rom%C3%A2nii-tot-mai-nostalgici-dup%C4%83-comunism-cre%C8%99tere-de-20-%C3%AEen-7-ani-care-sunt-motivele-/31463617.html>.

⁶ Bogdan Iacob, "The Romanian Communist Past and the Entrapment of Polemics," *Remembrance, History and Justice* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 441. The author asserts that the Romanian population adhered to the communist 'imaginary' to which it contributed either directly or indirectly by avoiding participation. Content downloaded on Sun, 14 Aug 2022.

mere dissatisfaction towards the political management of their country. I contemplate the possibility that the cohesiveness of the communist discourse, though inflexible, repetitive, lacking creativity, replete with wooden language elements and the intentional levelling of social classes (at least at the declarative level) might have made the Romanians feel that they were part of a country that 'cared' about each of them, regardless of how poor or how ignorant they were. The valorisation of the poor, illiterate layer of the society, the astute polarisation between the educated and the illiterate who, by starting from the very bottom, could in fact climb high on the social ladder, the criminalisation of the burghers could indeed satisfy a large part of the Romanian population who felt that their destiny thus changed and that communism had given them a chance they would not otherwise have. Moreover, the public discourse avoided segregating the intellectuals from the workers and the direct consequence of this bringing together of people with different educational backgrounds was an illusory levelling of the society.

a. Communism and Feminism

A case in point is the trendy topic of feminism about which the totalitarian regime believed to have been solved in Romania, unlike the western democracies where progress in this respect was slow or inexistent. It is thus natural to wonder why the 'capitalist' west was unable, in the opinion of the communists, to solve the issue of feminism, which proved to be an easy task for the Romanian communism. I conjecture that the 'hot' issue of feminism was *deceptively* solved by the Romanian communism in a twofold strategy that would intertwine to the point of erasing the ideological connection between them. The first element that communism used in order to deal with the issue of feminism was the inclusive, levelling⁷ discourse, whose main purpose was to create the impression that the communist leadership of the country treats men and women equally, that it creates equal opportunities for career development for both men and women, that it trains women in fields that had previously been considered masculine, that it offers non-discriminatory payment to men and women. The second element was the implicit ideological comparison between capitalist regimes, unable to remedy a centuries-old social injustice towards women, and communism, which succeeded where the others had unparadonably failed.

The means by which the society at large was impregnated with the communist propaganda were primarily the magazines, the television, and the radio, which were under strict political control and which were meant to spread the principles of the communist ideology. If the television and the radio broadcast time was reduced, a succinct retrospect of the magazines issued in Romania in the communist period shows that there is a plethora of them addressing various social categories. The pro-feminist discourse embraced and

⁷ Bogdan Iacob, "The Romanian Communist Past and the Entrapment of Polemics," *Remembrance, History and Justice* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011), 428.

proliferated by official mass-media outposts⁸ like *Femeia* (The Woman), 'Săteanca' (The she-Villager), and 'Cosmetica - Știință, Artă, Fumusețe' (Cosmetics – Science, Art, Beauty)⁹ abounded in examples of 'successful women' who were meant to function as models for the entire society. In fact, these magazines, alongside others dedicated to other social categories, were actively creating an identity¹⁰ for the communist party in Romania and, surely, women were not a category to be overlooked. The identity that communism needed was created by the *templated discourse* that functioned by slowly compelling the target audience to adjust to the propagandistic communist discourse.

