Worker, Mother, Socialist: The Making of the Romanian Communist Woman, 1965 – 1975

By Stanca Iris Iacob

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Under the advisement of Dr. James Chappel
Department of History, Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

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Writing this thesis has been one of the most rewarding, fulfilling, and challenging projects of my undergraduate experience. It has shown me firsthand how understanding the past can lead one to better understand what might happen in the future. Not only did I more thoroughly explore my heritage and the society that I came from, but I also learned what my forthcoming experience as mother and a career woman might be like.

I would especially like to thank my advisor, Dr. James Chappel, for his never-ending patience in reading draft after draft of my work and for his encouraging guidance in constructing my argument. This thesis would not have been possible without his help. I would also like to thank Dr. Dirk Bonker for his support in the thesis seminar class and my classmates for their thoughtful suggestions. I would like to thank the women that allowed me to interview them for this thesis, for their honestly and willingness to tell me about their struggles and successes.

This thesis would not have been possible without my parents. I would like to thank them for telling me countless stories about their childhoods under Communism and feeding my curiosity. Additionally, I would like to thank them for taking me to as many museums throughout my childhood, in America and in Europe, as we could visit, and for presenting all the artifacts and local histories as stories that captivated me and allowed my love for history to grow.
Abstract

Women in Communist Romania experienced great pressure from the government to simultaneously raise children and pursue their careers, especially from 1965 to 1975. The government pursued policies in an attempt to help them manage this balance. It also heavily relied on propaganda to explain what the Ideal Communist Woman was and to encourage Romanian women to assume this role. Interviews with Romanian women who worked and raised children during this decade show that the governmental solutions did not work ideally, often leaving the women to find creative solutions for their own families.
Introduction

I am a product of the Communist system. My parents were the children that were raised under this regime. Both of my grandmothers worked and hired nannies, or brought in their own mothers, or a combination, to assure them childcare while they worked. The forced gender equality that Communists established in the workplace is the society that my parents were brought up in, and consequently the way that they raised me. This equality, at the very least, is a positive legacy of communism.

For much of the study of Communism, in Romania, in the Eastern Bloc, and elsewhere, has revolved around men. Recently, historians have turned their attention more towards studying the experience of women who lived under Communist rule\(^1\). Their research has seen that Communist women were confronted with the challenge of balancing the demands of their careers and their families, much like women everywhere in the world.

The issues that confronted Romanian women in terms of maintaining their careers while raising children were not unique to Romania. In fact, these issues persist into the present throughout the developed world. Too often in modern America do women feel that they must choose between having children first and abandoning their careers altogether, or postponing having children for many years until they have established themselves in the workforce. Employers consider not hiring women because they do not want to give them maternity leave. They also take into account that males are “heads of households” and have to provide more financially for their families, when this is not necessarily how many families today are

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structured. None of this prejudice existed in Communist societies. It is, however, a trend that is gradually spreading to modern day Romania as American companies open more and more branches there and implement American work culture. The old system that was a legacy of Communism is slowly vanishing as Romania becomes more and more Americanized. I want to provide a reminder of what that Communist legacy meant for working mothers.

The contradiction between the roles of women is fascinating to me. The forced gender equality that the Romanian Communists established thoroughly spread in society the idea that women were just as intelligent and capable as men. However, simultaneously, the Communists managed to increase the birth rate while encouraging Romanian women to embrace motherhood. How did socialist policies manage to create generations of women who assumed both these roles? I, personally, have benefited from this system. I was raised by parents who grew up in this egalitarian society, where gender stereotypes and limitations did not exist. I was never told as a young girl that I had to choose between pursuing academic goals and social goals or familial goals. But the society I grew up in, in America, did not exactly have these same progressive views. I was greatly confused by this as I began to mature and open my eyes to the world around me. Researching and analyzing the society that I originate from, Communist Romania, has allowed me to gain a greater understanding of why I was raised the way I was, the inequalities that still exist in the society that I currently live in, and what this all could mean for my future as a career woman and a mother.

I come from a family where all women in the three generations before me have balanced their careers and raising their children. I foresee myself having to juggle this balance as well. The world for my great-grandmother was radically different than it is for me. We were born in different centuries and grew up on different continents. But this one essential detail, the
responsibilities of both work and home, brings us together in a way I did not realize until I started writing this thesis.

**Introducing Romania**

Like many European countries, Romania had a tumultuous twentieth century. In this section I will briefly explain what happened at the beginning of the century in order to set the stage for the Communist period. In 1900, the three main regions of Romania were not united. Muntenia and Moldova were in the independent country of Romania, but Transylvania was still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Only in 1918, after World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire, did the three major territories of Romania unite under Romanian rule. Thus, modern Romania, as we know it, is a creation of the post-World War I period. Romania is a largely rural country, but it is rich in resources of gold, silver, copper, salt, coal, petroleum, and iron.

Romania, as most European countries, had a period of homegrown fascism in the interwar period. The Iron Guard was established in 1927, a paramilitary formation.² Strongly Orthodox Christian and garnering huge support from the country’s intellectuals, the Iron Guard heavily campaigned against Romania’s bureaucratic-boyar class, essentially stripping all power from the King, Carol II.³ In 1938, the King was ousted after he stood by and watched Hitler award a large portion of Transylvania to Hungary, leaving the throne to his young son Michael. Ion Antonescu, an anti-Semitic general rose to power afterwards, and used the country’s troops to dismantle the Iron Guard to gain Hitler’s favor. Antonescu led programs that massacred

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15,000 Romanian Jews. Nearing the end of World War II, and with the Red Army at the country’s gates, King Michael and his Allied backers removed Antonescu from power.\textsuperscript{4}

At the end of World War II, the radical ideas of Karl Marx were slowly taking root in Eastern Europe, but at different rates in different countries. In Bulgaria, for example, several kinds of leftist radicalism heavily impacted the politics of the country in the interwar period in urban areas and greatly escalated after World War II.\textsuperscript{5} In Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito created a leftist coalition that allowed him to gain power of the country.\textsuperscript{6} In Romania, the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) had only a thousand registered members in 1944, but this number was to increase exponentially as a result of the disorganization the Second World War brought on.\textsuperscript{7} The RCP grew in power as the USSR declared the country under its sphere of influence, giving themselves a clear path to insert their own interests through the RCP. As it grew its membership, it became the most important political party in Romania.\textsuperscript{8} In 1947 it forced King Michael to abdicate and officially took power with Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, a militant railway worker, as its leader.\textsuperscript{9}

Gheorghiu-Dej wanted to steer Romania away from Soviet leadership while maintaining Soviet Communism. He was frightened by the unceremonious dumping of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{10} He wanted greater independence for Romania and thought this was best achieved through industrialization. The

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p 15.
\textsuperscript{5} Trond Gilberg, \textit{Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceauşescu’s personal dictatorship} (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 39.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p 39.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p 39.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p 46.
\textsuperscript{9} Clapp, “Romania Redivivus,” p. 16.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p 18.
1958 departure of all Soviet divisions from Romanian soil and the dissociation of Romania from the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba were both the work of Gheorghiu-Dej.\footnote{Ibid., p 18.}

In 1965, Ceauşescu accessed control of the RCP and of Romania. He had major projects in mind for Romania. Among these were all-out industrialization, much more than Gheorghiu-Dej achieved, increasing the population, bringing women into the workforce, educating the people, and moving young persons from the country into cities where they could work in factories.

1965 to 1975 was the pinnacle of Communism and will be the years under investigation in this thesis. The decade from 1965 to 1975 was the time when Ceauşescu’s policies were at their prime. Communism had been in power for a couple of decades and had been given a chance to reorganize the country however it saw fit. Ceauşescu was industrializing the nation, creating jobs, educating the people and giving them more opportunities in terms of education and employment. Society was homogenous because the Holocaust had drastically reduced the number of Jews in Romania. Transylvania was still full of minorities, including Hungarians, Saxons, and Ukrainians, but these groups coexisted relatively peacefully in the ‘60s and ‘70s, as they historically have.\footnote{Ibid., p 1.}

It is most fair that I evaluate Communism when it was working the best, so that we can analyze Romanian Socialist society when it was most successful. When Communists took power in Romania in 1947 they had several goals in mind to improve the country.\footnote{Ibid., p 47.} They wanted to develop infrastructure, build modern factories, and develop a self-sufficient nation, free from imports. In order to achieve these ambitious goals, they borrowed a large sum of money. This
debt stood in their way from establishing a self-sufficient nation, consequently they intended to pay it back as soon as possible.

