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Regaining the future by rebuilding the past? Women's narratives of life during communism[1]

Introduction

This article is an introduction to our research project entitled „Regaining the future by rebuilding the past: Women's narratives of life during communism" in Poland, Romania and the former German Democratic Republic. The aim of our research is to focus on the Polish, Romanian and East German generation of mothers-predecessors (born in the '40s and '50s) and daughters-successors (born in the '60s and '70s) whose life was determined by the consequences of the Second World War in the context of a communist state. Thus, the project draws on two traditions of scholarly study: social history and gender studies. It aims to open new ground in the study of women's history in Central and Eastern Europe in the postwar period (1945–1989) by investigating women's life-writing during this period and using the methods of oral history to reconstruct personal histories. One of the strengths of this project is its comparative frame, encompassing three countries with different experiences of the Second World War and different living conditions during the communist regime.

[1] Research project "Regaining the future by rebuilding the past: Women's narratives of life during communism" (NCN nr/no. 2013/10/M/HS3/00482) (2014-2017).

Women's narratives of life during communism. Theoretical and socio-historical frameworks

Polish perspective

The Polish research on this topic includes the conclusion of Małgorzata Fidelis's[2] documentary project aimed at preserving the memories of women from Central and Eastern Europe (2010), Jirina Siklova's[3] work on women's memories from the perspective of gender studies (1995), the interviews with women opposition activists from Poland published by S. Penn (2003, 2014)[4] and E. Kondratowicz[5] and Tatiana Czerska's[6] cultural-historical analysis of women's private narratives after 1944 as well as Hanna Świda-Zięba's[7] generational portraits of young people in the PRL and the general context described by Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk[8]. Building on the work of Fidelis, Siklova, Czerska, Kondratowicz and others, we aim to realise more fully the research potential of women's life narratives. These sources enable us to question some of the established verities about women's socio-history during communism and to formulate new perspectives on this topic. A particularly strong argument in favour of studying women's life histories comes from M. Riot-Sarcey[9] (as discussed by M. Solarska[10]), who argues that these histories are "irreducible to any community."[11] To summarize, the question of how

[2] M. Fidelis, *Women, communism, and industrialization in postwar Poland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.

[3] J. Siclova, *Womens Memory Project* (http://www.womensmemory.net). See also: *Kobiety w czasach przełomu 1989–2009. Polska, Czechy, Słowacja, Niemcy Wschodnie, Ukraina*, [eds.] A. Grzybek, A. Mrozik, Przedstawicielstwo Fundacji im. Heinricha Bölla w Polsce, Warszawa 2009.

[4] S. Penn, *Sekret Solidarności*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 2014. Also: *idem*, *Podziemie kobiet*, Rosner i Wspólnicy, Warszawa 2003.

[5] E. Kondratowicz, *Szminka na sztandarze. Kobiety Solidarności 1980–1989*: rozmowy, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2001.

[6] T. Czerska, *Między autobiografią a opowieścią rodzinną. Kobiece narracje osobiste w Polsce po 1944 roku w perspektywie historyczno-kulturowej*, Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Szczecin 2011.

[7] H. Świda-Zięba, *Młodzież PRL. Portrety pokoleń w kontekście historii*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Warszawa 2011.

[8] M. Witeska-Młynarczyk, *Evoking Polish Memory: State, Self and the Communist Past in Transition*, Peter Lang Gmbh. Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, Frankfurt am Mainz 2014.

[9] M. Riot-Sarcey, *La démocratie à l'épreuve de femmes. Trois figures critiques du pouvoir (1830–1848)*, Albin Michel, Paris 1994.

[10] M. Solarska, *S/Przeciw — historia*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Epigram, Bydgoszcz, 2011.

[11] M. Riot-Sarcey, *op. cit.*

representative women's memories are can prove misleading. This perspective assumes that women ought to reflect the dominant values of society and thus fails to take into account the complicated relationship between the political and cultural authorities and individuals as "critical subjects."[12] Building on this insight, our objective is to enable women's voices to emerge as witnesses of the past and interpreters of their own lives before their histories are either forgotten or subjected to socio-historical narrative regimes that generalize their experiences during communism.

As regards the research of historians, the deficit of knowledge about women's recent history has its roots in the ideological view of history as a science in the People's Republic of Poland. In postwar Polish historiography, there was little room for women, even though, during that same period, new approaches giving women pride of place were developing in Western Europe, for instance in the French *Annales* school: the history of women, of everyday life, childhood, private life, as well as local history, microhistory, and, of course, gender studies. It was only in the 1980s that Polish historiography became more in touch with these modern and postmodern trends in European historical research. The first significant work in this area began to take shape at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The work of the Warsaw University research team on the social history of Poland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, directed by A. Żarnowska and A. Szwarc, laid the foundations for all subsequent research on these topics. After 1989, feminist and gender studies achieved an important status in Polish historiography and social sciences, yet by no means did it become a dominant trend. Some of the names associated with this process include: B. Klich-Kluczewska, D. Kałwa, E. Kondratowicz, S. Penn, A. Leszczyński, M. Mazurek, A. Janiak-Jasińska, M. Trawińska, M. Solarska, E. Domańska, E. Toniak, A. Kluzik and K. Stańczak-Wiślicz. New research centres and research teams were created, including the interdisciplinary research team on women's problems at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, directed by E. Pakszys (1989), and the research team on women and the family at the Philosophy and Sociology Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN) in Warsaw. After 2000, research on recent history was also conducted within the framework of the Institute of National Memory (IPN) and also by the social archive movement and the KARTA Center (Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA) in Warsaw.

As with all recent history, the history of Polish women during communism has personal resonance for all but the youngest of today's researchers. For many of us, what we define today as the history of women during the communist period used to be part of our own everyday experience. During Stalinism,

[12] Ibid., pp. 22-23. Quoted by M. Solarska, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

historians and sociologists suffered from the purges aimed at unmasking "rightist deviationists." Sociology itself was perceived as "bourgeois science." The brief period of the rebirth of Polish sociology up to 1948 was abruptly terminated.[13] After 1957 social research received a new but limited impetus and remained confined at the empirical level, without attempting any social theory for fear of falling prey to suspicions of ideological deviationism. The image of women in postwar Polish sociology was a reflection of a specific set of ideological imperatives. The preferred topics of research when it came to women included professional work, family roles, marriage models, children's education, the family's social functions, models of motherhood and fatherhood, family socialization and interaction processes, the impact of industrialization and urbanization on women and the family, secularization and the family, the model family of workers, big-city families, contemporary families, the changing roles of women in modern society, the social consequences of family disintegration, and single-parent families. What emerges from this list is the decidedly contextual character of sociological research on women — the focus on the familial and public settings in which women made their impact, rather than on individual women's life stories. When individual women were brought into the limelight they were celebrated strictly as heroines of socialist labour. The famous examples are Magdalena Figur and Wanda Gościmińska, two weavers from Łódź with interesting biographies, who were turned into socialist symbols of women's emancipation.

