

Fecha de recepción: 2 noviembre 2010  
 Fecha de aceptación: 4 enero 2011  
 Fecha de publicación: 15 marzo 2011  
 URL: <http://oceanide.netne.net/articulos/art3-11.php>  
 Oceánide número 3, ISSN 1989-6328

## Constructing Females Identity: Women's Emancipation, Press and Propaganda. (Case Study: Special Issues Dedicated to Women in Romanian Cultural Press in the 1950s)

Dra. Andrada Fatu-Tutoveanu  
 Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania

Mara Marginean,  
 "Babeş-Bolyai University", Cluj-Napoca, Romania

### RESUMEN:

El artículo aborda la cuestión de la emancipación de la mujer como uno de los más importantes elementos discursivos comunista y considerado por algunos autores el "mito total" (Aivazova) de la ideología comunista. El complejo ideológico asociado a las creencias marxista-leninista fue utilizado por la propaganda política en la Unión Soviética y más tarde impuesto al resto de los países de Europa oriental comunista. El estudio se centra en la praxis asociada a este discurso oficial en Rumania, lo que resulta en la creación y la imposición de modelos de identidad específica, que se reflejan en los papeles de la "nueva" mujer y sus representaciones visuales. El análisis se inicia desde el paradigma teórico de los *women studies*, discutiendo las cuestiones de género en el contexto de los regímenes del Este europeo totalitario y centrándose en los elementos de las políticas comunistas de construcción de identidad aplicados en Rumania en el final de la década de 1940 y en década de los 1950, cuando la influencia soviética fue máxima. El estudio pretende mostrar - mediante el uso de la prensa rumana cultural (en artículos de propaganda y las imágenes relacionadas en torno a la emancipación de la mujer y su identidad, presentes sobre todo en números festivos - especiales - dedicados a ellos) -, y los aspectos de la intromisión política en la vida privada y pública en relación con los importantes cambios de identidad del modelo de identidad femenina. La identidad femenina fue reconfigurada por esta intromisión política, que multiplicó sus papeles (la "triple carga" de llevar a cabo tareas profesionales, políticas y domésticas) y casi anuló la individualidad y características de las mujeres a favor de una imagen impuesta estereotípica, uniforme, y asexual. Relacionando las políticas de construcción de la identidad a los *women studies*, el análisis (utilizando representaciones de prensa de estos modelos Soviéticos de "segunda mano") concluye que los diferentes niveles de la identidad femenina se han visto afectados por la intrusión política, estableciéndose coordenadas específicas de la dramática reconfiguración de la identidad femenina.

**Palabras clave:** Emancipación de la mujer, Europa oriental, Prensa rumana, propaganda comunista.

### ABSTRACT:

The article deals with the issue of women's emancipation as one of the most significant communist discursive elements and considered by some authors the "total myth" (Aivazova) of the communist ideology. The ideological complex associated with the Marxist and Leninist beliefs was used by political propaganda in the Soviet Union and later imposed to the rest of the Eastern European Communist countries. The study focuses on the actual praxis associated to this official discourse in Romania, resulting in the creation and imposing of specific identity patterns, reflected on the "new" women's roles and visual representations. The analysis starts from the theoretical paradigm of women studies, discussing gender issues in the context of Eastern European totalitarian regimes and focusing on the elements of the communist identity construction policies applied in Romania in the late 1940s-1950s, when the Soviet influence was maximal. The study aims to reveal - by using Romanian cultural press (and propaganda articles and images on women's emancipation and identity present there, particularly in festive special issues dedicated to them) - the aspects of the political intrusion in private and public life as related to important identity pattern changes. Female identity was reconfigured by this political intrusion, her roles multiplying (the "triple burden" of performing professional, political and domestic tasks) as her individuality and female features were almost annulled in favour of an imposed, stereotypical, non-sexual and uniform image. Relating the construction of identity policies to women studies, the analysis (using press representations of these Soviet - "second-hand" - patterns) concludes that different levels of female identity have been affected by the political intrusion, setting specific coordinates of the dramatically reconfigured female identity.

**Keywords:** Women emancipation, Eastern Europe, Romanian press, communist propaganda.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: MARXISM-LENINISM AND WOMEN EMANCIPATION

"Women emancipation" was a favourite discursive category in the Marxist and Leninist ideology, as a powerful symbol both for the Manichean opposition between oppressive capitalism and liberating socialism and for the social revolution itself – as through this new freedom and equality of women traditional family and social structures were radically transformed. The actual practices concerning this model in both Soviet Union and the rest of the satellite countries of the communist bloc reveal, however – when confronting propaganda and the implementing of these identity patterns – a huge discrepancy. The complicated situation of assuming all the roles the communist state demanded women to play is even more of an interesting research topic in other communist countries, such as Romania (the object of the present study), which adopted as such some given Soviet formulas with no correspondence in the local realities or women's expectations or needs.

Women, communist ideologues argued, were oppressed under capitalism, and the source of their oppression -no different from class-based oppression - was to be found in women's lack of ownership over the means of production and lack of control over the work process and the fruits of their labour. The only way women could overcome their exploitation was to join the ranks of the proletariat and shake off the rule of the capitalist class. (Fodor, 2002: 244).