**Method and Organization of Thesis**

Communist Romania is well known for its draconian policies, especially in regard to the family. The government banned abortions, pressured women into entering the workforce, pressed them into taking management level positions, and forced them to get humiliating checkups at the workplace by the Menstrual Police, lest they attempt to get an illegal abortion. Both men and women, nevertheless, were taxed for not having children. Ceaușescu’s policies were likely the most invasive ones that women had to endure at that time, anywhere in the world.

The Romanian government at this time was asking its women to both raise children and work. This is a seemingly impossible demand. While, the government wanted to increase the birthrate in order to increase the population which would strengthen the country, they also wanted women to toil in factories and in the fields to boost the economy and help pay back foreign debt. These two seemingly unrelated goals had drastic consequences for Romanian women. How were they supposed to keep a full-time job and raise children at once?

This is the question that I will try to answer in this thesis. In order to do so, I build on the work of scholars who have done important research on Romanian Communism during the same decade I analyze. Barbara Lobodzinska, for example, has written about how the Communists brought Romanian women into the workforce as equal laborers to their male counterparts. Others, such as Gail Kligman, have written about the reproductive and familial hurdles women had to face under Communist rule in Romania including the pressures to bear children along with restricted access to birth control.
The most captivating question that I attempt to answer in my thesis is how did these women juggle these conflicting demands? No one has yet combined these two aspects to show how Communists recognized that women were bearing the burdens of both having families as well as maintaining their careers and intended to help them balance the two through policy. This is what I intend to explore in this thesis.

I will use multiple different methodologies throughout this thesis in order to give a multi-faceted account of this period in history. The thesis will not be organized by chronology, but rather by method, creating three different perspectives about the same subject. The first will analyze policies using government meeting notes, the second will analyze governmental influences on the population using media, and the third will analyze women’s realities using oral interviews from women who lived during this time. This multifaceted approach is an attempt to analysis the topic as thoroughly as possible, especially considering heavy censorship the government imposed during this time.

Clearly Communism had many flaws, but it is possible that some of their policies fostered this balance in women’s lives. My argument is that Communist policies regarding childcare, workplace, and educational practices forced women to simultaneously pursue professional careers and families. My intention in this thesis is to not make a clear-cut argument about Romanian family policies; it would be too simple to declare them as “good” or “bad” or to declare them dramatically different from policies pursued elsewhere. My goal is to use multiple methodologies to reconstruct the world of Romanian women in this particular time and place in order to allow us to see how this society functioned and how policy, propaganda and reality all worked together. Without the Communist influence, the entrance of women into the workforce as mothers and as their husbands’ equals would have taken many more decades. Undeniably the
Communist regime was responsible for many horrors in Romania’s history: censorship of free speech and imprisonment or “disappearance” of those who dared speak against the regime, increase in number of children put up for adoption, extreme rationing of food, good, and utilities, etc. Dozens of other historians have written about these terrors. I, instead, will be focusing on ways that the Communists attempted to explain to and help Romanian women balance their responsibilities both at work and at home, and also how they negotiated their new roles. Although Romanian women faced many additional challenges, one they had in common with many of their Capitalist, Western counterparts, is that of the struggle of raising children as women with careers. This is the same oppression that women still face today. My goal is to analyze the propaganda and policies that pressured women into assuming both these roles and thereby becoming the Ideal Communist Woman, but also the lived reality of Romanian women during this time, to try to understand how the system worked – both its successes and shortcomings.

In this thesis, I will write about how Romanian women took care of their children while holding down full-time jobs. Somehow, the policies Nicolae Ceaușescu, the primary dictator under Communism, established managed to help women establish this balance in their work and family lives. What did he do to make this happen? In my first chapter I will describe the official policies that Ceaușescu’s government implemented in terms of what he expected from women. Speeches he gave were transcribed onto newspapers that described what he considered the ideal Romanian women to be. His wife, Elena, was also thought to embody these ideals. She was supposed to be highly educated, a hard worker, and a Communist mother to three. Laws can also

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illustrate for us what he wanted his society to do, such as banning of all forms of contraception to increase the population, taxing young people without children as punishment for next yet being parents, giving parents allocation for their children, and establishing day cares, for example. Furthermore, Ceaușescu started women’s committees that were supposed to highlight any issues women faced in order to address them.

These committees were meant to handle any matters the women felt were standing in their way of becoming the ideal Communist woman as well as serve as a channel of communication between the government and its female citizens. They served as another form of propaganda to form Ceaușescu’s ideal woman. These committee meetings made sure that women were employed and pushing themselves to fulfill their careers as well as giving them a chance to serve as political activists. Occasionally, these meetings also addressed how these mothers were raising their children. Were they taking them to day care? Were they indoctrinating them with Communist propaganda?15 Were they learning please and thank you?

The Communist party used several forms of propaganda to target women. My second chapter will discuss the national women’s magazine Femeia, which was a widely read periodical. It gave advice and celebrated “ideal” women. It was still, however, a government sanctioned publication. This meant that it also contained propaganda meant to encourage women to embody what the Communists considered the perfect epitome of womanhood. Most notable are the articles that celebrated “Heroine Mothers.”16 These were women that had many children (seven and up) and still managed to hold down careers. They were celebrated with parades, ceremonies,

and magazine articles, and aptly also used as propaganda tools. Reading this monthly publication was supposed to inspire other mothers to push themselves into expanding their families all while not missing a beat at work.

Heroine mothers were also glorified in other forms of media. The film *Toamna Bobocilor* describes a woman heavily involved in RCP meetings in her town, but she is a mother, a wife, and also President of her local Women’s Committee. She seems to be a woman that is capable of doing everything, which is exactly what Ceaușescu wanted his female citizens to be. Seeing many examples of such women was meant to guilt moms with just one or two children into thinking they weren’t good enough mothers, workers, and Romanians.

My final chapter will be based on oral interviews I conducted with four Romanian women about their experience balancing child rearing and careers under Ceaușescu’s regime. They had different professions and came from different social categories in society, but none of them relied on the government to care for their children. These were women that worked and raised their children during the ‘60s and ‘70s in Communist Romania. The stories they told me were radically different than what the Communist propaganda advertised. They described government funded nurseries and day cares that were all but sufficient in number and quality of care in terms of providing for all the children. This is a radical difference from what the Communists claimed to be the truth, but this is not the only scenario history knows where Communists over exaggerated. Oral interviews are challenging because they require individuals to recall events that took place decades ago and may be marred by Communist nostalgia, the longing for “the good old days” of Communism when unemployment was unheard of and everyone could afford to own their own home. However, oral interviews are an invaluable
resource because they can show up what the ordinary citizen lived through and what her thoughts were about the society she was a part of.

Women in Communist Romania did not lead easy lives. The government not only expected them to be men’s equal in the workplace, hold down full-time jobs, further their careers, get pregnant, and raise children, but also to educate their kids to be future Communists. What is the point of raising an entire generation of workers if they will just grow up to rebel against the system? The way these mothers managed to handle the harsh pressures from the government is quite remarkable, because, somehow, they handed both major responsibilities, but not without help from certain Communist policies.
Chapter 1:

Ambitions of the Communist Party for Romanian Women (1965-1975)

The popular national women’s magazine *Femeia* interviewed Ileana Dicu, an ordinary factory worker, in 1972 for an article on “What does it mean to be a Communist?” Responding to this question she said “[it] means to be conscientious of everything you do: not only at the factory, but also in the world, even in your own home, within your family, in front of your friends, and even in front of yourself.”¹ Communism in practice promoted the idea that individuals are responsible for their actions and the consequences they bring about, even though it is often belittled as an anti-individualist form of government. Additionally, it is something that could be applied to many other aspects of one’s life aside from political ones. The idea of Communism involved hard work along with the assumption of responsibility. By applying these characteristics to one’s life, one would become more productive and efficient, setting examples for others to follow suit.

Communism was, however, preoccupied with the idea of the collective. After her promotion to head weaver, where she gained additional responsibility, Dicu learned an even deeper application of Communism to her life: “to be accountable not only for the quality of your own work, but also for the work of your colleagues.”² This interpretation raised the bar for quality of work that could be expected from Romania’s laborers. It stressed the idea that the successes of an individual under a Communist system was not as important as those of the group

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² Ibid.
as a whole. If everyone put in his greatest effort, the best possible outcome would become a reality.

Dicu demonstrated that she had accepted the Communist ideology preached to her. Even more so, once she had received her promotion, she realized an even deeper meaning of how Communist thought influenced her life: her work was not as important as the total work of her and her colleagues in collectivity. She had understood that “be a Communist” meant to internalize the idea that work is not an individual action, but the action of a group as a whole. Consequently, this implied that one had to take responsibility for the work of everyone else in the group, whether it was the workers in a factory, or the Romanian population as whole.