Against this background, it is easy to see that when women finally emerged in their own right as research subjects in Polish gender studies, feminist scholars faced the daunting task of making up for decades of disinterest. Women's recent past had to be documented and women's urgent problems discussed from a critical, scholarly perspective. Among the hot issues were women's role in the post-communist transition and the building of both civil society and a democratic order based on constitutional guarantees of gender equality.

A final remark is necessary regarding the relationship between women and the family in Poland. As part of a nostalgic, idealised view of the stable, "happy family" of communist Poland, it is emphasized that the "family protected individuals from external institutions and unfriendly realities,"[14] thus offering individuals the possibility of "escaping into privacy" and gaining satisfaction from enjoying good family relations. For these reasons, the Polish family is often held in great esteem. Yet it must be said that

[13] A. Wachowiak, *Socjologia rodziny w Polsce. Narodziny i rozwój*, Wyd. AR, Poznań 1996, pp. 85-87.

[14] A. Giza, M. Sikorska, *Współczesne społeczeństwo polskie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, pp. 185-229.

in the last years of communism, individuals experienced the family as a strongly oppressive institution. People were often pressured to enter into marriage because of unplanned pregnancies and faced great difficulties in making a home for themselves owing to the shortage of publicly-subsidized apartments. In general, the penury and harsh living conditions during the final years of communism took a heavy toll on family life. Nevertheless, in some respects the family offered opportunities that single individuals were unlikely to come by, such as procuring consumer goods through family connections at a time of scarcity and rationing.[15] This is another reason for the positive view of the Polish family during communism. On the other hand, a reverse effect can be seen in the development of a kind of "family selfishness," in effect a "hypertrophy of the family" caused by the absence of viable public institutions and social venues in which the individual might find an alternative to the structures of the family microcosm.[16]

From the Polish socio-historical perspective we have the spectacular tradition of women's voting rights being obtained in 1918. This was a special date in the history of Poland, the period in which we regained, after 123 years, independence. On the one hand, these 123 years saw the development of, as Ewa Kondratowicz writes, the noble myth of the "Polish Mother."[17] On the other hand, especially in the second half of the XIXth century, it was the emancipation movement, closely linked to the social emancipation of women, which was seen as the social agent in the process of building a modern Polish society. An open question remains: which of these two inherited traditions, the national myth of the "Polish Mother" or the social myth of the "Polish Emancipist," gained the advantage in a reviving country? Women's right to vote was obtained in 1918 and indicates that the second option won. And indeed, as Tomasz Pudłocki writes, in the period from 1918 to1939 women were active in new areas of the state and society: "... from education, through culture, in poetry, literature and medicine to policy."[18] This was the case, at least in big cities.[19] But we also have supporters of the first option, such as Dorochna Kalwa, who suggests that in the interwar period

[15] Ibid.

[16] E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Rozpad połowiczny. Szkice z socjologii transformacji ustrojowej*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 1991.

[17] E. Kondratowicz, *Być jak narodowy sztandar*, Wyd. Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2013.

[18] T. Pudłocki, *Maria Bielawska — w poszukiwaniu tożsamości kobiety aktywnej na prowincji okresu dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, [in:] Historia zwyczajnych kobiet i zwyczajnych mężczyzn. Dzieje społeczne w perspektywie gender, 2008, [eds.] D. Kałwa, T. Pudłocki, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Wschodnioeuropejska; Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk; Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Przemyśl 2008, p. 44.

[19] Ibid.

"the key to a solution to women's issues lost out to the national question."[20] The Second World War enforced women's independence and self-reliance, which resonated from the social position which they took in the interwar period. After the war, in the socio-political conditions of the socialist state, women were forced (as a result of war) and entitled (as a result of Marxist-communist ideology) to have the same rights as men. Their participation in the construction of the communist state was priceless. But no one removed their obligation to rebuild family life, including the reconstruction/construction of their economic, social and cultural capital. The myth of the "Polish Mother" worked this time in a non-spectacular way to make women important social actors in everyday public and familial life. As Jerzy Piotrowski[21] wrote, the professional activation of women constituted not only a recognized social demand, but also their indisputable right. However, this ended with a broad consensus. Doubt, hesitation and objections were often aroused when people looked at the work of women in the household and the family responsibilities of married women.[22] Mass-production work by married women, often mothers of small children, raised a lot of questions and caused controversy. There have been periods when the issue of women's work engaged the public positively, negatively or not at all. The fact is that the massive demand for labor on a large scale just after the war was covered by the mass entry of women into employment. Subsequent years saw a slowdown in overall female employment. Gradually, the recruitment drive weakened and the first difficulties in ensuring work for all women seeking employment came. Meanwhile, in the '40s and '50s, women's professional work was recognized as a new form of women's traditional role in the family in its material-economic function, as the result of the social bonds and obligations arising from it. Women's lives, however, not only involved a return to the role of mother, wife or daughter. At the same time, a transformation occurred in terms of types, models and patterns of behavior and the Polish family changed. Women definitively ceased to be merely housewives, and became family co-breadwinners. In the economic and cultural sense, they became co-decision makers about themselves and their families.[23] Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa wrote about a new model of the "woman for everything."[24]

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[20] D. Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej. Dylematy środowisk kobiecych*, Kraków TW „Historia Iagellonica," Kraków 2001, p. 26. Quoted by: Kondratowicz, *Być jak narodowy…*, p. 33.

[21] J. Piotrowski, *Praca zawodowa kobiety a rodzina*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa, 1963.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] S. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa: *1946*. Quoted by: M. Fidelis, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

These multiplicities, derived from tradition as well as quite new social expectations about women's responsibilities, shortly after Second World War, made them the rebuilders of the past to give their successors a new perspective on the future. This refers especially to women from land owning families or rich burghers, such as the heroines of Tatiana Czerska's book in the chapter dedicated the autobiographical narrations of women in post-war Poland. Cited by Czerska, Jolanta Wachowicz-Makowska (born in 1946 into a pre-war family of famous restaurateurs), said that she knew exactly the destroyed reality of postwar life. During the war her family lost their economic capital. "I was born [she wrote] and grew up in the period of constructed homes, creating the new world out of the ruins of the old one."[25] Another author of memories cited by Czerska, Małgorzata Słomczyńska-Pierzchalska, described in detail the end of the old world (the world of her father as she wrote) as the end of personal freedom, elite sports, patriotic pre-war schools, scouts, the home of the housekeeper, exquisite cuisine, foreign travels, *etc*.[26] Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of Polish women, drawn from families of intellectuals, and especially from peasants, however, also grew up in the ruins of the old world, inheriting the tradition of the work of their mothers and, in the case of rural women, also their grandmothers. The tradition of women working was probably only helpful for those who lost, as a result of war, the legacy of their predecessors and had now to rebuild it. Polish actors born during or after the Second World War, Beata Tyszkiewicz and Joanna Prucnal, recall their lonely mothers as resourceful, industrious and independent women, as both caring baby sitters and „harassed troubles," "physically exhausted" and hysterical.[27] The famous Polish writer, Joanna Chmielewska, wrote about her professional-familial life: she worked in an office and after work she took the baby from her mother's house, shopped and took additional work to have money for the family.[28] The mother of Gaja Kuroń (from a Warsaw intelligentsia — bourgeois family) repeated to her that mothers do not have to do everything, just study to have an education. She and her husband took on the burden of building the basics of life after