By the cohesiveness of the communist pro-feminist discourse I envisage the fact that women were given a voice in a number of magazines where they were addressed as complete human beings in their daily roles of women, wives, mothers, and active members of the society. It is obvious now that the cohesiveness was the result of rough censorship, of an attentive selection of the materials that were allowed to enter each issue, to the purpose of creating the cohesiveness that the regime badly needed, but the readers targeted by the magazines would not be aware of any of the propagandistic means that made their way into the articles. Women are idealized, and no ordinary woman would be included in the women's magazines unless she achieved something that exceeded normality. Irrespective of one's position, every woman that appeared in the magazine had accomplished extraordinary deeds - not alone, but with the help of the other members of the society, which emphasizes the type of society that communism wanted to create. A strong argument that supported the equal treatment of men and women was the fact that the president's wife, Elena Ceaușescu, had equal power in the state, boasting a productive academic career. Another important contributor to the success of the pro-feminist communist discourse was the stifling pressure put on any voice that might doubt the successes of the regime, of the communist party and of its leader. By silencing any opposition, the communists accused capitalism of failure to protect women, to educate women, to create jobs for women, relying on the fact that capitalism would not silence the voices that disagreed with the mainstream policies of the countries. Any protest, any dissent in capitalist societies would be interpreted in communist Romania as failure and, by way of comparison, a great success for communist Romania, where such situations did not exist.

The pro-feminist communist discourse was a branch purposefully severed from the mainstream communist discourse which played a similar role in the legitimation of the communist regime. As with every political ideology, in the printed discourse, communism

⁸ Régis Debray, "Socialism: A Life-Cycle," *New Left Review* (46, July/ August, 2007). Debray identifies typographers as one of the three pillars that communism was built on, alongside teachers and intellectuals. He mentions the prestige that books, magazines, and newspapers had at the time and how they majorly contributed to the spread of communism.

⁹ Cristian Vasile, "Propaganda and Culture in Romania at the Beginning of the Communist Regime," *Stalinism Revisited* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 369.

¹⁰ Bogdan Iacob, "The Romanian Communist Past and the Entrapment of Polemics," *Remembrance, History and Justice*, 426.

established sociological patterns that functioned on the inclusion/exclusion principle. Any strong woman who faces and rises above hardship was made into a role model for the entire society was welcomed into the big communist family. Any woman who marries¹¹ and bears children was welcomed and supported by the political regime. Atypicality was discouraged and actively avoided: unmarried women or single mothers were completely shunned, as women were officially the nation's breeders, stripped of the power to decide whether or not to keep any unborn baby. Though the state discourse praised women for their courage and determination in the workplace, the state secretly transformed the female body into a commodity that the political regime needed in its competition against the political and ideological opponent: capitalism. A woman is subdued, due to her reproductive system, to a political control which denies women the right to decide for themselves over their bodies and, in spite of the political propaganda, women were treated as second-rate citizens in comparison with men.¹²

For the success of the political regime, the communists needed the support of half the country's population who, in turn, needed to feel useful, productive and held in high esteem by the rest of the society. The valorisation of an important social category that had previously been ignored, not necessarily by the previous political regime of Romania, i.e., the monarchy, but by the whole of Europe, gave the Communists the upper hand in a political conflict whose winner could safely rely on the support of an important social category likely to influence others within their home environments. Idealizing individuals and situations was a common practice in communism and women copying Elena Ceaușescu's model were transformed into extraordinary achievers, which was meant to emphasize women's activism and their contribution to communism propagation.

Either as C.A.P.¹³ managers, countryside school teachers or as county representatives, women were presented as individuals who faced struggles and difficulties that greatly surpassed their initial power, but, under the impact of unexpected events, by the help of the others who potentiate the leaders, by their care for the entire community, by the teachings of the communist party, the female communist leaders overcome adversities.

¹¹ Sorana-Alexandra Constantinescu "How Women Made the News. A Case-Study of Femeia Magazine in Communist Romania under Ceaușescu," *Journal of Media Research* (Cluj: Accent Publisher, 2017), 34. The author emphasizes that both pro-feminist and pro-natality policies were borrowed by the communist party from the former USSR, the model for the Romanian communism.

¹² This decree (no.710) was issued in 1966, October 1st and it was meant to increase the population of the country by outlawing abortion. The decree states that abortion endangers women's health, while the second reason for the decision was the declining birth rate of the country. The decision is available at <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/177>.