Dicu is used as an example in this magazine article to show the readers that accepting Communist theory made their lives more fulfilling and offered them guidance when it was needed. Communism showed them that their purpose was to work and produce, not only goods in the factories, but also children that would grow up to be themselves future Communists. She demonstrates how the RCP managed to penetrate every aspect of the lives of Romanians.

Dicu was among the hundreds of thousands of women that went to labor each morning in a factory, producing goods such as leather clothing, grains, textiles, paper, sporting equipment and so on that were largely sent out for export.³ Her employment parallels that of other women in the world in the mid-twentieth century: more and more women stopped being homemakers and housewives and began to pursue careers in the 1960s and 70s. The major difference, however, was that Western women generally made the decision whether to work or not based on financial or personal considerations, while on the other hand, Romanian women received heavy pressure

from their government to become employed in order to power the rapid industrialization. A woman with a career was seen as a hard-working patriot who fulfilled her potential. It was a sense of pride in society to say that a woman was capable of both taking care of her children and her household, all while excelling in the workplace. People wanted the best for their families, and the additional income would allow them to secure more financial stability for themselves. There were, of course, some families that were forced to have working mothers in order to make ends meet.

Dicu’s article demonstrates that women were expected to apply Communist ideology to their lives. This meant both in the workplace and in their own homes. Historians have looked at each of these applications separately. It is a seemingly impossible demand to ask a nation’s women to be both workers and mothers simultaneously. There are many historical examples of societies asking their women to be one or the other. What is unique about Romanian Communism is that the government not only wanted women to do this, but that women actually succeeded in doing both.

The argument of this chapter is that the RCP created a nationwide agenda to establish a new generation of women that were educated, working mothers, not necessarily because this was essential to Communist ideology, but rather because the RCP developed a very specific form of Communism that was ingrained with Romanian patriotism and had financial and geopolitical goals that required both births and labor. This chapter analyzes the ambitions of the RCP with respect to how they wanted Romanian women to behave, especially in terms of maintaining both their careers and their families. I will talk about the pressures the government was under that led

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4 Gilberg, *Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship*, p. 112.
to women entering the workforce, traditional gender roles, and the patriarchy in Romanian society, how policies and laws were supposed to implement this, and how Ceaușescu’s wife, Elena Ceaușescu, was supposed to embody the ideal Romanian woman. I will analyze the ambitions and initiatives of the party, but not evaluate how successful or unsuccessful they were, that analysis will be developed in chapter three of this thesis.

This chapter will use the media of the time as well as notes from Women’s Committee meetings to demonstrate the policies the RCP wanted to implement. The newspaper *Steaua Roșie*, and the national women’s magazine *Femeia* will be the major media outlets used. The Women’s Committees were organized in order to communicate directly to the RCP what women needed and wanted from their government. The relationship between the government and the Women’s Committees was not one-sided and was also intended to communicate to the women present what their party expected of them. These meetings also organized community events that targeted women, such as competitions for Best Garden or Best Plăcintă recipe, for example.

The Communist government controlled all publications and media outlets of the time. Control went beyond mere censorship, as the government published and produced everything that was released for public consumption. The contents of the magazines, newspapers, and movies published under Ceaușescu’s dictatorship represented his ideals and interpretations of scenarios. They were alternate forms of propaganda, other than his speeches for example, that allowed him to communicate his political messages to the masses.

Ceaușescu wanted Communist ideology to penetrate into every aspect of his citizens’ lives. Feeding them Communist propaganda not only through indoctrination via television, radio, print, but also in the policies having to do with schools, workplaces, cultural and community
activities, and national holidays intended to make it difficult to imagine that there could be life in Romania without Communism.

**The RCP under Ceaușescu**

In order to understand the RCP’s conflicting goals for Romanian women, we must first examine the RCP and its primary objectives in the time period I am investigating (1965-1975). The RCP had two conflicting goals for Romania’s female citizens. They wanted them to contribute as equals to the men in the workforce, and at the same time bear as many children as possible. The reasoning behind these seemingly contradicting demands reflect what the RCP wanted from Romania as a whole.

In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu took over and began establishing strong feelings of nationalism to portray himself as a Romanian patriot. He was obsessed with the notion that Romania had to pay off its debts in order to become truly independent. These debts were taken out from Western banks and firms in the 1960s in order to modernize and industrialize the country, which he also considered essential.\(^5\) In order to pay back the debts, the population was deprived of essential goods and services, instead sending them off for export. Additionally, technology importation from abroad was heavily restricted.\(^6\) These restrictions were meant to save money that would be used instead to pay off the loans, while also encouraging domestic research and development. Ceaușescu strongly believed that the Romanian people had some sort

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\(^5\) Gilberg, *Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship*, p. 120.

of genius within them that would make outside influences irrelevant.\textsuperscript{7} He took it upon himself to try to tap into this brilliance, believing that only he was capable of finding it.

Ceaușescu is unique in the sense that he is both a Communist and a strong nationalist. His desire was to increase the population so that it would lead to more workers for Romania in the future. A larger population would be more future soldiers, workers, and loyal socialists if they were raised as such. He also wanted more female works because they would increase the productivity of the nation. More workers mean more production, no matter their gender. His desire for more Romanians is strongly nationalist, but this desire for more workers is strongly Communist.

Nevertheless, his intense desire to pay back the debt and become financially independent took a great toll on the citizens under his dictatorship, regardless of untapped genius or not. Rationing of food, water, electricity, gas, among others made everyday life uncomfortable and even difficult. The highest quality produce was selected and shipped for export, while the second and third-class produce was solely available for Romanian consumption.\textsuperscript{8} This created much dissatisfaction with the regime, but its tight control on all media ensured that those who disagreed never had a voice.

Another measure taken to make sure that the debt was paid as soon as possible was to bring women into the industrial workforce. Before the end of the Second World War, city women generally did not work outside of the house while women in the country only sometimes helped work the family’s fields, particularly when additional hands were needed, such as during the harvest. Society was traditionally patriarchal with the father earning the bread and the mother

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p 78.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p 127.
raising the children. Introduction of women into factories and companies ensured that Romania was taking advantage of the maximum amount of manpower it had. Women were forcibly introduced into leadership positions in the workplace to foster gender equality. Seeing women in management positions would inspire other women to advance up the workplace hierarchy and assure them that they belonged in the factory or office. Working women no longer were staying at home to be housewives and take care of the children. The introduction of new goods such as TV dinners and home electronics was meant to reduce the time that women had to do housework so that they had more time to work and raise their children. Government policy was shifting society by having women take on new roles. When both parents were working, someone still had to provide child care for the children. The government recognized that this was an issue and decided it could take steps to help its citizens with this.

Additionally, increasing the birth rate was another one of Ceaușescu’s strategies to help the nation pay off its debts as quickly as possible. Having more Romanian children meant that in a generation, Ceaușescu would have significantly more employees for the factories. This meant that they could produce more and thus have more for export, making more revenue for the country.

Romania did not accept Soviet policies as readily as other Soviet Bloc nations did. Romania maintained a strong sense of nationalism as the RCP steadily gained power. This patriotism was strongly present throughout Communist rule, and Ceaușescu made sure to use it to his advantage while in power. It set apart Romanian Communism from that of other countries.

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9 Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare in România Comunistă*, p. 112.
in the Soviet Bloc. Ceaușescu made sure to capitalize on this sensitivity of the people in order to earn their trust by portraying himself as a patriot.

Ceaușescu developed a rather unique form of Communism built upon a heavy emphasis on populist nationalism. He emphasized that the Romanian people contained within themselves the values that defined the guidelines for political action.\(^{11}\) He suggested that his leadership represented what the Romanian people already had inside of them – he only tried to bring it out and translate it into policy. Since he was implementing what each Romanian held in his soul, there should have been no doubt that he was leading the nation in the right direction and had its best interests at heart.

Ceaușescu also tried to capitalize on Romanian nationalism by associating himself with powerful and well-respected figures from Romanian history. He made constant references to strong heroes in Romania’s history such as Stefan the Great and Michael the Brave in order to clearly compare their actions with his, tying the two sets of historical periods together.\(^{12}\) Associating himself with great historical figures not only earned him the respect of his fellow countrymen, but also elevated himself to their status of importance as a protector of the nation. This was a clever means to please the intensely nationalistic population all while painting himself in the patriotic manner he knew they expected of their leader. Pleasing his people and convincing them of his nationalism reassured them that what he was doing was for the good of the nation. Even if they did not understand this logic, they could still follow him because they could trust he had the best intentions. After all, if Stefan the Great did wonderful things for the

\(^{11}\) Gilberg, *Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship*, p. 49.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p 51.
country and Ceaușescu was just like Stefan the Great, there was no reason to believe that Ceaușescu would not follow suit and also do great things for the country.