[25] J. Wachowicz-Makowska, *Panienka w PRL-u*, Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik," Warszawa 2007, p. 25. Quted by T. Czerska, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[26] M. Słomczyńska-Pierzchalska, *Nie mogłem być inny. Zagadka Macieja Słomczyńskiego*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2003, p. 52. Quted by T. Czerska, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

[27] B. Tyszkiewicz, *Nie wszystko na sprzedaż*, Studio Marka Łebkowskiego, Warszawa 2003, p. 66. Quted by T. Czerska, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[28] J. Chmielewska, *Autobiografia*, Polski Dom Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1994, vol. I, p. 136. Quted by T. Czerska, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

the war period.[29] Also, Gaja Kuroń, Jacek Kuroń's wife, engaged in her professional work as a psychologist and in the dissident movement with her husband, in an effort to civilize their under-invested apartment, to give it a familial and more comfortable character.[30] Meanwhile, in another part of the country, women from small towns and villages started to build a new life in a "new city for a new socialist society" in Nowa Huta. One of the builders was Krystyna Gil, a Roma girl, the first Roma metallurgist and first female machinist in Nowa Huta and Cracow. The building of Nowa Huta in the '50s was for young Roma women a double challenge. There was not only the need to rebuild the old life in a new place and social-historical context but also the need to change this life from cultural and ethnic-traditional points of view. Another Nowa Huta builder, Stanisława Olchawa, came from a little village in the mountains. She had seven sisters and three brothers. Migration to Nowa Huta gave her the possibility to change her life status. She served food in a canteen.[31] Other women-peasants — started their post-war life in yet another context. They were housekeepers/housewives and workers on National State Farms at the same time. Less educated, but used to hard work, these women did not rebuild their parents' heritage and did not build a new life for their children. Even though they changed their economic status by working on the National State Farms, they had nothing to give their successors. Although they were formerly workers, they had owned no property. In many cases their ancestors reproduced older economic and cultural capital, a specific style of life with a mixture of peasant and labor traditions.[32] For nothing seemed the propaganda slogan "women on tractors." The diaries of female agricultural workers leave no illusions.

Nevertheless, the next generation of women, especially in the cities, was able to enjoy social and economic advancement which provided education and work. As we have mentioned, in the '60s came "the edge of little stabilization," and gradually the recruitment drive for women workers weakened and the first difficulties in ensuring work for all women seeking employment came. Moreover, in the second half of the '70s, the political, and most importantly, economic crisis began in Poland. Educated and resourceful women were forced to face a difficult everyday life. The lack of flats, furnishings and food led to women once again becoming working mother heroines. Having knowledge,

[29] K. Kalukin-Skrzydłowska, *Gajka i Jacek Kuroniowie*, Wydawnictwo Czerwone i Czarne, Warszawa 2011, p. 25.

[30] Ibid.

[31] K. Gil, *Moja Nowa Huta 1949–2009*, Kraków 2009, pp. 66-73.

[32] E. Szpak, *Robotnice czy chłopki, czyli o życiu codziennym pegeerowskich kobiet*, [in:] Historia zwyczajnych kobiet i zwyczajnych mężczyzn..., pp. 74-75.

skills and aspirations, many of them fought for the *status quo* worked out by their mothers rather than invest in the promotion of their children. What is more, this effort was not highly valued socially. Symbolic of this period were the scenes of the long queues to buy anything. "What will be the inscription on the monument of the 'Polish Mother'"? "You cannot stand here" — went the popular joke in communist Poland.[33] This image of women also determined those who were engaged in the labor protests and dissident opposition. An active actor in the workers' protests in the Gdańsk Shipyard, Anna Waletynowicz, gained during the strikes the nickname "Mother of Courage," fighting for Poles' social and political freedom. "Friends sent flowers to me once again. This time red and white carnations. Flowers wait for the hero of the day, the hero of our time, with the symbol of the Polish Mother's passionate fight for a better future for the daughters and sons of our nation."[34] But when the striking men returned home, their equally rebellious wife again "went to the queues" and cooked for them their favorite soups.[35] Gaja Kuroń, like her husband Jacek and son Maciej, was interned in December 1981. She left prison one year later because of very bad health (actually, she was already then dying). She moved in with a family friend and her doctor in Łódź. In her friend's fridge she kept a piece of veal for her husband, who was still interned.[36]

Did women during communism achieve the status of a "woman for everything"? Were they rebuilding the past to regain the future? And if so, did a similar mechanism rule women's lives in Poland, the former GDR and Romania?

German perspective

Although the beginning of research which placed women at the center of scientific interest is often dated back in Germany to as late as the turn of the 19th century, it is worth commemorating one woman, whose birthday in 2015 will recur for the 300th time: Dorothea Erxleben. In Germany she is the pioneer of women's studies and was the first woman who was allowed to study medicine and be granted the degree of a medical doctor (M.D.). In 1742 she wrote a book titled "Inquiry into the causes preventing the female sex

[33] E. Kondratowicz, *Być jak narodowy...*, p. 30.

[34] A. Walentynowicz, A. Baszanowska, *Cień przyszłości*, Kraków 2005, p. 154. Quoted by E. Kondratowicz, *Być jak narodowy...*, pp. 31-32. See also: S. Cenckiewicz, *Anna Solidarność. Życie i działalność Anny Walentynowicz na tle epoki (1929–2010)*, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2010.

[35] E. Kondratowicz, *Być jak narodowy...* p. 31.

[36] A. Bikont, J. Szczęsna, *Przeżyć śmierć Gajki*, cz. 5, „Wysokie Obcasy" dodatek „Gazety Wyborczej" 09/03/2011. See also *Kobiety wobec systemu*, „Karta," 2012/71, pp. 91-125.

from studying" ("Gründliche Untersuchung der Ursachen, die das weibliche Geschlecht vom Studieren abhalten"). A special dispensation of Frederick the Great (presented to the University of Halle (Saale) in 1741) was necessary to allow Dorothea Erxleben her graduation. Women in the German Empire were officially admitted to state examinations in medicine, dentistry and pharmacy in April 1899. And at the universities of the Kingdom of Prussia, women were first entitled to the right to study medicine in the winter semester 1908/1909.[37]

This was also the time when many studies were written in relation to the so called "first" feminist movement, which dealt with the life conditions and social problems of women. Authors of these studies were women associated with different trends of the feminist movement and its aims, e.g. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne (1850–1917), who was engaged in answering questions about the social position of women and wrote, amongst other things, a study on the situation of female workers in the stationery industry in Berlin; Gertrud Dyhrenfurth (1865–1945), who for the first time ever observed the everyday life of peasant women from socio-scientific perspectives; and Alice Salomon (1872–1948), who was a forerunner in social work as a science and explored in her dissertation (1906) "The causes for unequal payment of men's and women's work" ("Die Ursachen der ungleichen Entlohnung von Männer- und Frauenarbeit"). The works of these and other women had at that time an enormous impact on endeavors towards the implementation of social and political reforms, even if their research was hardly absorbed and acknowledged in the scientific discourse of their contemporaries.[38]

The connection between women's studies and the goals and demands of the "second" feminist movement was also formative from the beginning of 1960s. It was founded in the manifold discrimination against women in science and society and in the lack of recognition necessary to bring significance to their lives and works.