¹³ C.A.P. is the acronym for Productive Agricultural Cooperative and it represents the way in which the Communist party organized the land for agriculture.

b. Communism vs. Capitalism in the *Femeia* Magazine

The greatest enemy of communism was deemed to be capitalism,¹⁴ whose most abominable characteristic was the exploitation of the individual by other individuals or by the state¹⁵ and implicitly, by way of comparison, in communism neither the individuals nor the state could or would exploit any one individual. Property is another issue of ideological divergence between the capitalists and the communists and the latter transformed this issue into a major denigrating point against capitalism, while exploitation became an important discursive component in the communist rhetoric glossary of terms used when addressing capitalist topics in magazines. Capitalism is blamed for not giving women equal chances to men who are better paid, are given more opportunities when getting hired, and are fired last. The anti-capitalist and pro-feminist narrative blended in the magazines dedicated to women as the communist woman needed to be informed about the advantages and opportunities she had by living in a communist country, compared to the ones living in capitalist ones. When bringing arguments in favour of the communist regime over the capitalist one, the editors were in the habit of collecting opinions of women enrolled in the communist parties from democratic European or American countries¹⁶ that complain about the little or inexistent help they receive from the local or national authorities, the fact that they are not allowed to train in certain domains or that they are fired before men or their salary is far lower than men's. It is easily noticeable that there is an almost one to one correspondence between the pluses of communism and the minuses of capitalism.

Notwithstanding the rich communist repertoire covers areas of large interest especially when related to politics, I envisage that the pro-feminist discourse constructed by the communist party in Romania provides a significant slice of the communist determination to manipulate large masses of people to the interests of a small clique that by abuse and control influence decisions, stands, lives.

¹⁴ This is one of the major elements identified by Iacob (2011, 424-425) that the communist regime in Romania used to fight against. The list is completed by industrialization, international antagonism, popular community, national millennialism.

¹⁵ Cristian Vasile ("Propaganda and Culture in Romania at the Beginning of the Communist Regime," 370) claims that the communist propaganda reacted to the 'Western ideological offensive' by increasing the number of publications that had as a common denominator the spread of the communist ideology and philosophy.

¹⁶ Iringo Toth Godri "Propaganda, Emancipation and Stalinist Internationalism in Romanian Communist Magazines for Women", Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty, Section: Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences, (Iași: Lumen Publishing House, 2017), 22. The author compares the propagandistic representation of women in Romanian and Hungarian magazines edited in Romania and she identifies a series of common features that are to be found in them, which stands as a sign that the majority of magazines in former communist countries in Europe took as model the soviet magazine dedicated to women.

III. 'Big Story' Narrative

In as far as the register that the communists prefer in the *Femeia* (The Woman) magazine, it is noteworthy that *the biographical narrative* interspersed with interview is favoured when creating portrayals of communist women. The communists create 'big stories'¹⁷ from the life happenings of the woman in the limelight by retrospectively bringing into the audience's attentions events, episodes that are tied together in order to create a unitary life in the service of communism. What is interesting and what is different in the communist approach to this perspective is that the interviewer knows so much about the interviewee, though the latter is no celebrity and had never had her life under public scrutiny. Both the interviewer and the interviewee contribute to the 'big story' as a way of controlling the telling of the story and of choosing the episodes that might have an impact on the audience and consequently, on the creation of the communist discourse on women. Though a farmer, a worker, a teacher, or an academic, each biographical narrative is a big story of a woman that stands out by her dedication, early communist adhesion, fight for women's rights, organisational skills, etc. It is a sublimation of regular women who are epically turned into heroines, into characters that communism was ready to embrace. The method is a means to an end, as it relies on the peak moments of one's life from a social-political perspective in order to create the impression of continuity, of a process that the woman conscientiously pursues in the service of communism.