Ceaușescu’s nationalism and desire to use it to his advantage also led him to isolate Romania from foreign powers, particularly Western ones. He considered that foreign influences, particularly thoughts and ideas from the West, were harmful to the national and revolutionary spirit of Romania and its people.\(^{13}\) The strength of the Romanians came from within them and did not need to be diluted by bringing in foreign factors. This resulted in strict censorship, especially of texts relating to social and economic development, to prevent this “contamination.” His restrictions could also be interpreted as censorship under a dictatorship that is an attempt to protect the status of the dictator rather than the nationalism of the people, lest anyone began to criticize Ceaușescu or his intentions for the country.

The RCP had several goals for Romania. Among these was the desire to increase the country’s population as well as bring women into the workforce. In essence, the party wanted Romanian women to simultaneously be workers and mothers. The duality the Communists asked of Romanian women led to the idea of the ideal Communist woman.

**The Ideal Communist Woman**

Every society has its own notion of the ideal women that is publicized in popular culture and social policy. She fulfills all the roles that women were expected to have and excel at them. Nothing would be too much for her to balance on her plate. In Romania, a specific form of young woman was pursued by the RCP. She was an educated young mother that was employed. She

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, p 52.
preferably worked in industry or STEM, fields that were lucrative for the government. Elena Ceaușescu exemplified the ideal woman of the RCP.

Nicolae Ceaușescu’s wife was Elena, the strongest example of an ideal Romanian woman. She was portrayed in Communist media and propaganda as the ideal Romanian woman. She was a mother to three children, a PhD in chemistry, and also a politician. She served as Deputy Prime Minister for her husband’s government from 1980 to 1989, when the Iron Curtain fell.\textsuperscript{14} She was called the “Mother of the Nation” and was hailed as Ceaușescu’s ideal woman. Elena and Nicolae had a tremendous personality cult around themselves.\textsuperscript{15} They were meant to be the perfect family that could serve as an example for the rest of Romania. Nicolae was an educated head of household that was a patriot and worked to serve his country. Elena was likewise educated and professed a career that was in service to Romania as well. Together they had three children that they educated and raised as patriots.

Many magazine spreads and newspaper articles were devoted to the Ceaușescu family, to praise them and encourage other Romanians to follow their example. In the magazine \textit{Femeia}, an entire spread was devoted to Elena in the August 1975 issue. She was introduced as “the eminent scientific personality, comrade Elena Ceaușescu – academic, doctorate in chemistry, General Director of the Institute of Chemical Research, vice-president of the National Council for science and technology.”\textsuperscript{16} Her titles demonstrated that she was advancing her field of chemistry through her research. Nevertheless, she also managed to find time to be a caring mother and wife, Deputy Prime Minister, and head two scientific institutions.

\textsuperscript{14} Barbara Łobodzińska, \textit{Family, women, and employment in Central-Eastern Europe}, 209.
\textsuperscript{15} Gilberg, \textit{Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship}, p. 54.
When she made political appearances alongside her husband, she was not there just as his spousal support, but as his equal. She was a mother like he was a father, she had a career in the sciences like he had one in politics, and she was a public figure as much as he was. Her representation in government, published media, and in public appearances demonstrated that the ideal woman was no longer solely concerned with motherhood, but balanced all the aspects that Elena balanced.\textsuperscript{17} In order to support women in making this transition, the Central Committee of the RCP issued a series of new regulations at their June 1973 meeting, which included increasing roles for women in economic, scientific, and cultural spheres, promoting women to positions of authority in all party and state institutions, and intensifying political and educational work for women, among others.\textsuperscript{18} Educated and hard-working women would increase the overall productivity of the nation simply because it meant more people would be working. The RCP wanted all comrades to assume equal positions in all domains of work and these regulations were supposed to facilitate this equality as soon as possible. Presenting Elena to the public eye gave women the courage to take on these new responsibilities because they could follow her example. However, using Elena and Nicolae as examples for the Romanian people lead to a creation of a personality cult. Below are a couple of examples of their glorification in media.

The image of Ceauşescu below was the cover of the August 1975 edition of Femeia. It shows a young, healthy, and strong looking Ceauşescu speaking on a podium with many clapping and well-dressed citizens behind him. They are holding up signs that said “PCR” (which is RCP in Romanian) and others that have the hammer and sickle flag. Many large flags are on display in the background with the Romanian tricolor, blue, yellow, and red, clearly

\textsuperscript{17} Kligman, \textit{The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceauşescu’s Romania}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, p 131.
visible. Displaying the tricolor is the ultimate show of nationalism in Romanian culture. The
cover has no title, since the image of Ceaușescu was enough to communicate a strong message.
He was the leader of the nation and guided them in Communist ideology. He was the reason they
were strong, well dressed, and thriving as a nation. He was the ultimate patriot and would be
forever loyal to Romania.
The image below of Elena presented her in a slightly different context than her husband. She is shown in black and white, sitting in front of her work bench in the laboratory. While the image of her husband above clearly wanted to show him as a leader of his nation, this image of Elena wanted to show her as a scientist, leader in her field. Seeing the nation’s “ideal woman” at her workplace was meant to inspire the readers of Femeia into assuming more responsibility and leadership in their own workplaces.

Romanian society was, under Communist rule, still a patriarchal society. Even though Communists made great efforts to include its female citizens in the workforce as equals, this gender equality did not apply as strongly in the household.\textsuperscript{21} This is not to say that all Romanian fathers were removed from the education and upbringing of their children, but it was culturally understood that mothers played a larger role. There was no official Communist policy or speech that specifically brought into the public’s attention the role that men have as fathers to their children.\textsuperscript{22} There were also no courses on fatherhood offered at RCP-run community centers like there were courses for future mothers to embrace their new equal roles in the household.\textsuperscript{23} The division of roles between a husband and wife also involved other elements of the household. Those such as cooking, and cleaning fell more on the wives’ shoulders while outside elements such as fuel, industrial products, cars, were more the husbands’ responsibilities.\textsuperscript{24} Although there was some sort of division of household labor, the consistent day to day work such as cooking, and childrearing was largely the responsibility of the mother. The empowerment that the RCP gave females also had unintended consequences such as increases in the rate of divorces.\textsuperscript{25} Women suddenly felt independent and self-sustaining enough that they had the courage to leave their husbands. For European women in the twentieth century, divorces and autonomy became possibilities for the first time. The RCP did not approve of the rising divorce rate, however, considering it a social failure.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{21} Łobodzińska, \textit{Family, women, and employment in Central-Eastern Europe}, p. 213.  
\textsuperscript{22} Oprea, “Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”  
\textsuperscript{23} Jinga, \textit{Gen și reprezentare in România Comunistă}, p. 142.  
\textsuperscript{24} Łobodzińska, \textit{Family, women, and employment in Central-Eastern Europe}, p. 215.  
\textsuperscript{25} Jinga, \textit{Gen și reprezentare in România Comunistă}, p. 113.  
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p 143.
The ideal Communist woman was one that at the very minimum worked and raised children. Idyllically, she would also be educated and raise her children to be socialists. The ideal woman was exemplified through Elena Ceaușescu. She was not only a mother and a worker, but she was also a politician and a scientist with a doctorate. Although there existed pressure on women to become men’s equal in the workplace, the patriarchy was still present at home, with the expectation that women would do more than half of the child rearing.

**Policies and Laws Implemented**

The RCP put in place many policies that were meant to help families, and mothers in particular, with balancing two-income families. Other draconian elements of the RCP’s policies towards women’s reproductive health are well known and will be discussed in this section. These policies should be seen in the context of several other programs that were occurring simultaneously to make the Romanian working mother a reality. These include the women’s committees, state sponsored childcare, allocations for children, and cultural celebrations of motherhood.

Romanians were also motivated to have more children financially, with allocations as rewards for having children and taxes as punishments for not having children. State allocations for children were established and the sum a family received was determined by the number of children living in the family and the salary levels of the adults. These allowances were not taxable and lasted until the child’s sixteenth birthday. The purpose of these allocations was to assist the families with providing necessities for the children, such as school clothes, school supplies, food, and extracurricular activities. These allocations were incentives to have children.

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because they were about a ten percent increase in monthly income per child.\textsuperscript{28} This is quite a large sum to be given from the government to help financially support one’s children. Other additional motivations to increase the population included taxation. There was even a tax that was imposed on young people who did not yet have children.\textsuperscript{29} Most countries give you financial incentives to have children, but in Romania you were financially punished for not having children.