A scientific perspective was postulated which would revoke the androcentrism (*the Androcentric Culture*) presented in research and theory construction and allow the consideration of feminist positions. From this moment the central field of interest and analysis was the everyday social setting of women e.g. the family or professional life.

Socially and scientifically taboo topics — like violence against women or sexual abuse — also found a place in the discussion. The demand was that

[37] E. Pies, *Dorothea Christiane Erxleben geborene Leporin (1715–1762), die erste promovierte Ärztin in Deutschland*, Dommershausen-Sprockhövel 2011.

[38] See also R. Nave-Herz, *Die Geschichte der Frauenbewegung in Deutschland*, Landeszentralle für politische Bildung, Hannover 1997.

research results should find their application in social and political processes in order to serve change. Consequently, the range of topics has been extended over time and subjects like migration and integration (meaning also the acceptance und rejection of people with migration backgrounds and the disabled) were included.

Different approaches, stressing either the equality of the sexes or the perspective of difference, resulted in controversial discussions. Also, the relationship with the feminist movement gave cause for controversy within women's studies.

Against this background, beginning from the mid-80s, gender studies also developed into an autonomous discipline in Germany.

This development (from women's studies to gender studies), however, should not be regarded as a historical succession of differing phases replacing one another. It rather concerns the "shifting and pluralization of perspectives." That is to say: gender studies did not replace women's studies, but complemented it by asking some new questions. In the first instance it focuses on gender relations. The situation of women is examined in the context of manifold social power constellations. There is a shift in the sociological interest: the image of a homogenous, oppressed group of women gives way to an examination of various differences and similarities as well as to the entanglements with other dimensions which influence social inequality and the (gender) hierarchy.

Along with the political change in Germany in 1989/1990 came a rapid extension of perspective, which encompassed the situation of women in East Germany.

Very quickly it became obvious that with regard to the situation in the former GDR after the political change, traditional socio-scientific women's studies were overstretched in their efforts and faced many limitations which had to be overcome. In 1990 the East German sociologist Hildegard Maria Nickel listed the following limitations typical for the GDR academic landscape: (1) until then women were viewed to a large extent in a purely functional and therefore one-sided way, since they were reduced to their economic, biological and/or political function. Women were not conceived as subjects or seen in the complexity of their specific life contexts and environments, but as a workforce, political officials, a management cadre, child bearers and/or as mothers; (2) in the "objective" androcentric analysis, the point was to arrange in an "optimal" way the division of women according to qualifications, profession und performance efficiency. Intrinsically this research examined "deficiency and difference," i.e. it concentrated on deficiencies, which women "still" demonstrated in comparison to men and which women had to overcome to reach "higher," mostly economic goals — above all by their own effort and

diligence. The deficiencies with which women were confronted in society i.e. the objective inequality of endowment with material goods, time, social and cultural resources were not closely examined or not perceived at all; (3) this traditional kind of research on women was definitely "biased" in the sense that it represented the reigning ideology which fitted the existent order, but was not favorable for women. Women had no women's movement to lean on and only the Women's Department in the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany on their backs instead. They had to legitimate their worth through the results of their work in order to participate in the construction of myths about the successful progression of equal rights for men and women in the GDR, as well as in making knowledge about the real situation of women a taboo. This kind of research plays a role in atrophying the real self-consciousness of women i.e. in social desensitization to the gender question; (4) sex was reduced to a statistical category and not regarded as a category of structure. The relations between the sexes was scaled down to a "secondary contradiction" of a wider, main contradiction. Therefore, its solution was to come almost automatically, if the individuals only had the right judgment — again, above all, the women themselves should have it.[39]

After 1990, women's studies in East Germany were, no doubt, able to set new priorities. The situation of women on the employment market,[40] emigration and the demographic problems which result from it, were in the foreground. Works which had consideration for the mental state of women in East Germany were indeed also published,[41] but to our knowledge none of them pursued the approach which is the basis of this study: clearing and reflecting on the tension existent in relations between the experience of women who lived in a socialist society and the experience and perspectives of the next generation of women living in a post-communist society.

Just like the women in Poland — women in Germany earned the right to vote in 1918. On 30th November 1918 the right to eligibility and the right to vote for all female and male citizens was anchored in the regulations on

[39] H. M. Nickel, *„... kommt an den Herd,"* [in:] I. Lenz, *Die Neue Frauenbewegung in Deutschland. Abschied vom kleinen Unterschied. Eine Quellensammlung*, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 964-967.

[40] For example H. Best, E. Holtmann [eds.], *Aufbruch der entsicherten Gesellschaft. Deutschland nach der Wiedervereinigung*, Frankfurt a. M. 2012, also B. Wiener, *Die Arbeitswelt wird weiblicher*, [in:] S. Böttcher, J. Csongàr, U. Schlegel, B. Wiener [eds.], Schichtwechsel. Work-Life-Balance neu gestalten. Ideen, Anregungen, Beispiele, Halle 2014, pp. 43-62.

[41] See K. Böllert, *Zur Lebenssituation junger Frauen in den neuen Bundesländern*, Bund-Verlag, Köln 1994; also G. Förster, U. Schröter, B. Seyfarth, *Zur sozialen Lage und Befindlichkeit der Frauen in Ostdeutschland*, Berlin 1995.

elections by the constituent German national assembly. Every woman and man from the age of 20 was allowed to vote.

Five weeks later, German women made active use of this: in the first elections to the constituent national assembly in which women could be elected and had the right to vote, on 19th January 1919, the participation of women was almost 90 percent.[42]

The introduction of suffrage for women is usually celebrated as a great success. But this success also implied in Germany the fact that — as a result — German women also carried a great moral burden, since they belonged to the ones who helped Adolf Hitler come to power in January 1933. This fact had well-known consequences: Hitler's politics brought death and destruction all over the world and eventually also led to the banishment of over 14 million people, of which only 12 million reached any destination at all. For over 4 million this destination was the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ).[43] The displaced persons constituted over 24 percent of the whole postwar society in the later GDR (the percentage in West Germany was at that time only 15,7). We are still not sure if this circumstance has a relevant influence on the results of our study, but we should not leave unnoticed the fact that the lives of mothers of some of the interviewed women contained the experience not only of displacement but also of — often cruel — rejection and disrespect.[44]

However, the fortunes of women who were not displaced was also not at all easy. Directly after the Second World War — with men absent, since they had either fallen in battle or were still being held in war captivity — women had not only to bring up their children alone, but also to remove the wreckage and ruins after the bombings — this gave birth to the "rubble women" ethos.