The ideological complex associated with the Marxist and Leninist beliefs on the emancipation of women as a significant part of the freedom and emancipation of the proletariat had thus a more prominent history in the Soviet space. A brief setting of this historical background is necessary (as a source of the Eastern European propaganda discourse on the women "issue") even when analysing different cases than the Soviet Union. The general framework had been set by the communist ideologists, as for instance Engels spoke of women's status within capitalist societies and traditional bourgeois families as marked by oppression, being excluded from social production, made subject of the "private male ownership" and used as "domestic slaves" in Engels's words. The Communist solution to eliminate this oppression meant actually a radical change of the individual and family identity and roles, within a social order itself completely redesigned. Soviets understood to reconstruct female identity initially by deconstructing the family (idea which led in 1917-1927 to a series of laws issued on this topic), the traditional institution of marriage being considered the core of women's oppression. "Another idea related to this dissolution of the traditional ('bourgeois') family ('founded on social and economic interests') was to transform child care into a state/public matter and housekeeping into social industry" (Fatu-Tutoveanu, 2010a: 195). The "new society" concept (*new* is one of the strongest language stereotypes in the communist propaganda discourse, especially in the first years of the regime – which in Romania were the late 1940s-1950s) included free cohabiting marriage (free unions, divorce) as opposed to the bourgeois families, while the cares related to food, laundry or

child raising would be institutionally solved, leaving women free for their working duties. One significant name among the Soviet ideologues dealing with women emancipation was Alexandra Kollontai's, who supported this reconstruction of female identity on the background of a dissolved family structure. As family and "private life" were considered by Kollontai as obstacles against the equality and emancipation of women (work at home oppressing them), the dominant changes and the work oriented towards the community become the priority, setting women free (see Aivazova, 2010 [1997]: 670). Thus, as the family structures are dissolved, the real great family becomes that of the community within factories, Party etc., within which all previous family tasks are shared - work, food, laundry, child raising (as maternity remains – even in this ideal project - a major duty for communist women) - solidarity within work communities replacing traditional family relations (672).

Despite Soviet the propaganda and legal discourse related to the success of this new structure favouring women (Kollontai herself wrote in 1946 that the Soviet state):

had provided women with access to all areas of creative activity and at the same time provided all the necessary conditions to enable her to fulfil her natural duty as mother, educating her own children, as mistress of her own home. (Kollontai qtd. In Brodsky Farnsworth, 316),

in the Soviet Union (and similarly, in the satellite countries, where even fewer attempts in this respect took place) this community ideals could not be achieved because of economical reasons, as all the unpaid tasks performed previously by women would have involved a huge financial effort of the state. Female work became a symbol, yet the state could not offer the infrastructure and social support. On the other hand birth numbers were dropping dramatically and the issue had to be reconsidered (see Aivazova, 2010 [1997]: 673). The result was that instead of being set free, women had to perform simultaneously various roles imposed by the state.

Most scholars agree that the key element of the communist emancipation project was women's inclusion in paid work and the education system. This, however, did not mean a reduction in women's domestic and reproductive responsibilities, although the state instituted some measures-inadequate in many cases. (Fodor, 2002: 245)

On the same grounds, the official discourse changed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s (especially with the 1936 decree related to women<sup>1</sup>) – the previous policies of dissolution of the family being now opposed attempts to stabilize it (by prohibition of abortion, penalizing divorce etc.). The satellite states in the communist bloc inherited – due to the historical factors – this new paradigm, reinterpreted in the 1930s, the woman identity pattern containing all these (sometimes contradicting) roles – worker, mother (and housekeeper) and political activist (fig. 4-6). This gap between the women's emancipation paradigm

and its practical failure has led to considering this emancipation ideology and intended social pattern as conversed into a "revolutionary myth". (Brodsky Farnsworth, 1976, 292). Aivazova calls it a "*mythe totale*" of women's freedom and equality (2010 [1997]: 669), as part of the Socialist Paradise myth (672). The pattern is already turned into a propaganda stereotype when transferred to the other countries in the Communist Eastern Europe, the gap between the discourse and practice becoming more significant in unprepared societies (such as Romania, where communism had no tradition and was predominantly an agricultural country, with no developed industry and a proper proletarian class). The women emancipation paradigm was "borrowed" already containing what we can call – paraphrasing Claude Alzon's (1982 [1978]) title – the "femme mythifiée- femme mystifiée" pattern.

This gap between "the ideological production and social reality" (Cirstocea, 2003: 111) regarding women emancipation and social and political equality is questioned by researchers within *women studies*, a field focusing on the Eastern European gender issues within the specific framework of the totalitarian societies (implying that this area needs a different approach than the feminist paradigm, despite some theoretical connections between feminism and Marxism on the idea of "oppression" versus "liberation"):