Of the many cases presented in the *Femeia* magazine, I have chosen the example provided by the 'big story' of a woman whose destiny is the perfect embodiment of how the Romanian communists envisaged communist Romanian women. Her case was published in the 1980 *Femeia* magazine issue,¹⁸ where under the heading '1979 Womanly Yearbook', Alexandrina Găinușe is presented as a typical case of a woman who starts from a modest working class background to climb the professional ladder to the position of county manager and the educational ladder so high as to a post-university degree at the famous Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy. The 'big story' is a priori sketched by the journalist who introduces Alexandrina Găinușe from the initial working position of spinner to that of an activist in the U.T.C.¹⁹; then, she becomes a member of the Communist party, she is a graduate of the Faculty of History, Bucharest University and of the post-university course in Sociology at the Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy. The big story contains resounding achievements which are meant to validate Alexandrina Găinușe's position in the political organization and her being given as a model to the other Romanian women. In this first part, the journalist enumerates all

¹⁷ Michael Bamberg "Biographic-Narrative Research, Quo Vadis? A Critical Review of 'Big Stories' from the Perspective of 'Small Stories'," *Narrative, Memory & Knowledge: Representations, Aesthetics, Contexts* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield, 2006), 64.

¹⁸ Eugen Moraru "În fruntea județului Bacău," *Almanahul Femeia* (1980): 24, at

<https://cameraarhiva.com/2019/10/22/1980-almanah-femeia-bvau/> (accessed on August 9th 2022)

¹⁹ U.T.C. is an acronym which stands for the Uniunea Tineretului Comunist (Communist Youth Trade Union) which was founded in 1922 and which was the youth organization of the Communist Party in Romania.

these achievements and the interviewee is non-participative. The rest of the interview contains only two questions addressed to the interviewee – the first inquires about the interviewee’s feelings upon being appointed general manager of Bacău County and the second question is addressing one of the communists’ favourite topics of women’s equality to men in the communist regime and what is being done about it. By analysing the answers provided by the interviewee to the two questions presented above, there is an important adaptation undergone by the concept of narrative ‘big story’ in communism. Thus, any reader would immediately realize that the questions the interviewee is asked are not meant to collect further data about the interviewee, but the very interviewee is meant to further increase the status, fame and prestige of the communist party and of its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Thus, in the communist vision, the ‘big story’, the portrayal of a valuable woman, as a member of the communist party and a leading figure for her county is only an ‘overture’ to the bigger ‘big story’, which is actually the communist party and its leader. Against this background, the communist preoccupation for the women’s social status, equality to men, their living conditions, the party’s concern for each woman’s well-being is nothing but sheer propaganda since what is truly important is to highlight the great achievements of the communist party and the extraordinary leaders of the country. Alexandrina Găinușe has duties, obligations, and responsibilities to the party and its leaders due to the trust they had placed in her. Moreover, she shows her gratitude for having been given the opportunity to learn from the leaders of the party; all her administrative activity is related to, or a consequence of the twelfth Congress of the Communist Party. Thus, for communism, the care for women is reflected by a permanent adulation of the single party and of its leaders, as well as the simultaneous and successful accomplishment of all tasks in the woman’s triple positioning of learner, wife and mother. A simple graphic representation (see Figure 1 below) of the replies in an interview places a regular ‘big story’ interview – which consists of an orderly question-answer structure in which the answer focuses on the interviewee (I) and their achievements, trajectory, important encounters along the way – in opposition with an interview carried out in the *Femeia* magazine – which begins by the initial enumeration made by the knowledgeable reporter (R) listing the interviewee’s achievements, followed by questions meant to prioritize the party’s achievements, merit, role, etc.

Reporter – Interviewee reply and answer focus in regular interviews	Reporter – Interviewee reply and answer focus in communist interviews in the <i>Femeia</i> magazine
R → I	R → the audience / magazine readers
R ↔ I (speaking about oneself)	R → I -----> (Communist party and its leader)
R ↔ I (speaking about oneself)	R ↔ I -----> (Communist party and its leader)
R ↔ I (speaking about oneself)	R ←

Fig. 1 A comparative representation of ‘big stories’ in capitalist and communist magazines

The deconstruction of Alexandrina Găinușe’s ‘big story’ may shed some light on a troubling question: If Alexandrina Găinușe’s ‘big story’ is not actually about Alexandrina Găinușe, how could the communists claim that the *Femeia* magazine was actually addressed to

women? Was it a women's magazine or the single party's another propagandistic outlet? The author of this piece of research reckons that it was mostly a propagandistic communist magazine and, only to a small extent, a magazine for women. Mostly propagandistic because, regardless of which issue of the magazine is scrutinized, the main focus is placed on the principles, values and beliefs of the Romanian communist party when dealing with issues related to women, such as career, family, health, religion, fashion, etc. The agglomeration of women's stories depicting their achievements curtailed a deeper reading of the magazine's message which, despite it not being written outright, would subliminally be transmitted to all the readers of the magazine: *the party was present in everything*.