But after the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, only every third woman became employed. The German constitution actually guaranteed the equality of men and women, but in practice women still got lower salaries and received subordinate job positions. It was self-evident that — if women wanted to be employed — they were left alone with the double burden of maintaining the household and a profession. Who at that time would have been astonished by this fact? It was the time when a woman couldn't even get herself a job without her husband's permission (not until the reform of marriage and family law in 1977 changed this!). Well into the 60s she also couldn't have her

[42] http://www.bmfsfj.de/mag/root,did=114188.html [14.12.2014]

[43] See also A. Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945*, Siedler Verlag, München 2008, p. 59.

[44] B. Alberti, *Seelische Trümmer: Geboren in den 50er- und 60er-Jahren: Die Nachkriegsgeneration im Schatten des Kriegstraumas*, Verlag: Kösel, München 2010.

own bank account. Sexual violence i.e. sexual abuse in marriage was also not considered to be rape (this applied as late as into the 1990s !).

The government under Konrad Adenauer (1949-63) did not see any reason to bring about change. On the contrary: the minister for family affairs at that time, Franz Josef Wuermeling (1953-62), promoted the idea of a family raising many children as the proper family model and used his best endeavors to block the structural change of the family as such. He saw the place of women — after they had been occupied in the wartime economy — as back in the family. The alliteration "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" ("children, kitchen, church") — known in the German language as "the three K's" — was born.

Much different was the situation in the other part of Germany, in the GDR (1949–1990): the official picture of women in the former GDR was a counterpart to the picture of women in the Federal Republic.

A woman in the GDR was always to be employed and be a mother to as many children as possible. The goal of family politics was the growth of population. A woman in the GDR was capable anytime of combining a job and a family smoothly and she had all the support of the state for her needs. While family and social policy in West Germany was for a long time (well into the 1960s) affected by the idea that it was parents — and not the state — who were responsible for bringing up children — therefore the state would only intervene when parents could not fulfill their duties — the available state kindergartens and nurseries made it possible for GDR-women to combine professional life with the role of a mother. For almost all children who were born in the GDR it was natural to attend a day nursery and a kindergarten; and for the majority of women who lived in the GDR it was natural to be employed. The fact that many a tear was shed when one had to haul the tiny child out of bed, at five in the morning, and leave it at the nursery to be on time for the beginning of the shift at the factory, is frequently forgotten in the "chorus of praise" for the GDR's system. As well as the frequently ignored fact that all too often it was of secondary or no importance if the occupation answered the needs and interests of the woman. What was crucial was the economic demands of the labor force. The woman as a professional was to be continuously fit for service and the facilities for children had opening hours which guaranteed her readiness to work; they also socialized them from a very early age into the state educational system.

Working women who had children in East Germany received (from the end of the 1940s till December 1991) the right to one paid free day monthly, to stay at home ("work-at-home-day," "Hausarbeitstag") — also colloquially called "wash day" ("Waschtag").[45]

[45] C. Sachse, *Der Hausarbeitstag. Gerechtigkeit und Gleichberechtigung in Ost und West 1939–1994*, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2002.

The high employment rate for women in the GDR (almost 100%) also had its price: a very high rate of divorce. The continuous state control and suspiciousness towards other people and neighbors, which developed due to the STASI's activities the feeling of being caged in one's own land — all this resulted in the fact that the lives of GDR-women showed a "sunny side" only in the propaganda broadcasts of GDR television. Nonetheless, women's employment — with all the problems it bore — was not only a duty but also a right, whereby women were guaranteed a relative material independence. Also, a field outside of the family settings was provided, where a woman could find recognition and meaning.[46]

After the political change in East Germany many things were rapidly revised under the conditions of the market economy — mostly to the disadvantage of women. A much delayed and long overdue rationalization in companies, which began in 1990, had its price and this was paid in the first instance by women. Their unemployment grew rapidly. The majority of women were not prepared for this. The power structures which had always ruled in companies and in society — in spite of all the equal rights propaganda — were blocking the development of women's critical consciousness; even more than that they were exposed to the enormous and permanent stress of a strenuous double burden.

New structures for the economy and democracy had to be developed first. But people in East Germany were given no time for this process to happen. Much, if not everything was imposed on them by the Westerners. Accordingly, some of them regret the dissolution of the old, proven structures. From the perspective of today, 25 years later, it is clear to us, that it would have been important to keep something — at least in the approach — from the "old GDR," like e.g. elements of the childcare system.

Romanian perspective

In Romania, researchers have traditionally never devoted much attention to women's history or to gender issues. Women were absent from historiography and any other type of academic research until recently. Under the pressure of foreign institutions, mainly European Commission gender policies and agenda, as well as other European research centers, the issues related to women have now started to be investigated.

In 1993, an NGO was created in Bucharest in order to promote gender studies. Called AnA, it succeeded in implementing a master's curriculum in "Public policies and gender" at the National School of Political Science

[46] H. M. Nickel, „... *kommt an den Herd*," [in:] I. Lenz, *Die Neue Frauenbewegung in Deutschland. Abschied vom kleinen Unterschied. Eine Quellensammlung*, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 964-967.

and Public Administration (SNSPA). One of the most influential and prolific members of this NGO, a professor at SNSPA, was Mihaela Miroiu.[47] AnA published a journal called *AnALize*, which did not accomplish its mission[48] due to financial reasons.

In 2000, another master's curriculum was instituted at Babeș-Bolyai, in Cluj, called "Differences and inequities of gender." The program was supported by the Research Centre for Women's Studies of Sussex University and by the Centre for Women's Studies of Nijmegen University. In 1999, the University of Timisoara created a "Feminist studies Center," which published a journal called, *Gender Studies*. A Gender Centre for Feminist Studies was also created in the department of English Language at Bucharest University.[49]

These centers did not succeed in investing gender studies with the necessary importance to became a mainstream academic discipline. Actually, most of them are not functioning anymore. The researchers working in these centers did not succeed in introducing gender studies as a topic of debate in the public sphere. Far more prolific and visible in the public sphere were researchers affiliated to the Ecole Doctorale Francophone en Sciences Sociales de Bucarest.[50]

The most important and relevant studies pertaining to women's history and gender studies are the work of foreign researchers or researchers of Romanian origin but active abroad. Gail Kligman's work entitled, *The Politics*

[47] M. Miroiu has published extensively on feminist theories and women during post-communism: *Convenio. Despre natură, femei și morală* [Convenio. On nature, women and morals], Polirom, Iaşi 2002; *Nepreţuitele femei. Publicistică feministă* [Un-precious women. Feminist articles], Polirom, Iași 2006; M. Miroiu, O. Dragomir, eds., *Lexicon feminist* [A feminist dictionary], Polirom, Iași 2002.