Based on Eastern European women's historical situation and experience with communism, *womanism* offers a distinctly different line of thought than *feminism*. Although women throughout Eastern Europe face different problems and different forms of discrimination in the transitional period, many women have a common experience of voicing opposition to gender based discrimination. [...] I distinguish womanism from feminism in three ways. First, womanist writing is characterized by a rejection of the category and label of "feminism" and "feminist," although there are exceptions to this [...] Along with a rejection of feminism, a distinction is made between the formal women's movement, represented by the communist parties' women's organizations, and an informal, grassroots movement that most womanists assert is nonexistent throughout the region. Second, womanist writing stresses that men have not been their oppressors. Rather, if men had certain behaviors or characteristics that were detrimental to women, it was believed that a repressive public sphere caused negative behavior. Furthermore, womanists give much attention to the idea of universal liberation, stressing that women, men, and children are disadvantaged in society on account of the repressive nature of the public sphere during communism. (Harvey, 2002: 28)

This approach associated to women studies moves therefore the stress feminism placed on male-

female relations to the oppression of women in the totalitarian context. Thus, researchers such as Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000), despite emphasising (similarly to Drakulic, 1991), the need to take into consideration the heterogeneous linguistic and social context in Eastern Europe (when analysing women's identity in this area) agree that there is a series of common features characteristic to the gender issue in socialist societies "among them the intention to annul the differences between men and women in the political and civic space, together with class and ethnic differences, or the creation of a atomised society composed of individuals depending exclusively on the paternalist state" (Cirstocea, 2003: 111). This type of research favours individual testimonies on real experiences, beyond political propaganda, "pleading for integrating social history and gender history in the analysis of the totalitarian regimes" (111).

In this women studies perspective the issue of *emancipation*<sup>2</sup> is discussed on different terms than within researches based on feminism, arguing that the oppression (of both women and men) was that of the state, and we agree that in this approach the real emancipation was that taking place after 1989.

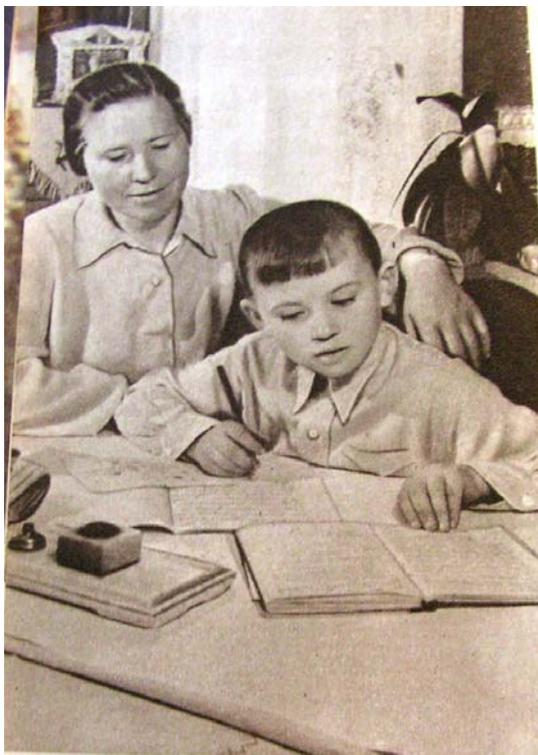
Eastern European womanists' writings reflect the state's patriarchal role as breadwinner, provider, and caretaker of its subjects as they theorize and debate emancipation and gender in the post-1989 period. The location of oppression is not men, the family, or the private sphere. [...] Emancipation from and independence of the state-patriarch is the central aspect informing womanist writing. (Harvey, 2002: 28)



## 2. POLICIES OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN ROMANIAN PROPAGANDA

The propaganda discourse on women emancipation was transferred to other Eastern European countries, transformed into satellites of the Soviet Union – Romania among them (officially turned

into a communist state in 1948, replacing the monarchy), the political discourse using the rights of women as an important political instrument of persuasion and manipulation. These states, adopting a already processed formula (which had no correspondent in the local realities and therefore this had to be created, following the "great Soviet model"), the gap being even more significant as the historical evolution of these countries did not support the newly imposed, artificial, identity patterns on the background of a totalitarian society. The women's right to vote, for instance, had not represented an issue for Romanian society before 1948 and had no longer significance within a totalitarian regime (see Vulcu & Tărau, 2003: 175-176), for which voting did no longer involve a choice but meant merely a political ritual, equality and emancipation being part of this artificial construct – a "mystified" identity – loudly spoken by propaganda (see Zoe Petre, qtd. in Morar-Vulcu & Tărau, 2002: 174).



Maria Gînskaia, colhoznică a artelelor agricole „Votșikov” din regiunea Moscova, ajutându-și fiul la lecții.

As stated above, these satellite states were imposed the Soviet policies (and ideology) on women emancipation in the post-1936 formula (see Aivazova, 2010 [1997]: 674), a pattern lacking the "revolutionary romanticism" (674) of the previous Soviet ideals but instead establishing a rigid pattern of women responsibilities and duties to the State and Party, in her triple dimension (worker, mother and performer of political duties), or "triple burden" (Cirstocea, 2003: 138).