The National Women’s Committee was established in 1966 and its mission was to stimulate the participation of women in production and activism.\textsuperscript{30} It is remarkable that such an organization was created with a main purpose of involving women in politics, another example of the Socialist desire to equalize the genders in society. Its leadership was entirely women, most of them were members of the Communist Party, with Suzana Gâdea as the president.\textsuperscript{31} The organization was subdivided into chapters in every Romanian state. In 1968, local meetings of delegates became national policy.\textsuperscript{32} At these meetings, implementation and usage of national programs was discussed, as well as how women could better participate in politics, spread Communist propaganda, and increase the country’s production.\textsuperscript{33} The Women’s Committee was also responsible for organizing professional schools, qualification courses, and other specialization courses for around 100,000 women annually.\textsuperscript{34} They also held courses that were meant to prepare women for family life.\textsuperscript{35} The Women’s Committee would also propose its

\textsuperscript{30} Dinga, \textit{Gen și reprezentare în România Comunistă}, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p 115.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p 115.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p 139.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p 147.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p 159.
members for promotions, especially with regards to the textile industry. Often the standards for these promotions were rather lax, but their purpose was to make sure that women were in leadership roles.\textsuperscript{36} The Women’s Committee even went so far as to celebrate the year 1975 as the year of the woman, along with several other nations.\textsuperscript{37} These meetings gave women a voice, no matter how influential they actually were in the end. They gave women a forum where they were asked for their opinions and encouraged to not only take on careers and advance in the workplace, but also take on activist roles. They also provided women with skills and opportunities to get qualifications that would help advance their careers. In the grand scheme of things, their activism had very little impact under Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, but it gave them the confidence to move out of their kitchens and find roles in society that were not assigned to them based on their reproductive capabilities.

In order to show women that they were appreciated, and that the RCP realized the heavy burden they were given, several national holidays were organized. March 8\textsuperscript{th} is International Women’s Day and was an important holiday in Communist Romania. March 8\textsuperscript{th} was supposed to be celebrated as a day that brought together women and the history of Communism in Romania.\textsuperscript{38} It was meant to show that women were just as important in society as men, with this one particular day devoted to highlighting this equality and showing women how appreciated they were. “With the support of the Municipal Council and the Union of the Committee for Cultures and Arts, and of the House of Culture for the Unions, the March 8\textsuperscript{th} festivities were organized, actions which were especially appreciated by the three hundred women that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p 147.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p 149.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p 157.
\end{itemize}
participated.” 39 Women’s Committees were heavily involved in the planning of these sorts of festivities. If the government showed its women that it was thankful for all of the work that they put in, then the women would feel valued and would be more likely to complete the work demanded of them. For this reason, March 8th was one of the largest non-religious holidays in a Communist Romania that otherwise did not observe too many holidays. The Women’s Committee president was heavily involved in the planning of the festivities and obtaining Ceaușescu’s approval for them. 40 The celebrations, parades, and resultant propaganda were additional opportunities to promote the Communist agenda and what the RCP wanted from Romanian women. Women who had exceptional results and production in the workplace were celebrated in the week leading up to March 8th. 41 All workplaces and institutions of learning organized events that were meant to celebrate women, always taking care to especially highlight the role of the working mother. 42 Although these events and celebrations were meant to support women, encourage them, and show that they are appreciated, they turned out to be nothing more than additional vehicles to spread Communist propaganda. The Woman’s Committee was an additional layer of control and surveillance for the female population, continuously departing itself from its female-centric agenda.

40 Jinga, Gen şi reprezentare in România Comunistă, p. 157.
41 Ibid., p 159.
42 Ibid., p 159.
Above is a newspaper article published on March 8th with the capitalized title: PRAISE WOMEN. Its contents are an accumulation of quotations from famous historical figures about the importance of women in society. For example, it quotes Jean Jacques Rousseau as saying, “Every civilized society has respected its women.” It implies that the well-being of women has been essential to the success of a society as a whole. The illustration next to the article shows a woman with flying doves. Doves are associated with peace and kindness, so the illustration made the connection that women are the peace bearers of society and must be highly esteemed for this. Similar articles were published every year in the press under the Communist regime. They

44 Ibid.
served as a gentle reminder to family members to take the time to appreciate the women in their lives as well as make the women themselves feel recognized. Other than the days on or near the 8th of March, women were almost never mentioned in the newspaper articles. This was a day when they were acknowledged by their nation by having one small article written for them in one corner of one page.

Ceaușescu wanted to increase the population. An increase would stimulate economic growth and innovation by producing future workers that were indoctrinated with his Communist philosophies throughout their childhood. Ceaușescu truly believed in the Romanian people and thought that having more people would create better outcomes for the nation in the long term. For this reason, Ceaușescu insisted that all young adults have as many children as possible. This was further enforced by the restrictive access to birth control methods as well as the illegalization of abortions.

Abortion was first banned in Romania in 1948. It was then re-legalized in 1957 as a sign of progress in society brought on by the Communists. Between 1959 and 1965, up to four out of five women had an abortion. From 1960 to 1966 the birth rate had fallen from 19.1 live births per 1,000 people to 14.3. The RCP was convinced that this drop was due to the increasing popularity of abortion. In fact, in 1966, the annual birth rate in Romania was one of the lowest in Europe. On October 1, 1966, the Council of State issued Decree 770 which forbade the interruption of a pregnancy. The only exceptions were if the mother’s life was at risk, she was

45 Oprea, “Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”
47 Oprea, “Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”
over 45, the pregnancy was a result of rape, or if she already had four children in her care.\textsuperscript{49} The 
decree stated the reason for this drastic prohibition as protecting the health and fertility of the 
mother because it is detrimental to the individual’s fertility and the growth of the population to 
continue to allow abortions. This restriction had drastic consequences for Romanian families as 
many were left with pregnancies they did not feel they could take the responsibility for. Some 
women resorted to backroom abortions because they knew they could not afford to take on the 
responsibility of another child. Some even tried self-induced abortions and ended up fatally 
injuring themselves. Sixty-four women died of illegal abortions in 1966, and this number jumped 
to one hundred ninety-two in 1968.\textsuperscript{50} These statistics were reported by the RCP, so it is likely 
that even more women died of illegal abortions, but the government did not want to admit it. 
Methods of self-induced abortion include douching, puncturing of the uterus with crochet 
needles, or stuffing boiling polenta up the vaginal canal.\textsuperscript{51} These painful methods show how 
desperate these women were to not undertake another pregnancy since there was no other form 
of birth control available. The only options women had been either to practice abstinence, bear 
the child, or try an illegal abortion method that could be life threatening. 

Ceaușescu established the Menstrual Police, a department of gynecologists whose role 
was to inspect women in the workplace.\textsuperscript{52} The periodic searches that women were forcibly 
subjected to were mostly to make sure that women did not attempt a backroom abortion, rather 
than to check on the condition of the mother and child. They underwent routine gynecological

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p 54. 
\textsuperscript{50} Oprea, “Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.” 
\textsuperscript{52} Nelson, “Romania’s Abandoned Children Deprivation, Brain Development, and the Struggle for Recovery,” p. 46.
checks at their workplace to catch pregnancies as quickly as possible and were forced to carry the child to term whether or not they wanted to.\textsuperscript{53} “There was no way to hide a pregnancy and get a backroom abortion if your workplace had these checkups.”\textsuperscript{54} These searches were an intense violation and privacy and a government presence in the lives of its citizens. They were meant to not only ensure that a woman carried her pregnancy to term, but also to discover that women were pregnant as soon as they showed physiological signs. This was an incredible invasive practice on the government’s part; it is an actual example of the government invading its citizen’s personal lives and bodies. These women had to undergo these gynecological exams, they were not optional. These women were being checked for any signs of pregnancy to ensure that not even one pregnancy got terminated because that meant one less future Romanian. All these efforts attempted to prevent abortions at any stage of pregnancy. This was a strategy Ceaușescu employed to try to increase the population. No other country practice anything remotely similar to this – the government was literally using its influence in order to force women into bearing children by giving them no other option.

The RCP did realize that some sort of childcare should be provided by the government in order to help families balance their careers and childrearing. It would not be possible for dual income couples to both keep up fulltime jobs and have children without any sort of childcare. This issue was often addressed at Women’s Committee Meetings, seeing as the issue of childcare often fell on the shoulders of women.

Minutes from the Comitetului Județean al Femeilor Județul Mureș (The Women’s Committee chapter in Mureș state) show that the government was aware of the issue that came

\textsuperscript{53} Oprea, “Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”
\textsuperscript{54} Eugenia Călușer. Interview in Târgu Mureș. May 13, 2017.
with the balancing of childcare and careers. “In collaboration with Comitetul Județean al Femeilor, a discussion was organized in terms of the issue of the children that were not registered in nurseries, day cares or preschools. At this debate, there were seventeen comrades present, workers from the companies which were majority female.”⁵⁵ The meeting’s minutes show that this issue was brought up to the Committee. However only three sentences were written about this point, and two of those describe in what industry the women present worked. There is no mention of an attempt to open more nurseries, day cares or preschools in order to resolve this issue during this meeting. It is likely that the government was dealing with limited budgets and realized that some families would relying on hiring nannies or getting childcare from other family members, such as the children’s grandmothers.