[48] *AnALize: Revista de studii feministe* started to be published in 1998. On the magazine site the journal is described as: "AnALize: A Journal of feminist studies" is the first publication of its kind in Romania. It promotes multi-disciplinary study in the field, explaining through theoretic arguments the need for feminism in Romania and encouraging autochtonic feminism. The journal is bilingual (Romanian-English) and his abstracts in French. "AnALize" ceased to be printed. Issue no. 13, although ready for print, can't be published because of luck of funding," last accessed in 2006.

[49] The information mentioned here dated from 2004–2006 when I was able to consult their internet sites for my PhD research on *Women testimonies on communism and political repression*. All these web sites have disappeared since.

[50] In the publicity booklet published by Ecole Doctorale Francophone en Sciences Sociales of Bucharest in 2004, there were a few PhD thesis on « Histoire des femmes, construction sociale de genre » : to give a few examples: I. Băluță, *La construction d'une nouvelle identité féminine au XIX-e siècle dans les pays Roumains*; F. Bohîlțea, *Rôles religieux de la femme dans la Rome Républicaine*; I. Cârstocea, *Raisons d'écrire, raisons de lire: la presse féminine en Roumanie post-communiste*; L. Anton, *La mémoire de l'avortement en Roumanie communiste : une ethnographie des formes de la mémoire du pronatalisme roumain*, *etc*.

of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania (University of California Press, Berkeley 1998), became a reference with regard to gender during communism in Romania and generated a growing interest in this topic[51]. An important book for gender studies which illuminated women's status and perceptions during the interwar period in Romania was published by Maria Bucur: *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2002).

A few studies realized by Romanian researchers are also worth mentioning: Vladimir Pasti's work, *Ultima inegalitate. Relaţiile de gen în România* [The last inequality: Gender relations in Romania] (Polirom, Iaşi 2003), deals with gender issues in post-communist Romania; Ionela Băluţă, Ioana Cârstocea, *Direcţii şi teme de cercetare în studiile de gen din România* [Patterns and research topics concerning gender studies in Romania] (Atelier. New Europe College, 5 July 2002, Colegiul Noua Europă, 2003); Mihaela Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie. Teorii politice feministe* [The road to autonomy. Feminist political theories] (Polirom, Iaşi 2004); Ştefănescu, Doina-Olga, *Dilema de gen a educaţiei* [The gender dilemma in education] (Polirom, Iaşi 2003); Oana Băluţă, ed., *Gen şi putere. Partea leului în politica românească* [Gender and power. The lion's share in Romanian politics] (Polirom, Iaşi 2006); Eniko Magyari-Vincze, "Gender, Ethnicity and the Construction of the Social Order: A View from Below in the Context of Romania," [in:] *Anthropological Yearbook of European Cultures*, vol. 14/2005, pp. 197-225.

Twentieth century women's history and identity as well as Romanian feminism seem to be attracting more Romanian researchers. Ştefania Mihăilescu has published a collection of articles/speeches/public interventions of Romanian feminists in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century[52]. Ionela Baluta's interest in bourgeois women produced an important book on middle class women's identity, *La Bourgeoise respectable. Réflexion sur la construction d'une nouvelle identité féminine dans la seconde moitié du XIXe roumain* (Editions universitaires europeennes,). Another book dealing with women's status in nineteenth century Romania was published by the historian, Alin Ciupala, *Femeia în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea:*

[51] A few important projects on this topic were undertaken by young scholars like: L. Anton, „ « On n'en parlera jamais... . » Interroger la mémoire de l'avortement en Roumanie communiste," *Ethnologie française*, 2014/3 (Vol. 44): pp. 421-428; C. Doboș (coord.), F. Soare, L.-M. Jinga, *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu O perspectivă comparativă*, vol. 1, Polirom, Iași 2010; C. Doboș, F. Soare, C. Roman, L. Marioara Jinga, *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu. Instituții și practici,* Polirom, Iaşi 2011.

[52] Ş. Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte* [Files of history of Romanian Feminism], vol. 1, (1829–1929), Iaşi, Polirom, 2002, vol. 2. (1929–1948), Polirom, Iaşi 2006.

între public şi privat [Women in the Romanian society of the XIXth century: between public and private] (Editura Meridiane, Bucureşti 2003).

Remembering communism in Romania is characterized by a lack of gender sensitivity. The public narrative concerning the communist regime in Romania has not yet included a feminine perspective. The male-dominant discourse depicts women as victims of the former regime, regarded as a destructive system, which encouraged women to work and behave like men, and controlled the female body through its politics and policies of reproduction. Furthermore, the regime is also considered to have been criminal because it sent women to prison, regardless of their condition (old, sick, pregnant, teenager) if they manifested any kind of opposition towards the authorities.

Women's anti-communist endeavors are integrated into the broader topic of the anticommunist resistance. The only woman who enjoyed large scale attention from media and public intellectuals was a peasant, Elisabeta Rizea of Nucsoara. In the 1990s she became a symbol of the anticommunist resistance, a subject of appropriation and/or symbolic violence. A charismatic and courageous figure, as both a peasant and a mother, she addressed the imagination of Romanian women,[53] while incarnating the high moral values of the Romanian nation that were still believed to exist.[54]

The absence of a public feminine narrative on communism and repression raised questions about women's roles and gender relations during communism, especially after the regime's collapse, but also about women's construction of subjectivities.

The issue of women's identities during communism was dealt with by Calin Morar-Vulcu in a chapter of his book, *The Republic creates its people*.[55] There are a few studies on women during communism,[56] most of these studies being concerned with women detainees and their testimonies.[57]

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[53] She was the perfect incarnation of a Romanian woman (according to a traditional definition still dominant in Romania): she was a good wife, mother, and housekeeper. She never betrayed her husband, even if she was savagely tortured, she raised her stepdaughter as her own, she kept on working to support her family. She was welcoming and devoted to an ideal and to her husband's partners; she was loyal, faithful, and honest.

[54] C. F. Dobre: "Elisabeta Rizea de Nucşoara: un 'lieu de mémoire' pour les Roumains?," *Conserveries mémorielles*, 2006 : http://www.celat.ulaval.ca/histoire.memoire/revue.htm.

[55] C. Morar-Vulcu, *Republica isi faureste oamenii. Constructia identitatilor politice in discursul official in Romania (1948–1965)* [The republic creates its people. The construction of political identities in the Romanian official discourse (1948–1956)], Eikon, Cluj 2007, pp. 389-445.

[56] C. Olteanu, ed., *Femeile in Romania comunista. Studii de istorie sociala* [Women in communist Romania. Studies in social history], Politeia, SNSPA, Bucharest 2003.

[57] Testimonies were analyzed from a gender perspective by T.-E. Văcărescu in her article on women experiences of repression and detention based on memoirs published by *Memoria*

An interesting essay about women's status at the beginning of communism was published by Virgiliu Tarau, "De la diversitate la integrare. Problema femeii si instaurarea comunismului in Europa Centrala si de Est. Cazul Romaniei" [From diversity to integration. Women's issues at the instauration of communism. The Romanian case study], in a collective volume edited by Ghizela Cosma, Virgil Tarau, *Conditia femeii in Romania in secolul XX. Studii de caz* [Women's condition in XX century Romania. Case studies] (Cluj, Presa universitară Clujeană, 2002, pp. 135-159).