IV. The Self-Made Woman Empowered by Communism

The articles in *Femeia* indicate a preference for self-made women who start from inferior, precarious backgrounds, only to ascend in perfect careers and to achieve unparalleled success, thus incarnating a symbol of a society that encourages women to overcome difficulties and to prove their value. The soaring trajectory of such women contests the influence of education, schooling and preparation in their professional / artistic success. Such titles as "Țărăncă devenită pictoriță"²⁰ [Mere peasant turned painter] (*Femeia*, 1988:32) denies education all merits for the artist's success and transfers the merit to the political regime that gave her this opportunity. The focus that is placed on the term "peasant" is meant to show that social class is irrelevant, that a bourgeois background is not necessary for a career. Moreover, the educational background of most women who appear in the magazine is a *template* that indicates a preference for a particular educational path: secondary school attended in the countryside, professional school (2 years), evening high school classes, a low position in a communist factory, faculty (sometimes day classes, sometimes evening classes), and, in some cases, doctoral studies at the Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy,²¹ in relation to which a fruitful research activity is reported. The iconic element that links all of these educational / labour institutions together is "work", a leitmotif of communism which is recurrent in all narratives related to career, career success, determination and obstinacy to meet the objectives of the communist party, which – sometimes by the interviewer, sometimes the by interviewee – are present as both their own and everybody's. Though notorious for their disliking of intellectuals, the Romanian communists blatantly kept in high esteem the "new type of intellectual", one of modest origins and who attended higher schools imbued with the communist ideology. Their preference for this type of intellectuals is evident in all written accounts, magazines included. It is not infrequent to find such headings as "Plămădim un om nou" (We are moulding a new

²⁰ Cristina Bălțeanu "Țărăncă devenită pictoriță," *Almanahul Femeia* (1988): 32.

²¹ This academy was used by the Communist Party to train its cadres for different executive functions in the communist state structure.

man) (*Femeia*, 1977:18),²² which illustrates their intention of breaking away from the past, with its outdated values, and imposing new ones, in accordance with the communist ideology. Given that Romania, immediately after WWII (1946), had a preponderantly and mostly illiterate peasant population (77,2%),²³ the communists relied on this huge reservoir of population for the creation of the new man according to their standards.

Despite it seeming professional to establish goals and to pursue them, the communists' quinquennium transformed into a rush for the accomplishment of what the party had established beforehand. The permanent reference to the quinquennium and to the stipulations in the plan dominated the public discourse and penetrated all fields of activity. With the fulfilment of the quinquennium plan in sight, the discourse in the *Femeia* magazine was adapted to the mission of communism which needed to be fulfilled by both the editors of the magazine and the interviewees that appeared in the magazine.

V. The Innards of the Communist Discourse in the *Femeia* Magazine

The Whorf-Sapir hypothesis²⁴ claims that people from different cultures think differently because they speak different languages, which directly implies that languages shape the way speakers of different languages perceive reality, to the extent of annihilating the individual's freedom of having a personal understanding of the reality decided by the communist's ideologists.²⁵ This hypothesis may help create a clearer representation of how Romanian communists used language to outline the communist ideology, to communicate it to the citizens and to convince Romanian women to buy and read a magazine that was supposedly addressed to them. The suspension of the language's influence on the perception of reality was vital for the communists because otherwise, their control on what their citizens would understand from what happened to and around them would dissolve. In order to promote and share ideology, one needs the language to serve one's goal. In discourse, to suppress the shaping of language may lead to thinking, which stands for an acknowledgement of one's intention of using the language as a means of propagating ideology, and Romanian communism did not refrain from it. Moreover, if the communists' use of the language to spread their ideology is beyond any doubt, the way this was achieved and the quality of the language that they used in persuading the Romanian women on the advantages of living in communist Romania are the aspects that were insufficiently well adapted to their goals.