Although women were brought into the public sphere, their duties at home remained as well. Besides the fact that men assumed few household chores, the state did not prioritize the production of time saving appliances in its industrialization plans. Few women

owned timesaving appliances such as washing machines. [...] Few people used the public cantinas, and childcare was far from adequate in most of the Eastern European countries. Thus, women resented the obligation of formal employment because they also performed the majority of household work. Work was far from fulfilling and satisfying, and therefore hardly liberating, as it only doubled the total amount of work one had. (Harvey, 2002: 30)



The study of individual cases reveal the difficulties faced by women forced to assign all these tasks, the family (the parents) becoming often an important support, especially in domestic activities or child raising (136, 138), contrary to the early communist discourse which saw traditional family as an oppressive environment. Propaganda discourse – present especially in political controlled press – imposing this contrastive female identity pattern (actually cumulating the two opposing patterns –wife - mother and working woman, in a new "asymmetrical family" formula (see Aivazova, 2010 [1997]: 674) as a paradigm of unquestionable identity standards where thus promoting the state policies of constructing identities in communist societies. The state – following the Soviet model – builds categories and matrices for its individuals, women identity being part of this "mechanical construction" of identities (Morar-Vulcu, 2007: 74).

First of all the identity is not essential, but *constructed*. [...] The construction is radical. [...] Secondly, not only the nation, but all group identities, cultural, professional, political identities and so on (classes, age groups)

are *imagined* [emphasis added]. [...] Thirdly, a fundamental role in constructing the identity is held by narration or by the discourse. [...] All discursive actors have necessarily been invented. (99-100).



However, when analysing the issue of women's emancipation in the context of Eastern European totalitarian regimes, these gender inequality structures appear as less significant in a context in which both men and women were dominated and controlled by the totalitarian "patriarchal" state, the actual oppressor.

The new female identity was therefore a *construct*, reuniting a set of symbolical elements (political, professional, and maternal) and becoming a very significant embodiment of what the "New World", "New Person". The new paradigm (in which the emphasised term is "new") brings always in contrast the pattern *Before* and *After* change of regime, and bourgeois oppressed women versus Communist emancipated women. In this new social structure, constructed itself out of artificial individual identity matrices, the emphasis is laid on social classes and not gender cleavage (Cirstocea, 2003: 126). However, perfect equality remained at the level of propaganda as men remain dominant in political sphere and even at some levels of propaganda discourse and representation (Romanian women workers represented in early communist years as being initiated or advised by men in their profession, see Morar-Vulcu & Tărau, 2002). Despite the equality model uniting the socialist men and women – as "life, fight and work comrades" (fig. 19) in their common effort achieving the progress of the new society, women had to be instructed, helped by their "comrades" at work or at home to find the right path, the balance – even within the emancipation discourse – favouring men.



Thus, men and women share the same experience, while the patriarchal state alienates men, interfering in the family, restructuring social relations and dominating the new, reorganised structures (see Aivazova, 2010 [1997]: 671).

It's hard to see them [men] as an opposite force, men as a gender, hard to confront them as enemies. Perhaps because everyone's identity is denied, we want to see them as persons, not as a group, or a category, or a mass. (Drakulic, 1991: 111)



3. WORKING WOMEN IN 1950s ROMANIA AND PRESS PROPAGANDA

Following the Soviet model, Romanian propaganda used media as one of the main tools due to its impact on the population (repeating the same stereotypical discourse in all the types of publications - political, cultural, women's publication or entertaining press - and in all types of languages, from text to visual impact, from explicit to subliminal message. The "political 'symbols' and 'mythologies' launched and circulating within official propaganda (mostly through press, but also visual arts and literature)" (Cirstocea, 2003: 125) tried to impose the new female ideal, the female identity as a construct, becoming a very significant embodiment of what the "New World" and "New Person". If the pattern transmitted in the 1950s was the "Soviet model", mentioned recurrently in these very words, and expressed a very simplistic set of features, repeated and easily recognisable in its representations, the "symbolical and practical propaganda strategies" (125) used a very careful designed implementation and control mechanism. All the levels of female activities and life were centralised around this model (professional environment, reading circles, entertaining activities - all institutionalised as much as possible, media of all sorts being saturated with propaganda discourse regarding this *New Woman* identity pattern (in the first decade 1948-1958, usually placed in strong contrasting formulas favouring *new* against *old* woman, society, "way"). One of the favourite manners used by Communist propaganda in implementing its stereotypical formulas was *showing* ("How to *show*, this is an art, comrades", explains in these very words the politician Miron Constantinescu in 1953, when the Party was organising an International Youth Festival, see Borbély, 2004, 143-144), exposing prefabricated models which had simply to be copied as faithfully as possible - and visual materials had a dominant role here as being the

most direct and therefore having the most impact. The "heroine Pantheon" (Cirstocea, 2003: 125-126) present in the press propaganda - the series of female models of different professions and ages although presented in very stereotypical images, almost identical in form and message, aimed to *show* as explicit as possible what models to copy in order to fit the *New* norm. Few "heroines" were individualised, in the late 1940s-early 1950s one significant in this respect being an authority political leader, under Moscow direct influence, Ana Pauker (fig.14), who had, almost as in later decades Elena Ceausescu, a privileged place within propaganda. Her exceptional power within the communist leader (until she was marginalised - after a few years - by the General Secretary of the Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, leader of the country in the 1950s) is visible in press propaganda, for instance in poems, articles and festive biographical presentations every year on her birthday (Cozma, 2002: 143). Press (mostly printed press as in the 1950s it was the dominating media type in Romania, followed by radio and only in the mid 1960s by television) had been appropriated by the regime, which carefully selected - until voiding them of any content - all the materials reaching women, from the most explicitly ideological to the most innocent (fashion, entertaining etc.).