In a later meeting, a temporary solution was proposed to solve the childcare issue. The answer would allow for mothers to go to work to make sure that production for the country did not slow down due to childcare and therefore no profits would be lost. “In different neighborhoods of the city, there should be organized micro-preschools which could each hold ten-fifteen children whose care would be provided by retired women, from the teaching category of women.”⁵⁶ This is a community solution to the problem that is representative of how Communism wanted to encourage a community aspect into its citizens’ lives. The people were not meant to be separated into individual family units, but rather community units that could help each other for the greater good. In this situation, the greater good would be the production of goods for the Socialist Republic of Romania.

⁵⁶ Ibid.
The Communists realized that establishing appropriate childcare would “reduce the number of medical leaves, permitted leaves, absences taken by women during the workday and would also assure an upbringing and corresponding education for children.”\(^{57}\) They realized that at the end of the year it would mean more profit for them because the work schedules of their employees would not be disrupted. It was expressly made clear several times in the minutes from the Women’s Committees Meetings that “there will be no cases where workers are permitted to take on only half of a normal workload to take care of children.”\(^{58}\) One could argue that making sure all of the country’s workforce was in the factory day in and day out seemed like more of a priority to the RCP than the quality of care for its children.

In order to show progress, Women’s Committee meetings often reported on statistics regarding the issues discussed. For example, implementation of childcare was an important issue at these meetings, as discussed previously. The middle column represents the number of spots available in preschools, while the rightmost column represents the actual number of children enrolled. The rows represent different day cares. It was quite obvious that there are many more children enrolled than the daycares were meant to care for.\(^{59}\) This created a tremendous strain on resources and ultimately led to the suffering of the children enrolled. The children could not be getting the education and attention they needed where, in extreme cases, the teachers were obligated to take care of twice as many children as they had the capacity to.

Some exceptions were made for pregnant women in terms of the labor expected from them. “In general, women with child are protected during their pregnancy, they are subject to

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\(^{57}\) Ibid.


\(^{59}\) Ibid.
periodic searches by the healthcare workers of the company and are exempt from night shifts."\(^{60}\)

This is not a great reduction in work for women that are producing future Communists for the country.

It is rather interesting to note that the Women’s Committee Minutes often reported on what was intended to be done, or what was necessary to be done, rather than what had been done. Regardless of whether or not the resources and government motivation was enough to actually put the plan into action, the Communists still wanted to show that they realized an issue was present and, at least on paper, wanted to take actions to improve it. The RCP did intend to continuously improve the conditions of childcare facilities to make them more attractive and helpful to more and more families. Progress, however, was slow while the population was dramatically increasing thanks to the ban on abortions in 1966. Below is a list of intentions that the RCP explained at a Women’s Committee Meeting in 1969. It intended to increase the number of spots in preschools by 300 over a period of three years in three different neighborhoods. This demonstrates that they were planning on making efforts to help women with their double burden of careers and childcare. The full result would not be seen for another six years. During which time, the children of the women currently complaining about lack of childcare would already be in elementary school and would no longer need to go to daycare or preschool or nurseries.

Women were in the positions where they needed to go to work Monday morning and needed childcare immediately. Promises of what would be built and established in six years was almost irrelevant to them.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.
Women were also celebrated through Heroine Mother celebrations. Heroine Mothers were exceptional women that not only managed to have a career outside of the house but also had ten children. The Communist party wanted to applaud these women for their efforts to support the nation both through their work but also through their commitment to raising the next generation of Romanians. These women were celebrated for being the “ideal” Communist women but at the same time used as examples to pressure other women into following suit. Women who delivered and reared ten children were honored with the title Heroine Mother. This use of celebration rewards and encourages the Heroine Mothers while establishing these guidelines for action and implementation that other women could follow. In this way Ceaușescu showed that every Romanian woman was capable of being a Heroine Mother if she just followed the examples of her compatriots. There were also financial rewards, where Heroine Mothers received 2,000 lei.

The emphasis on the people and populism could also be understood to be another motivation behind the strong nationalism that was present in Communist Romania.

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An example of an article praising Heroine Mothers is shown below. This was a spread in the November 1973 edition of *Femeia*. It describes the Vișan family who lived in an apartment building in Bucharest. The magazine spread proudly displays pictures of the Vișan parents and their children. The reporter writing, Cici Iordache, the story describes the children as "well developed, the sign of a caring upbringing, well dressed and maintain an atmosphere of order and cleanliness." Iordache shows that the mother has taken good care of her children even though there are so many of them. The mother, Ioana, 43, was a worker in a textile factory and the father, Constantin, 46, a truck driver. They have industrial professions that have allowed them to live comfortably with their eleven children. This testament to Communism shows that ordinary workers can live comfortably with many children and also serves to inspire readers to follow suit.

The reporter was fascinated by how well the mother knew all of her eleven children. Ioana responded saying that “the mother who does not know her kids well did not birth them herself and did not raise them herself.” Ioana demonstrated that she is not only a mother capable of raising so many children but also capable of raising them well and caring for them, making sure that they had successful futures. She explains how her children were taught to go get what they wanted themselves, “to do something for themselves in life, not to have parents constantly pushing them forward.” Ioana says that she and her husband make sure that their children “are clean, orderly, well-behaved, with good characters, willing to learn and will become prosperous people.” The example of the Vișan family showed *Femeia’s* readers that not only is it possible for a family to have two industrial workers as parents and have many children, but also to raise

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them well and lovingly. A young woman reading this article was meant to be inspired to be as good a worker and mother as Ioana was.

Conclusion

Ceaușescu was a Communist leader who was also a fierce patriot. He had in mind an ideal Romanian woman. She was a mother and a worker, and by balancing both she demonstrated her patriotism. He believed that this woman was going to help Romania progress the furthest and therefore fulfill the Romanian people’s true potential. The RCP recognized that this was a large expectation to have of its female citizens and in order to help it implemented

65 Ibid.
several policies. Families with children received allocations as well as free daycares and nurseries. Women were also however, subject to surprise gynecological examinations at the workplace and were prohibited from receiving abortions. Heroine mothers were also financially rewarded and lauded in the media, while all women were celebrated on March 8th of every year. Women organized themselves and received communication from the government about what was expected from them through Women’s Committee meetings.

For the most part, these policies did work. Force and fear did play some role in their respect, but the end result was that women did enter the workforce and simultaneously the birthrate increased. How was this possible? The RCP used propaganda to pressure Romanian women into transforming themselves in the Ideal Communist Woman. That will be the subject of chapter two.
Chapter 2:
Women’s Magazines as a Reflection of the RCP’s Expectations of Women (1965-1975)

In its April 1973 edition, the women’s magazine Femeia published a spread on the spring season’s fashion, it is pictured below. The text described this new trend as a revival of the “classic” look that “rediscover and brings up again to our attention today what two decades ago caused a stir,” saying that it brings together elements of fashion that were becoming increasingly popular in the past half-decade.¹ The style is described as having structured jackets and hems of modest length, around the knees. It might to surprising to realize that the women’s magazine in Communist Romania also included fashion advice, given that the Soviet Bloc was often considered a gray and grim place. This chapter will show that Romanian women, like their female counterparts across the globe, were participants of a vigorous popular culture that involved fashion, citizenship, and labor. This classic look advertised in this magazine spread was not just about fashion. It informed women on attire that was appropriate for the workplace, not outfits to do work in the house that an apron would cutely cover. This fashion also influenced the economy. These pieces of clothing were simple to make, and some women likely already had certain pieces given that this was a revival of a trend from two decades ago. The classic look was a form of fashion but also of women’s popular culture, appropriate to Communist Romania.

This classic look came into style again at a time when many women were employed in or just starting jobs in offices and factories. Many such jobs required that women show up in

business attire, which is similar to what this classic look is. This article is encouraging women to dress in a way that not only makes them look appropriate for work, but also is on trend as well. Older women probably already had such pieces in their closets since this is a trend that came back into fashion. Likely they could reuse items they already had and still be on trendy and appropriate for the office all at once. Often women make conscious choices to wear outfits that have elements that are described in magazines as new and fashionable. Dressing to keep up with the latest fashion but also in a way that also makes them appropriate for the office makes women feel less out of place in a professional environment, especially if they just started a new job.