²² Niki Georgescu "Plămădim un om nou pe meleagurile sălajului," *Almanahul Femeia*, 1977: 18, <https://cameraarhiva.com/2019/10/22/1977-almanah-femeia-bvau/> (accessed on 9 August 2022).

²³ The data are retrieved from INSSE (The National Institute of Statistics). <https://insse.ro/cms/files/evenimente/RoCentenar/ROCentenar.pdf> (accessed on 9 August 2022).

²⁴ John Lucy "Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis," *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behaviour Sciences* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B0080430767030424> (accessed on August 7th, 2022).

²⁵ Jacques Bidet "Communism: Between Philosophy, Prophecy, and Theory," *Actuel Marx*, 2010/2 (No 48): 89-104, <https://doi.org/10.3917/amx.048.0089>.

a. The Exacerbation of Women's Dedication to the Cause(s) of the Communist Party

Women are presented or they present themselves as “fanatic” followers of the party's directives. In their presentation, the magazine journalists characterize them as “deschizătoare de drumuri”²⁶ (a trailblazer), “bună patrioată și activistă” (a good patriot and activist), “sudor de înaltă clasă” (a world-class welder). When presenting women's feelings towards communism and the Communist Party or its leader, they are endowed with deep, noble feelings, showing their gratitude and their sacrificial attitude towards the higher cause of communism. Such feelings as “încredere tovărășească” (comradely trust), “dragostea nețărmurită față de patrie”²⁷ (undying love for the country), “dăruire” (dedication), or “responsabilitate comunistă și patriotică” (communist and patriotic responsibility) are syntagms that are meant to point out the will to fight for the communist cause that the Romanian women embraced and made their own. Women are presented as involved in different activities which are equally given patriotic communist connotations. Romanian communist women “muncesc cot la cot” (work side by side), “se află în primele rânduri ale întrecerii socialiste”²⁸ (they are on the front lines of the socialist competition), or “au răspuns la chemarea partidului” (they answered to the party's call), all of which had the precise function of showing women's activism and involvement in the serious endeavours of the country. Women also take part in other activities that inexorably lead to the development, progress and enhancement of communism in Romania; they are involved in “emanciparea socială” (social emancipation), they work to meet “cerințele progresului tehnic” (the demands of the technical progress), they are in fact a new type of woman: “noua femeie: om al muncii, cetățean, mamă, educatoare” (the new woman: labourer, citizen, mother, educator).

A technique that may be used to increase credibility in a journalistic product is “to focus on facts and evidence,”²⁹ which the communist journalists actually did in the *Femeia* magazine. If all of the above keywords in describing and speaking about the worthiness of communist women were reported by journalists that might have been suspected to add to the real value of women, there are short fragments in which women are given a voice in the form of quotes and they briefly give their opinion on the discussed topic. Communist

²⁶Aneta Popescu “O femeie veghează,” *Almanahul Femeia*, 1983: 33, <https://cameraarhiva.com/2019/10/22/1983-almanah-femeia-bvau/> (accessed on 9 August 2022).

²⁷ Carol Roman “Femeile și eforturile de stabilire a unei noi ordini economice și politice internaționale,” *Almahul Femeia*, 1976: 30-31, <https://cameraarhiva.com/2019/10/22/1976-almanah-femeia-bvau/> (accessed on 9 August 2022).