Cultural press is no exception in this respect, journals such as *Flacara* and *Contemporanul* using the same discourse regarding women as political newspapers or women's magazines, no more sophisticated despite their cultural explicit purposes. Images, caricatures, language or visual stereotypes are (almost) undistinguishable in a cultural versus a political publication, as culture was *for* the masses (artists being "workers with the minds" that had to be initiated, taught and corrected if necessary by their proletarian audience). As this "new" culture, which requested no level of education and whose accessibility and

reading-friendliness was a must (because of the importance of the propaganda messages involved), the publications studied present an evolution towards simplifying the message and a change towards image dominance in relation to text, which becomes mainly an (ideological) interpretation of the visual message (especially in *Flacara*, which towards the mid-1950s and 1960s changes its format from a cultural newspaper format into a more colourful and mostly illustrated magazine).

The first journal making the object of research for the late 1940s-1950s period is *Contemporanul* (*The Contemporary* – masculine form of the word), a weekly journal in newspaper format, applying, in a more accessible form (it is illustrated with photos, drawings and caricatures and offers various cultural chronicles and articles) the ideological directions presented by the official Communist Party publication, *Scântea* (inspiring in its turn from *Pravda*), especially related to culture.

While *Contemporanul* was more illustrated and reader-friendly at late 1940s-early 1950s than *Flacara* [*The Flame*]: the latter changes its format since 1953, multiplying its appearances (twice a month compared with its previous monthly publication) and focusing much more on the graphical side. The quality and number of illustration changes radically, becoming similar to a women's or lifestyle publication (a sort of 1950s concept of glossy magazine), while the text is usually just accompanying the groups of images, as an already "digested" interpretation of images, the "script" of the scene which is already, visibly "prepared" (the scenery and postures are artificial and stereotypical).



However, the message simplifies and stereotypes are perpetuating, both in image representation and text/interpretation. By these changes, the magazine aimed to increase its audience and therefore make its propaganda message more accessible.

As women had their own publications (their content and even titles – *Muncitoarea*, *Femeia*, *Sateanca* [*The Working Woman*, *The Peasant Woman*, *The Woman*,] – being thoroughly copied from the Soviet model – *Rabotnitza*, *Krestianska*, *Sovietskaia Jentschina* – see Cozma, 2002: 139), the cultural press remains dominated by men authors, women being present, especially in the late 1940s-early 1950s in a symbolic way (one woman poet among a few men poets). This is why special issues dedicated to women (on March, 8th,

the International Day of *Working Women*) are the richest and most complex materials when analysing the approach of women emancipation and status in the Romanian communist state. Also, their stereotypical perpetuation in these "special occasions" of the emancipation discourse is significant especially if compared with the otherwise marginal place this issue has in the rest of the time.

In fact, women do not participate to the public life as a group preoccupied to fight for certain specific requests. The social communist world, far from being uniform, reveals hierarchical structures in which women continue to be regarded as minor creatures, incapable to rule or organise themselves. 'Female masses are similar to children, one must know how to approach them', claims a political leader in 1945. (Cirstocea, 2003: 128)



Women's emancipation was, the official discourse claimed, following again the Soviet model, a "solved matter".

Formal equality has become associated with women's superficial presence in government, through institutions such as quota systems in the USSR and the communist parties' women's organizations. Women representatives and women's groups are perceived to have failed to represent women's needs because of their obedience to the party and the state. Furthermore, the communist state had been claiming since the 1950s that the woman question had been solved, leaving little room for these groups to agitate for women's position because it was

formally believed that women were socially equal to men. Because the state offered institutions to promote women's position in society, but did this superficially, womanists criticize the state sponsored, formal women's movement that failed to qualitatively change women's lives. (Harvey, 2002: 31)

The March 8th specific type of approach reveals the opposite of its intentions: the marginality and minority of women in the relation to men in the public sphere (they are "remembered" and celebrated especially as some secondary "life, work and fight comrades" of men), while assuming in everyday reality the "triple burden" (professional and political duties, together with domestic very difficult tasks, as they had no access to many domestic appliances, products or infrastructures). If the early 1950s issues perpetuate the rhetoric of female emancipation and involvement in the fight for peace (some titles, variants of the same idea focusing on women equality and emancipation, their celebration being associated with their fight for "peace and progress": *Egalitatea sexelor in R.P.România, Lupta pentru emanciparea femeii, Ziua luptei femeilor pentru o pace trainica, Femeile lupta pentru pace si progress, Ziua de lupta si de sarbatoare a femeilor din lumea intreaga, In primele rânduri*), with the years the (always multiple) roles of women seem to lose importance when associated with men (titles evolving towards the "comrade" of men pattern: *Tovarasa mea de viata, Tovarase de viata, de munca, de lupta*), losing their "fighting" attributes in favour of the everyday accomplished duties pattern of a uniform mass of Communist women.