No sooner did the communists come to power in Romania than they made women the main target of their modernization campaign.[58] In view of their long history of legal and social discrimination, women were regarded as a social group in need of protection and emancipation. Lost in all this was the history of Romanian feminism, which had been an important presence during the interwar era, both domestically and especially internationally. The feminist associations disappeared; everything they had achieved was lost. In their place came the Women's Democratic Union (March 1948), which in 1957 became the Women's National Council.[59]

Gender equality — literally: "the equality between man and woman" — became the regime's new catchphrase. This was reflected in legislation about voting rights and in the new family and labor codes. Full equality between men and women as regards the right to vote and to be elected in all state

magazine. T.-E. Văcărescu, "Women and/in the communist political prisons: the first and the second circle of suffering, Romania, 1947–1965," [in:] *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 7-45. Another article concerning former political detainees' testimonies was published by Jill Massino, "Humanizing Imprisonment: Religion, Community and Gender Identity in the Narratives of Women Prisoners in Communist Romania," [in:] G. Cosma, V. Tarau, *Conditia femeii in Romania in secolul XX. Studii de caz* [Woman condition in XX century Romania. Case studies] Presa universitară Clujeană, Cluj 2002, pp. 179-198. Besides these articles, there are a few books dealing with women repression and women memories of political persecutions: G. Cormoş, *Femei în infernul concentraţionar din România (1945–1989)* [Women in the concentrationnaire inferno], E. Argonaut, ediţia a II-a, Cluj-Napoca 2009; Cozea, Liana, *Confesiuni ale eului feminin* [Confessions of Feminine Ego], Paralela 45, Pitesti 2005; and C.-F. Dobre, *Vies menottées, paroles libérées. Témoignages des anciennes persécutées politiques roumaines*, Editions universitaires européennes, Saarbrücken 2010.

[58] I. Cârstocea, "Conceptul de gen, o categorie utilă pentru analiza socio-istorică a regimului communist din România" [Gender, a useful category for the socio-historical analysis of the Romanian communist regime], [in:] I. Băluţă, I. Cîrstocea, *Direcţii şi teme de cercetare în studiile de gen din România* [Research directions and topics in Romanian gender studies], Atelier, Colegiul Noua Europă, București, 5 iulie 2002, Ecole Doctorale Régionale en Sciences Sociales, Colegiul Noua Europă, 2003 (henceforth I. Cârstocea, « Conceptul de gen »), p. 123.

[59] A. Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* [Standing on Marx's shoulders: an introduction to the history of Romanian Communism], Curtea veche, Bucarest 2005, p. 79.

and party offices was enshrined in the 1948 Constitution, together with the principle of equal pay, including equality as regards vacations, retirement plans, and so on. Unfortunately, the undemocratic nature of the regime meant that all this legislation soon rang hollow.[60] Legal emancipation became void of any real substance owing to the workings of the communist bureaucracy and the cadres' narrow viewpoint.

The misogynistic outlook of the communist cadres not only hampered the legislative efforts to achieve emancipation but also took a toll on the social roles ascribed to women. Ultimately, women's path to emancipation ran through the traditional professional choices: chiefly the textile industry and the education and health sectors. Women continued to work predominantly under male superiors.[61] This narrow outlook on gender equality has been studied by Călin Morar-Vulcu in a discourse analysis of the articles published between 1956 and 1959 in the party's theoretical journal, *The Class Struggle* [*Lupta de clasă*]. Women were encouraged to dedicate themselves to the education of their children and the care for the elderly. Their special skills in cooking, fashion, agriculture and propaganda were highlighted.[62] In summary, the party's view on women was that they were good at cooking, sewing, child rearing and caring for the sick. Women also seemed destined for propaganda work, on the assumption that they were naturally talkative and shallow. For women, the party recommended such jobs as textile worker, teacher, nurse and farmer. The feminization of agriculture became even clearer during the communist regime. This led to the perpetuation of traditional stereotypes about women, despite the communist egalitarian theories, as shown by Gail Kligman's research in Maramureş in the 1980s.[63]

For propaganda purposes, however, the communist achievements in gender equality were blown out of all proportion. Women were depicted as the embodiment of progress — driving tractors, piloting aircraft and operating technologically advanced machinery. Women became increasingly visible in the public space, occupying leadership positions and taking an active part in propaganda work. With women holding such important offices as

[60] M. Miroiu, "Feminismul ca politică a modernizării" [Feminism as modernization policy], [in:] A. Mungiu Pippidi, ed., *Doctrine politice* [Political doctrines], Polirom, Iasi, p. 253.

[61] I. Cârstocea, "Conceptul de gen", p. 128.

[62] C. Morar Vulcu, "Între 'noi' şi 'ei': identitatea politică a femeii în discursul comunist" [Between 'us' and 'them': women's political identity in communist discourse], [in:] G. Cosma, V. Tarău, eds., *Condiția femeii în România secolului XX. Studii de caz* [Women's status in twentieth-century Romania: case studies], Presa Universitară clujeană, Cluj 2002, pp. 199-213.

[63] G. Kligman, *Nunta mortului. Ritual, poetică și cultură populară în Transilvania* [The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics and Popular Culture in Transylvania], Polirom, Iasi 2005, p. 44.

representative in the National Assembly or cabinet minister, at first glance the modernization looked real enough. In reality, research has shown that the communist emancipation of women was but "a different kind of serfdom, doubled by self-deception."[64]

Summing up, the various measures aimed at eradicating gender inequality did not emancipate women but arguably made them more dependent on the state.[65] Male hegemony was now doubled by the power of the communist state. Women were placed in a dependent relationship with both the party-state and the male patriarchy.

During this first, internationalist stage of the communist regime, the role of models drawn from the communist social imagination was to show women the path to progress. The models most actively promoted included the woman worker dedicated to the party, the persecuted communist militant, and the androgynous heroine fallen in the line of duty, e.g., while piloting a war plane. In the communist imagination, such women held the promise of undermining the bourgeois social structure by transgressing traditional social roles. The communist androgynous woman transcended biological constraints through her strength of character. The communist iconography became dominated by asexual adolescents that illustrated through their bodies the ideal of gender equality.

Ana Pauker, Romania's minister for foreign affairs, was the incarnation of the woman activist, who dedicated body and mind to the communist party.[66] Her official portrayal as an idealistic and asexual communist made her the perfect example of the emancipated woman who sacrificed her private life in order to help build the new society.[67] This epitomized what the party asked of women: to transgress gender roles and change society by renouncing the values of the traditional family.