²⁸ Eugen Moraru “Anuar feminin,” *Almanahul Femeia*, 1973: 27-30, <https://cameraarhiva.com/2019/10/22/1973-almanah-femeia-bvau/> (accessed on 9 August 2022)

²⁹ Jakob Henke, Laura Leissner & Wiebke Möhring, “How can Journalists Promote News Credibility? Effects of Evidences on Trust and Credibility,” *Journalism Practice*, 14, 3 (2020): 299-318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1605839>.

women present themselves as keen on the success of communism, to which they personally want to contribute: “ne frământam desigur cum să muncim mai bine” (we naturally continuously trouble ourselves about how to work better). This quote features some profoundly dogmatic and largely accepted opinions about Communism. The use of the verb “a se frământa” (to trouble oneself) is one of the communist propaganda’s favourite verbs, among the recurrent uses of words from the semantic field of “work” – the desired emphasis is placed on the effort and work that would lead to results. Moreover, something that required a large amount of work was also valuable and appreciated, which was the actual message that the communists wanted to transmit. The second aspect that is worth paying attention to is the pretended top-down systematic dissipation of communist responsibility and awareness of work-related goals. Workers and engineers trouble themselves with the achievement of the communist industrial and agricultural targets in an illustration of the ideological and theoretical background of communism, as an enhancer of shared property. A third characteristic of the communist propaganda is the competitive spirit, the conviction that there is always a better solution or a better result. The communist workers, as presented in the communist journals and films, are permanently troubled by the work problems and they never stop seeking solutions.

b. The Glorification of Romanian Women in the *Femeia* Magazine

Romanian women had every reason to feel satisfied, as a result of their thinking in the way in which the communist magazines would represent them. The communist glossary that emerges from the *Femeia* magazine compiled a generous amount of features susceptible to gratify women and to acknowledge their contribution to the upturn of communism. The *Femeia* magazine accommodated stories from the period in which communism operated undercover and tended to the social problems of workers, in an attempt to solve them. Thus, the 1971 issue,³⁰ under the heading “It was in ...”/ “S-a întâmplat în ...”, has a section that praises women’s bravery when confronted with difficulties which they overcame by “seeping strength from their trust in the party.” The woman, Viorica Moiescu, aged 16 at the time of the incident, in 1934, reports on the scanty salary, pay cuts, inexistent collective working contract, all of which are accused of being capitalist practices. Despite being only 16 years old, she persuaded the other spinners to cease work and protest, but the epitome was the rapid setting up of a strike committee and her election as their representative. Her account is teeming with communist rhetoric elements which appear in most of the stories of that period: “o mărire a numărului muncitorilor” (increase of workers), “conștiința” (consciousness), “viața ei s-a împletit cu lupta partidului” (her life interspersed with the party’s fight), “a fost găsită vinovată și condamnată la moarte”

³⁰ Ileana Măgură “La 16 ani în comitetul de grevă,” *Almanahul Femeia* (1971): 14 – 15, <https://cameraarhiva.com/2019/10/22/1971-almanah-femeia-bvau/>.

(convicted and sentenced to death), “muncea și învăța” (she would work and learn), “a absolvit liceul și apoi Academia de Științe Economice” (she graduated high school and then the Academy of Economic Sciences). Viorica Moisescu is the communist model of a young fighting woman with a sound family background (father-worker, mother-spinner), with initiative (she was immediately elected president of the strike committee), convicted and held in prison, helping the other organisations that went on strike, member of the trade union and in the U.T.C. and finally completing her studies. This is the model of a woman’s life that would satisfy communism’s need for dedicated women. Why was this model preferred by the communists and what were the chances for other women living in those times to relate to this pattern? The communists may have preferred such a model due to its complexity and to the likely multiple combinations of features that any other woman may match to her own. The victim of the bourgeoisie turns into a communist hero who ticks the important “must-haves” the checklist of a communist woman.

“Perseverance, curiosity, restlessness” are paramount attributes of women in the communist vision. “Exceptional” is a frequent adjective which in tandem with the adverb “neostoit” (tirelessly) exalt women to incredible heights. The multiple roles that Romanian women are assigned (labourer, citizen, mother, educator) is not seen as a burden, but as a gratification and a way of showing one’s skills in a deliberate comparison with capitalism which, as communists claimed, would downsize women, their abilities and knowledge. Communists make their treatment of women into an asset that they maximize at the declarative level, though it consistently contradicted their declarative intentions of freeing women from the difficulties of home handling³¹ by giving them the opportunity to participate in the social and political life.