The main political organisation, The National Romanian Women Council [Consiliul National al Femeilor din România] [...] has no actual access to political decisions, does not take part in the elaboration of the communist political project, but simply is meant to receive and disseminate ideas which are dominant at a given time. The National Council...functions in the logic of symbolical appropriation of female associative qualities, of those annihilating any form of genuine social activism and representation in a game of appearances. (Cirstocea, 2003: 129)



When considering social duty (professional and political) and family duties, the stress also changes, the first one being predominant in

propaganda discourse in the late 1940s and early 1950s, while the second gains ground towards the 1960s (of course, professional women remain the models, but are also represented as good wives and particularly mothers).

As profession – and presence of women in the public space – remains a dominant (the communist "new female ideal: professional qualification", see Morar-Vulcu and Tărau, 2002: 176), as a significant part of the Communist ideology related to women, the "working women" pattern is a dominant that to which other features are (and must be) added, also as duties, cumulating multiple roles: *Stakhanovist* worker, generous, "heroine mother", political woman, professional woman (from the most common to the most sophisticated roles – worker, scientist, astronaut, champion athlete – always performed at the highest level) etc.

These roles were designed and imposed on political grounds and the subjects of the roles assigned were most often simple proletarian girls, their origin and education, although suitable for the ideological message, contrasting with their responsibilities, (especially in the early 1950s, when the system had not yet time to educate its social "models"). Many industrial or agricultural workers are presented in charge of different institutions (sometimes vice-presidents but other times, with full responsibility) and a shocking example is the example of a female worker who was named judge at the Supreme Court (fig.10, above, right). These "model" women were used by the propaganda to illustrate its successes and directions, almost in a decorative manner (women had to be present – numerically – in all public life spheres, although lacking real responsibilities and remaining minor in the still hierarchical (in the traditional manner) social order (Cirstocea, 2003: 128; Morar-Vulcu and Tărau, 2002: 153-171).

In the syntagm *professional community*, despite the importance of the first term for the communist ideology in Romanian propaganda and its social practice, the second term also has major importance: the press discourse, as present in the issues analysed, but actually recurrent in all types of propaganda discourse, reveals the importance of the community, dominating individuals in every way. Even when a woman is represented in a powerful position, she is shown taking decisions together with the professional community, the workers, which is a permanent presence, the actual authority in the life of these women. All activities become institutionalised, politicised, individuals being constantly controlled (at least in the ideals promoted by the propaganda messages) by these communities (politically organised, not spontaneous): the women's magazines are introduced and read by groups, in factories (Cozma, 2002: 142), all their professional, social and private activities being coordinated and supervised by political and institutional mechanisms. The community is one of the most prominent myths of political propaganda in the publications analysed – being represented in numerous forms, some more transparent and some more subliminal. Articles and photographic representations focus on groups of individuals, from the same institution or from various (yet, the repetitiveness of the representations is obvious, they are merely expressing, as examples, the uniform identity pattern). Even actresses (a few years before represented after the Hollywood standards) are now part of communities (i.e. an

article on seven actresses, whose identities are sometimes difficult to distinguish within the text - presented together as having a parallel, similar destiny - simple girls, of low, proletarian origin, successful of course not because of their outstanding qualities but especially because of the conditions offered by the "new" world they live in.

#### 4. FEMALE BODY AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS IN 1950s ROMANIAN PRESS

Precisely because of the emphasis on uniformity and lack of individuality laid by the propaganda discourse present everywhere in the Romanian press of the 1950s female body representation is an interesting aspect to analyse when discussing female identity patterns of the period. The issue is related to a dilemma of propaganda, which had to capture interest of the audience of these periodicals (and visual impact was one of the most significant elements in this equation) but in the same time camouflage the body, its individuality and personality. We could consider the female body as "captive" body, possessed entirely by the state and the party, also by the group and community through the duties, allowing no individual trace or initiative to emerge to this artificially constructed surface. Visual propaganda uses "second-hand" representation patterns on the Soviet model (which is never questioned), the already made patterns have to be filled with local representations, the press adapting female image and story to these ideological frames. The representations of women have therefore no individuality (the images have to say "some from the many", an example from the many identical, even when they belong to different professions or ethnic minorities, they are represented in the same way), anonymous/ uniform both physically (no longer feminine, aesthetic representations, but dull, excessively simple) and in their roles.



"The ideal model of the human face and type during communism was the 'dull', 'plain' one (fig.15-17), with no personality [...] Even female

beauty started to be considered indecent" (Cuceu, 2005, 198). Thus, the beauty canon is considered part of the capitalist oppression: the new "aestheticism" involves simplicity ("a beauty recipe: work" says a 56-years old proletarian "role-model" woman) and maturity (fig. 15) instead of youth (young women being represented as "guided" by their elders in 1950s-1960s, while in the 1940s-early 1950s they were "guided" by men - see Morar-Vulcu & Tăraiu, 2003: 176). Fashion or make-up were part of the same category of frivolous, almost indecent accessories, of bourgeois origin (even "authorities", such as Claudia Cardinale in the Cinema magazine, are quoted as speaking against make-up and sophistication, while another actress is praised for a metamorphosis towards simplicity). Western fashion magazines are criticised (Cozma, 2002: 142) and so it was fashion itself, which was tolerated just when the products came from local factories (even patterns are discussed in an article, not being considered innocent - abstract bourgeois patterns being now replaced by workers with floral Romanian patterns, created by communist artists). Thus, ideology dominated even innocent areas of the female life, such as fashion or make-up, all individualities being replaced by the (at least tendency towards) "holy" communist uniformity. The design and shape of clothes had to be simple, proletarian, etc., accessories and sophistication being considered decadent and artificial, clothes had to be practical and uniform, the new "aesthetics": "they were dressed in elegant *blue cloth*" - articles on that (Maior, 1955: 16).