The literature and art of the 1950s were enlisted in the effort to destroy the traditional family through women's emancipation. The novels and particularly the plays written at the time — since theatre was perceived as

[64] P. Cernat, "Femei în fața oglinzii partidului" [Women in the party's mirror], [in:] P. Cernat, A. Mitchievici, I. Manolescu, I. Stanomir, *În căutarea comunismului pierdut* [In search of the lost communism], Paralela 45, 2001, p. 116.

[65] S. Gal and G. Kligman, *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 5.

[66] D. Pasca Harsanyi, "Women in Romania," [in:] N. Funk, M. Mueller, *Gender Politics and Post-communism. Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Routledge, 1993, p. 42.

[67] Z. Petre, "Promovarea femeii sau despre destructurarea sexului feminine" [Promoting women: on the destruction of the female sex], [in:] Lucian Boia, ed., *Miturile comunismului românesc* [The myths of Romanian communism], Nemira, București 1998, p. 260.

more effective in shaping public opinion — actively promoted communist values. School textbooks also played their part in the communist effort to change Romanian society. Among the models fed to schoolgirls was Zoia Kosmodemianskaia, the extraordinary woman pilot who fought the Nazis. The communists' love of Kosmodemianskaia went as far as naming streets and high schools after her. Ceaușescu even named his daughter after her.

Women fighters remained particularly popular all the way to the end of the communist regime.[68] Romanian women were expected to identify with these historic figures, whose profile was adjusted to suit the regime's evolving needs. One such character was inherited from the interwar period: Ecaterina Teodoroiu, the virgin heroine (as her tombstone described her),[69] was memorialized as a Romanian Joan of Arc — a comparison explicitly drawn by General Berthelot.[70] During Ceaușescu's regime this woman soldier was immortalized in the film "Ecaterina, the Heroine of the River Jiu Battle". Taking their cue from the interwar imagination, communist textbooks turned Teodoroiu into what one researcher has called "a cyborg avant la letter."[71]

Much changed in communist policy during its forty-four-year oppressive reign over Romania. Episodes of state-run terror were succeeded by a period of relative liberalization; finally, the Soviet-inspired internationalist phase made way for nationalism, influenced in part by the interwar extreme right. By the 1960s, as the regime became more nationalist in tone, the earlier egalitarian, proletarian internationalism became obsolete. This shift in ideology and policies had a significant impact on the party's discourse on women: henceforth they would be viewed primarily as mothers.

The transition from the internationalist to the nationalist phase of Romanian communism can be seen clearly in the 1966 anti-abortion legislation. For Romanian women it marked the moment when they lost control over their own bodies to the state. This was accompanied by social

[68] School textbooks offered similar models of women soldiers, like the World-War-One artillerist Măriuca. I. Manolescu, "Clişee tematice ale manualelor comuniste din clasele primare" [The stereotypes of the communist primary school textbooks], [in:] P. Cernat, I. Manolescu, A. Mitchievici, I. Stanomir, *Explorări în comunismul românesc* [Explorations of the Romanian communism], vol. 2, Polirom, Iaşi 2005 (hereafter Ion Manolescu, "Clişee tematice"), pp. 293-294.

[69] M. Bucur, "Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War", *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 12, no. 2, summer 2000, p. 46.

[70] A. Avram, *Femei celebre din România* [Romania's famous women], Editura ALL, p. 111.

[71] I. Manolescu, "Clişee tematice," p. 293.

discrimination: while women were now destined to give birth and raise children, the state child-support subsidy was paid to the father.[72]

During the period of national communism, when the woman-as-mother became the model stressed by party propaganda, the emphasis was not simply on raising exemplary children who as grownups would heroically defend the country and ensure its progress — like, for instance, in the nineteenth-century poem about the mother of Prince Stephen the Great. Rather, by giving birth to numerous children, the mother would become herself the heroine. Her courage was shown by bringing into the world the many offspring on which the communist state relied for its advancement. Such heroic women, the mothers of several children, were to receive both praise and material reward.

The communist ideology that emphasized gender-equality turned out to be pure demagogy. Far from liberating women, communism enslaved them, because the state now claimed the right to dispose of women's bodies. Overburdened by the duties of procreation and production, the woman's body became a site for the exercise of the communist state's patriarchal power.

Conclusions

The devastating effects of the war and the social costs of building a socialist society defined the quality of life for at least two generations of Polish, Romanian and East German women. Called upon to participate with their labour in the challenging task of reconstruction, the women born during and just after the war were nevertheless deprived in many cases of the social and economic capital of their parents. Thus, as we have suggested, one of their first objectives was to rebuild — and if possible enhance — the social and economic capital that the previous generation had possessed. Many women of the time showed courage and perseverance and attained professional and personal success. But does this necessarily mean that they managed to develop socio-economic capital that could be passed on successfully to the next generation? And if so, did this next generation of women, born in the '60s and '70s, benefit from the achievements of their parents? Or is it the case that, owing to the economic and social crisis of the socialist bloc, they were also required, if not to start from scratch, then at least to channel some of their work towards preserving the gains in socio-economic and cultural capital achieved through considerable efforts by their elders? These questions frame our working hypothesis. To answer them, we are going to investigate

[72] V. Pasti, *Ultima inegalitate. Relațiile de gen în România* [The last inequality: gender relations in Romania], Polirom, Iasi 2003, p. 110.

how women from Poland, Romania and the former GDR, struggling with the material legacy of the war and the difficulties of life under the communist regime, found ways to rise to the challenge before them, namely, "to rebuild the past so as to regain the future."

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Regaining the Future by Rebuilding the Past? Women's Narratives of Life during Communism

Abstract

As an increasing body of research on the status of women in the Central and Eastern European socialist countries ("people's democracies") shows, the regime did not necessarily turn women into "slaves of the system" their lives reduced to the dual role of worker and housewife. Rather, communism also enabled many women to achieve professional and personal development (Fidelis: 2010). That said, it remains the case that women's socio-economic and political status was adversely affected both by certain features of everyday life during communism and by the destruction brought upon Central and Eastern Europe by the Second World War. The devastating effects of the war and the social costs of building the socialist society defined the quality of life for at least two generations of Polish, Romanian, and East German women. Called upon to participate with their labour to the challenging task of reconstruction, the women born just after the war were nevertheless deprived in many cases of the social and economic capital of their parents. Thus, one of their first objectives was to rebuild—and if possible enhance—the social and economic capital that the previous generation had possessed. In doing so, many women of the time showed courage and perseverance and attained professional and personal success. But does this necessarily mean that they managed to develop socio-economic capital that could be passed on successfully to the next generation? And if so, did this next generation of women born in the 1960s and 70s benefit from the achievements of their parents? Or is it the case that, owing to the economic and social crisis of the socialist bloc, they were also required, if not to start from scratch, then at least to channel some of their work towards preserving the gains in socio-economic and cultural capital achieved through considerable efforts by their elders? These questions frame our working hypothesis. To answer them, we are going to investigate how women from Central and Eastern Europe, struggling with the material legacy of the war and the difficulties of life under the communist regime, found ways to rise to the challenge before them, namely: "regaining the future by rebuilding the past."

Keywords: women's life narratives, communism, Central and Eastern Europe.