c. Self-Sacrifice and Failure, the Leitmotifs of the Communist Propaganda

A constant of the communist rhetoric which appears in most narratives in *Femeia* is the reply “dar n-a fost ușor” (but it wasn’t easy), which most of the interviewees used when they described their duties that were traditionally done by men. They were intentionally used by women as they wanted to signal the revolution carried out by communism which trusted women and gave them a chance to prove what they could do. It was regularly used in a context in which a woman described the difficulties she encountered at work, the successful implementation shortly followed by “but it wasn’t easy.” The communist rhetoric that Romanian communists created mandatorily contained both the success or the results and the acknowledgement of the difficulties that had been overcome. Without mentioning the difficulties, the results would not have been as valuable as when insurmountable difficulties were easily untangled.

³¹ M. Dumančić, “The Communist and Postsocialist Gender Order in Russia and China,” in J. Fürst, S. Pons, & M. Selden (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Communism (The Cambridge History of Communism)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 422-446.

Secondly, women who appeared in the magazine extensively used other- and self-criticism as a complementation of the communist ideological concept on attempt, failure, re-attempt, success. Other-criticism is encouraged as a form of common purging, of joint improvement and a mechanism of control³² for the superior cause of communism. Self-criticism,³³ especially when public, is a symptomatic manifestation of pitiful communist rhetoric in a simulacrum of a moral or professional self-analysis, despite it initially having been conceived as “an official procedure of expressing one’s loyalty to the ruling party.”³⁴ By indicating the elements they had failed to accomplish or had not done all that well, the women in *Femeia* used to compare the results to the communist quinquennium plan which was meant as a comparison between units of production and their own achievements. It practically functioned as an acknowledgement of one’s faults and a promise to do better in the future, spotlighting its educational basis.³⁵ With the exception of writers who, when fallen into disgrace, used self-criticism to save their status or their lives, self-criticism, when produced by farmers, spinners, drivers, etc. gained a more of a ritualistic use “deprived of any ideology.”³⁶

VI. Conclusion

The present article has demonstrated the disparity in discourse between communist Romania’s pro-feminist attitude and the reality of communist Romania. It is the incongruity between a utopian social and linguistic construct that aimed to convince people about the superiority of communism over capitalism and a cruel reality in which women counted as breeders and as means for the propagation of a political system that was ignorant of and deaf to their womanly selves. In the *Femeia* magazine, women ironically came second, as the preeminent position was taken by the communist party and its supreme leader, as shown by the fact that the communist party was involved in everything and was more important than the individuals. Another aspect that was pointed out was the magnification of the women’s dedication to the party, which seemed to be

³² Leonard Chu, “Press Criticism and Self-Criticism in Communist China: an Analysis of Its Ideology, Structure, and Operation,” *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)*, 31(1) (1983): 47-61. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/001654928303100104>. It is mainly considered a mechanism that helps the party control its members and it could thus maintain social order.

³³ Self-criticism has been a favourite genre in the communist discourse which was believed to hold two major roles: firstly, it was perceived as a way of regulating the behaviour and discourse of members and secondly, it was a form of somewhat weak control of the population at large.

³⁴ Magdalena Nowicka, “Self-criticism in Public Discourse: A Device of Modernization? The Case of Eastern Europe,” in P. Marczewski, S. Eich (Eds.), *Dimensions of Modernity. The Enlightenment and its Contested Legacies*, (Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows’ Conferences), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ Mariusz Zawodniak, “Samokrytyka,” in Zdzisław Łapiński and Wojciech Tomasiak (eds.), *Słownik Realizmu Socjalistycznego*, (Kraków: Universitas 2004), 302-306.

more important than any other aspect of their private lives. The overemphasis might have been believed to stand as a solid proof of the women's devotion to the communist party or it might have been used as an indirect instrument of convincing the larger feminine population that communism was indeed worth their devotion. The lexical choices in the articles in the *Femeia* magazine are limited to a modest repertoire, which, by repetition, loses the pivotal role that it was meant to play.