Thus, all areas of the female universe are penetrated and the femininity itself questioned, following the masculine working woman paradigm expressed by the Soviet "second-hand images" imposed to the other communist states, in Romanian press propaganda especially in the 1950s (1948-1958 being the most significant period for the Soviet influence - still present with military troops in Romania - visible at all social, political and cultural levels). The Soviet model was eliminating not only individual specificity but also gender features in its models and representations (following a radical, yet surface, artificial sex equality), the body being subject of camouflage and repression: "any mark of sexuality had to be well hidden in uniforms or worker clothes. The model was that of the 'non-sexual communist comrade'" (Cuceu, 2005,199). Masculinity is everywhere in female body representations, especially from late 1940s-early 1950s, when the Soviet model is very prominent. While female features are diminished as much as possible and the choice of faces privileges uniformity, male attributes are exaggerated (women are strong, masculine, happy to perform types of work which had been previously typical to men - drive

tractors, trains, work in factories, fig. 9, 11). Access to industrialised work represents their ambition (to become qualified workers) and is presented as superior to others (working in a canteen for instance). Especially in the late 1940s - early 1950s these ambitions and the duty to the state and Party are presented as the priority of women, although their motherhood remains a duty and is praised when the number of children is important – the so-called “heroine mothers”, who receive medals. This stress on motherhood will culminate with Ceausescu’s exaggerated increasing birth policies.

Thus, the ideology penetrates the most intimate aspects of life (maternity, female body, marital life), controlling her (re)production as part of the state economy. The most intimate aspects of life are controlled by the state (sexuality, which is subject of reproduction policies), an approach typical for the totalitarian regimes which tend to erase the distance between public and private space (Cirstocea, 2003: 113) and actually make transparent all aspects from the life of *its* individuals.



women being oppressed by a dominant and repressive state (the actual *emancipation* following 1989 and the demise of these regimes), the intrusion of this third factor being apparent in the most intimate aspects of private life. Press propaganda – one of the most powerful and complex persuasion and manipulation tools used by the communist regime and analysed here in its Romanian cultural press hypostasis, which is most faithful to the stereotypical ideological models – reveals the aspects of this intrusion in private and public life as related to important identity pattern changes. Female identity is reconfigured by the political intrusion, its roles multiplying (the “triple burden” of performing professional, political and domestic tasks) as its individuality and female features are almost annulled in favour of a stereotypical, non-sexual, uniform imposed image. Relating the construction of identity policies to women studies, the analysis (using press representations of these Soviet - second-hand – patterns) discusses different levels of female identity affected by the political intrusion, analysing the coordinates of a specific and dramatic reconfigured female identity.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The issue of women emancipation was one of the most significant elements of the communist discourse as used by political propaganda in the Soviet Union (and later imposed to the rest of the Eastern European Communist countries, Romania among them). The actual practice of this official discourse (itself changing during the 1930s) resulted in the creation and imposing of specific identity patterns. This topic has been approached by women studies discussing gender issues in the context of Eastern European totalitarian regimes and therefore separating themselves theoretically from Western feminist studies. The analysis starts from this theoretical paradigm (which tries to find an adequate framework for a delicate and specific issue), discussing the intrusion of the political factor in the gender relations, both men and

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Since the 1936 Soviet legislation changes: a decree supporting maternity and forbidding abortions is issued the mother had to give birth and take care of the children, of domestic work and have a paid employment to support the family (or complete the insufficient salary of the man), (see Aivazova, 2010 [1997]: 674).

<sup>2</sup> “The danger now, however, is that we cannot use the old language because it was discredited by hypocritical usage; wonderful concepts like equality, emancipation, solidarity, can no longer be used. They were used to describe a reality which was quite their opposite” (Molyneux 1991: 135).