The spread is pictured below:
Femeia allows us to analyze Romanian women in this time period. In the last chapter we saw that the RCP implemented draconically oppressive measure in order to force women to bear children and work. Yet, there was no organized resistance, no protest from the women themselves. In general, women found a way to make do – this will be more fully explored in chapter three of this thesis. Why did women put up with these dual demands? Fear played some role, but that does not explain the entire situation. The RCP did not use punishment as its only tool, it also used propaganda tools to teach women how to be modern Romanian and help them handle the seemingly impossible demands placed upon them. Many other societies, including our contemporary United States, have women’s magazines as one of the most important forums where women write for women about these demands. This chapter will primarily focus on the Romanian women’s magazine Femeia to explore the gentler arm of the RCP’s attempt to transform its nation’s women.

This type of article about beauty and fashion is what is often associated with women’s magazines. Femeia, however, published many articles with more substance behind them. Some pieces published were about styles or relationship advice, while others taught women how to raise socialist children, spotlighted women like Ileana Dicu to show how they succeed in the workplace or encouraged women to use precious commodities such as butter and cloth economically. These were all goals that the RCP had for women and Femeia was a delicate manner for them to communicate their intentions across to the female population.

Femeia has been studied before by scholars such as Shana Penn, Jill Massino, Sorana-Alexandra Constantinescu, and Denisa-Adriana Oprea. My analysis, however, will be different

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3 Oprea’s work focuses on the magazine’s history from 1946 to 1989, while I specifically focus on the years 1965-1975, a time of the height of communism and the height of Femeia’s readership. Constantinescu’s study of Femeia specifically analyzes how the Communist
than the analyses of the abovementioned historians. I will be looking at how the articles in *Femeia* demonstrate what the RCP wanted from its female citizens, i.e. the “ideal woman.” The pages of *Femeia* were a direct line of communication of the Communist government to its female citizens. Thus, the contents of the articles reflected how the RCP wanted women to think, act, and participate in society.

*Femeia*’s content was meant to affect public opinion and cause behavioral change in its readers; it is a strong example of propaganda. In fact, *Femeia* is known as being one of the most prominent examples of a Romanian Communist media outlet that attempted to control public opinion and behavior according with the very specific objectives of party planning.

RCP content was seemly interwoven with regular magazine content, so it was not plainly presented as propaganda, but rather as normal magazine content.

This chapter will discuss how *Femeia* was used persuasively by the RCP in order to create the kind of female citizens that the Party desired, an ambition that was described in chapter one. It certainly did contain articles interwoven with propaganda to advertise the Communist party, but it also attempted to advise women on how to balance their responsibilities as both citizen-workers and mother-workers given the conditions Romanians lived in by offering helpful advice. *Femeia* managed to create in the minds of the audience an image of women, of their problems and of their place in society, that was in full accordance with RCP requirements.

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5 Constantinescu, "How Women Made the News. A Case-Study of *Femeia* Magazine in Communist Romania under Ceauşescu."
The ideal women that *Femeia* encouraged its readers to aspire to is the same ideal women that the RCP wanted its citizens to aspire to.

**Introducing Femeia**

*Femeia* had been an important women’s magazine for many years in Romania’s history. The magazine was first published in 1876 and went through several ownerships, was discontinued at some points, and had different goals at different times. The Communists started up *Femeia* again in 1946 as soon as they had taken power. It was a staple in the life of women in the second half of the twentieth century in order to turn them into reliable comrades. *Femeia* was the only women’s magazine published in Romania at this time. It was read by 100,000 women annually seeing as no other printed monthly media was geared towards them. The Communist government directly controlled everything that was released through media in Romania, which means they dictated what should and could be published. *Femeia* was edited by the National Council of Women from 1958 to 1989 and was the official women’s monthly. It was edited by women, but still published by a government entity which means it never published anything the RCP would not have approved of.

In the 1960’s, women’s magazines were very popular in many places around the globe. They were read by women who were trying to figure out their roles in a rapidly changing world.

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7 Oprea, "Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia."

8 Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare în România Comunistă*, p. 147.

The magazines were just as much a source of entertainment, a break from the women’s busy lives, as they were a source of advice and guidance for women. In 1946, East Germany began publishing *Für Dich*, a women’s magazine comparable to *Femeia*.\(^{10}\) *Für Dich* contained many articles that lauded women in the workplace and encouraged them to take their new place alongside men. In 1965 *Cosmopolitan* started rebranding itself as a magazine for single career women and enjoyed huge success.\(^{11}\) This rebranding started a trend in women’s magazines which can be felt in *Femeia* as well. *Femeia* intended to publish material that encouraged women to strive in their careers without thought to the men they worked alongside. *Femeia* contained some content that was similar to both its East German and American counterparts, but it was unique in the sense that it emphasized dealing with shortages and rationing especially when it came to the family. *Femeia* also contained significantly more political propaganda than either *Für Dich* or *Cosmopolitan*.

Many of *Femeia*’s readers were young women who had just gotten married (or were about to marry), they were either in University or began working, could not get abortions and did not have access to any other form of birth control. These women were about to, or very recently, had undertaken the dual responsibility of raising children and keeping up a career. Romanian culture dictates that the women are generally the ones responsible for the cooking and cleaning in the house, so this adds another burden to their load. Reading *Femeia* was intended to not only be a relaxing break from the pressures of their responsibilities, but also to offer these women helpful advice from the government as to how to be effective at fulfilling all of their


responsibilities. The Communist government did recognize that they put a heavy load on women, and supportive articles in this magazine were not only meant to be encouraging and sympathetic, but also inspiring.

The RCP wanted to disband many stereotypes about women, such as the women being home-centered and male dependent. *Femeia* attempted to show women that this was no longer acceptable in society. The ideal woman was one that was an assertive and determined female activist that occupied equal positions alongside men and participated in the building of Communist society.\(^\text{12}\) However, *Femeia* did maintain other traditional values of femininity such as intimacy, concern about appearances, being supportive of men, elegant, and sophisticated.\(^\text{13}\)

The RCP started publishing a magazine specifically for women in order to establish a line of communication with its female citizens. The magazine’s aim was to disseminate the desired values and ideals, everyday practices and behaviors of the RCP to create a new psychological order among its female citizens.\(^\text{14}\) Its intention was to recommend to women how to handle the harsh conditions of Communist life, particularly when it came to rationing. It also wanted to celebrate motherhood and teach women how to raise strong Communist children. And lastly, the magazine provided many examples in every issue of strong women in the workplace. Many pages are flooded with images of women in the workplace, in uniform, and in front of large machinery. Communism wanted to establish equality between the sexes and showing women examples of other working women was meant to encourage them to fulfill their careers’

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\(^\text{12}\) Oprea, ”Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.
potentials. *Femeia* often published stories of ordinary working women who were also mothers as a way to provide examples to Romanian women and influence them into following suit. The Women’s Committees’ opinions were taken into account in many more situations than just organizing festivities for holidays. “The Municipal Committee of Women has directed its Women’s Committees to organize actions that would popularize written media.” Ceaușescu wanted women to read these newspapers and magazines in order to be subjected to the propaganda they contained. If women were attracted to at least part of the material in these periodicals, they would purchase them. When reading the magazine, they would read not only the interesting tidbits they picked up the issue for, but they would also be exposed to Communist propaganda. With the occasion of asking the women what they wanted in the magazine, “the participants appreciated the contribution brought on by the newspaper towards the understanding women had of the politics of the party and of the state in terms of resolving the education of children, fashion, folk art, and culinary arts.” The articles in *Femeia* were devoted to teaching women tips and tricks in terms of childrearing, making clothes, baking, and so on. Nothing else about its subject matter suggests that its audience desired to read about politics. Because the government controlled all publications, it could put into the magazine whatever it chose. Since this was the sole women’s magazine on the market, women ended up buying it regardless of the obvious Communist propaganda just because they wanted to read the few seemingly non-politicized articles.

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“The Party and the People – one single thought, one single will” was the title of one typical propaganda article in the women’s magazine Femeia that lauded the RCP. It is rather out of place to image such an article alongside ones that describe recipes or how to discipline naughty children, but its presence demonstrated how this publication was dominated by propaganda.

**Dealing with Shortages**

Many of the difficulties that were associated with living under Communism were not necessarily the censoring of the press, lack of freedom of speech, or restrictions on traveling outside Romania’s borders, but rather the everyday rationing that affected every citizen. In order to pay off the debts that Ceaușescu was obsessed with, he limited his people’s access to commodities. For example, electricity and water were cut off in certain non-peak hours in order to conserve, every person was allowed a limited amount of goods such as meat, diary, sugar, gasoline, and others that he could purchase per month. These restrictions made daily life difficult, but it did teach its citizens how to be very mindful about how they used their resources and to limit any wastefulness.