## WORKS CITED

- ACEMOGLU, D. et al. (2004). *Women, War, and Wages: The Effect of Female Labor Supply on the Wage Structure at Midcentury*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- AIVAZOVA, S. (2010 [1997]). "Libertad e igualdad de las mujeres en los países socialistas de Europa del Este, 1960-1980", *Enciclopedia histórica y política de las mujeres. Europa y América*. Christine Fauré (ed.), Traducción de Marisa Pérez Colina, 669-692. Madrid: Ediciones Akal.
- ALZON, C. (1982 [1978]). *Mujer mitificada, mujer mixtificada*, Traducción de José Martín Arancibia, Barcelona: Ruedo Ibérico.
- BETEA, L. (2006). "The Woman in the Communist Regime. Meta-Analysis About a Gender Study", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, volume 5, no. 14, (2006): 31-40.
- BONNELL, V.E. (1991). "The Representation of Women in Early Soviet Political Art", *Russian Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Jul.), 267-288.
- BORBÉLY, S. (2004). "Cum se arata, aceasta este o arta, tovarasi", *Caietele Echinox: Literatura si totalitarism*, Borbély, S. (Ed.), 143-144, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia.
- BRODSKY FARNSWORTH, B. (1976). "Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Apr.), 292-316.
- BUCKLEY, M. (1981). "Women in the Soviet Union", *Feminist Review*, No. 8 (Summer), 79-106.
- CÎRSTOCEA, I. (2003). "Conceptul de gen o categorie utila pentru analiza socio-istorica a regimului comunist din România", In *Directii si teme de cercetare în studiile de gen din România*, Baluta, I., Cirstocea, I. (eds.), 95-143. Bucuresti: Colegiul Noua Europa.
- COLAIZZI, G. (1990). "Feminismo y Teoria del Discurs. Razones para un debate", In *Feminismo y Teoria del Discurso*. Giulia Colaizzi (Ed.), 13-29. Madrid: Ediciones Catédra.
- COMAS D'ARGEMIR (1995). *Trabajo, Género, Cultura. La construcción de desigualdades entre hombres y mujeres*. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial.
- COZMA, G. (2002). "Presă feminină după model sovietic. Studii de caz: Femeia (1948-1958)", In *Condiția femeii în România secolului XX. II. Imagini și reprezentări ale femeii în presa și documente*, Cosma G., Târau, V. (Eds.), 135-144. Cluj-Napoca: Nereamia Napocae.
- CUCEU, C. (2005). "Gen, corp, politică în communism", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 10, (Spring 2005): 94-102.
- DRAKULIC, S. (1991). *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*. New York: Norton.
- EVANS, J. (1981). "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defence of Mother and Child'", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Oct.), 757-775.
- FATU-TUTOVEANU, A. (2010). "Another Face of Feminine Identity: The Image of Working Women in USA versus Eastern Europe (during mid 1940s-mid 1950s)", *Conference of British and American Studies, 8th Edition (Proceedings)*, 187-200. Brasov: Transilvania University Press.
- FATU-TUTOVEANU, A. (2010). "Post-War Female Identity Between West and East: Changes in Identity Patterns in mid 1940s-1950s Romanian Women's Magazines", Lecture held at the Conference *Constructions of Identity*, Cluj-Napoca, "Babes-Bolyai University", October, 28-30, 2010.
- FODOR, É. (2002). "Smiling Women and Fighting Men: The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary" in *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Apr.), 240-263.
- FUNK, Nanette, Magda MÜLLER, Robin Ostow, Michael Bodeman, Matthias Weiss, "Dossier on Women in Eastern Europe", *Social Text*, No. 27 (1990): 88-122.
- GAL, S. and KLIGMAN G. (eds) (2000). *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics and Everyday Life after the Socialism*, Princeton University Press.
- HANEY, L. (1994). "From Proud Worker to Good Mother: Women, the State, and Regime Change in Hungary", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3: 113-150.
- HARVEY, J. (2002). "Re-Theorizing Emancipation: Remembering and Rethinking 'Gender Equality' in Eastern European Womanist Thought" in *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Volume 20, Number 1: 27-39.
- KRYLOVA, A. (2004). "Stalinist Identity from the Viewpoint of Gender: Rearing a Generation of Professionally Violent Women-Fighters in 1930s Stalinist Russia" in *Gender & History*, Vol.16 No.3 November, 626-653.
- MAIOR, L. (1955). "In slujba cumparatorului", *Flacara* 5 (54): 14-16.
- MARIE, J.J. (2003). *The Women Section of the Comintern: From Lenin to Stalin – In Political and Historical Encyclopaedia of Women*, Christine Fauré (ed.), London: Routledge. 275-285.
- MOLYNEUX, M. (1981). "Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress Towards Women's Emancipation?", *Feminist Review*, No. 8 (Summer): 1-34.
- MORAR-VULCU, C. (2007). *Republica își faurește oamenii*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon.
- MORAR-VULCU, C. and V. TÂRAU (2002). "Ipostaze ale femeii în presa comunistă: Muncitoarea și Sateanca, 1948-1960", In *Condiția femeii în România secolului XX. II. Imagini și reprezentări ale femeii în presa și documente*, Cosma G., Târau, V. (Eds.), 153-171. Cluj-Napoca: Nereamia Napocae.
- RACIOPPI, Linda and K. O'SULLIVAN (1995). "Organizing Women before and after the Fall: Women's Politics in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia", *Signs*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Postcolonial, Emergent, and Indigenous Feminisms (Summer): 818-85.
- ROMAN, D. (2001). "Gendering Eastern Europe: Pre-Feminism, Prejudice, and East-West Dialogues in Post-Communist Romania", *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 53-66.
- WALKER, N. A. (1998). *Women's magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- ZETKIN, Clara (2011). *Lenin on the "Women's Question"*, In <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1920/lenin/zetkin1.htm> [Retrieved March, 10, 2011]

## Acknowledgement:

This paper is supported by the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and the Romanian Government under the project number ID59323."

Titulo: Construyendo la identidad femenina: La emancipación de la mujer, los medios de comunicación y la propaganda. (Un caso de estudio: suplementos especiales dedicados a la mujer en la prensa rumana de la década de 1950)

Contacto: andrada\_f@yahoo.com