Femeia published many articles that gave its readers tips about how to use resources, such as butter or cloth, in a mindful way as to not be wasteful. The idea was that if women got their hands on a couple of meters of cloth, they were not sure when they would be able to purchase some more, so they used every inch of cloth they currently had. Merchandises such as

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18 Oprea, "Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”
19 Gilberg, Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship, p. 130.
cloth, bikes, leather goods, or other more specialized items could not be found in stores continuously. They were sold when they were in stock and there was no guarantee when they would be in stock again. Supply and demand market conditions still applied, so sometimes people would end up paying much more than the items were actually worth, just because of their rarity on the market. In such conditions, it becomes understandable why women would not want to lavishly waste bits of cloth by cutting clothing patterns inefficiently.

Using cloth wisely was a common theme in *Femeia*. Almost every issue had patterns that could be followed to sew clothing. These articles served several purposes. They taught women how to sew clothing at a time when cloth was not abundantly available in a way that creates few waste scraps. It also gave women a sense of independence. If there was a fashion that recently came out, women did not have to worry about finding it in stores and having to pay retail for it. Instead, they could make it themselves for just the price of the materials. This is not to say that clothing was not sold in stores and women had to sew everything. Clothing of all types could be found in stores, but not in great variety in terms of color or patterns. In fact, many ads for clothing stores do appear in *Femeia*. It was, however, appealing for women to learn how to make their own clothing and add some extra flair to them that could not be found on the market in Communist Romania.

Although such resourcefulness was meant to be helpful to the women, it created an additional responsibility for them. It added to the idea that women were supposed to be *gospodine*, homemakers, and be capable of not only maintaining a career and raising children as per the RCP’s influences, but also being good homemakers that can save money for the

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household and put less pressure on the country’s consumer markets by sewing clothing by hand or feeding their family an economical dinner.

Granted, cloth sewing was not people’s only source of clothing at all, but it clearly was of interest to Femeia’s readers as clothing pattern suggestions consistently show up in issue after issue.

Below is a typical example of a clothing pattern published in Femeia:

The above article appeared in a 1965 edition of *Femeia*. It is a typical example of an article that explained how to make a clothing item. It includes diagrams of how to measure, cut and sew the material in order to create the skirt. The clothing pattern shows typical measurements that a woman would have and which part of the body they measure. The article explains that only the front of the skirt is shown in order to simplify the cutting. Above the clothing pattern are a couple of images of a model wearing the skirt.

The skirt is of modest length and fits the description of the “classic style” described at the beginning of this chapter. It is professional enough to wear to the office, but also versatile enough to wear to everyday events. The design of the skirt is simple so that it would not involve complex sewing in order to create, making it more reasonable to expect that women would make it themselves.

The article describes this type of skirt as “irreplaceable in a women’s wardrobe” giving the readers a sense of urgency that they need such a skirt. The belt of the skirt (pictured at the top of the clothing pattern) is “a straight edge, that can be obtained from the sides of the original cloth material.” Its width can be “two to four centimeters, depending on your preference.” If women had excess material left after cutting out the pain parts of the skirt, they could make sure none of it went to waste by extending the width of the belt. However, the magazine giving a range of different widths that were suitable allows women who did not have as much excess material to also fit into the standard of making such a skirt.

The article goes on to mention that “the dress can be executed in any sort of material: wool for the cold season, cotton or silk for the summer.” This range of acceptable materials creates even more flexibility for the women reading *Femeia*. It almost did not matter what sort of material they had or could get because they would still be able to make this skirt. Additionally,
once made, this skirt could be replicated in other materials to be worn all year round. It is not a skirt style that is meant to be worn during just one season.

It is explained that the skirt is newly designed to “be made up of two pieces with a seam down the middle of the back” This redesign is meant to make it as simple as possible for the women cutting the material and sewing the pieces together to create this skirt. More pieces would make the process more complex and would take the woman away from her other responsibilities such as her children and her work.

This skirt design is an excellent example of the resourcefulness that Femeia wanted to instill in its readers. Women could still retain their style and elegance, while making clothes out of cloth that would be cheaper and reduce the pressure on the consumer economy in Romania. The government could worry about providing the markets with cloth, rather than pre-made clothing in different styles, colors, and sizes. That is a great simplification on their part, which allowed them to focus on other issues such as bringing women into the workforce.

Below is another example of how the RCP suggested women make clothing that contains two different outlines in one spread. On the left there is one that expects women to knit the material themselves and then sew the pieces together to create a sweater, or “pulover” as Romanians call them, for children. On the right, there is a dress that a woman could make for herself. This spread appeared in a 1973 edition of Femeia.
The above spread explained how to knit and sew a multicolored sweater, presumably for children since the model in the magazine is a child. The left page of the spread contains a picture of a little girl modeling the sweater alongside detailed descriptions of how to knit the material. Below the instructions are ideas for patterns to knit into the sweater, such as boats, people and dogs. The article explains that the dimensions given are good “for a child up to six years of age,” but it goes on to describe how to alter the dimensions so that the sweater could fit a child of up to eight years old.

This type of clothing pattern could be customized in many ways. The maker could decide to choose only boats in the pattern, or only dogs. She could also choose to make the sweater out

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of whatever colored yarn she has available. The article intends to provide a guideline that the reader could manipulate to suit whatever materials she has available and whatever she and her children would like.

The right page of the spread contains a clothing pattern for how to sew the pieces of cloth together that form the dress modeled in the upper left hang of the sheet. The article explains how the color, material and buttons on the dress can be adapted to whatever the maker wishes, or more likely, to whatever she has on hand or can expect to get. “The dress can be made with a single row of buttons or with the buttons on the side to create an asymmetric pattern.”

The article also describes how the readers can change the measurements given to fit their own bodies. It suggests the readers “create a sketch on a sheet of paper (of your dimensions) which you will then place on the materials and then cut.” It says that this design can be created without any special fabric scissors, which is an advantage to the readers because they can use whatever scissors they already have at home.

“With time, once some experience is gained, you can bring in your own corrections to our design, that fit you best, and can change the neckline to oval, round or elongated. In the same manner the shapes of the pockets can be changed to match the neckline.” This ability to modify the design shows the women that although they would be making a dress from the same clothing pattern that presumably thousands of other women across the country would be using, they could still input their own taste and style into the design.

Clothing was not the only way in which Femeia helped women make practical decision in their lives. It also tried to offer advice when it came to food and cooking in order to help women deal with the food rationing.
In the March 1973 edition of *Femeia*, an article was published about the importance of dairy in food. The article is pictured below:

This article describes how milk contains many of the important vitamins and nutrients that humans needs to survive. “In the gamete of natural produce, milk… out of all of the foodstuffs, it most closely fulfills multiple necessities of human nutrition.” The article goes on to describe how these nutrients are unaltered in cheese. The title of the articles translates to “No meal without cheese.” This implies that a meal with cheese will contain most of the nutrients that the human body needs, ensuring that all these meals will be very nutritious no matter what else in

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served. As an example, the article says that “a large part of the original B₂ content from milk in maintained in cheeses.”

Milk is a prominent produce of Romania because of the large bovine population. Milk is not something that could be easily exported because it does not stay fresh for long. This meant that it was not rationed as heavily as other consumer goods were, which were saved for export.  
The purpose of this article is to show Femeia’s readers that even if the women’s’ families had not had access to meat in a couple of days, their nutrition was not suffering as long as they were consuming dairy products. Meat was one of the foodstuffs that was hardest to find, with people often waiting in long lines to gain access to their ration of it.

The article continues to mention the benefits of consuming milk and the products that come from it. “They are easier to digest because in general, lactose has laxative properties…the bloating and intestinal turbulence that is associated with milk products are not associated with the consumption of cheese products.” This means to encourage its readers to consume milk because there do not seem to be digestive ailments that come from its consumption.

Femeia intended to show its readers that milk, which was readily available, was a good choice to feed their family. The rest of the article suggest recipes that use milk and cheese products, to cook for the family. In this way the wife and mother fulfills her duty of cooking filling food for her family even if the rations have affected them negatively. The RCP was aware that the rationing was difficult for Romanians and publishing articles targeting women, who were generally the cooks of the household, gave the party a way to suggest how to deal with this burden.

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24 Oprea, "Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine Femeia.”
The RCP recognized that Ceaușescu’s desire to pay off the nation’s debt as quickly as possible led to severe shortages for Romanian families. As mothers generally shopped for, cooked for, and clothed their families, the RCP wanted to give them guidance as to how they should navigate these shortages. Helpful articles in *Femeia* that included recipes, clothing patterns, and other tips and tricks were the party’s way of showing the magazine’s readers that a typical Romanian family could manage the shortages and rationings.

**Motherhood and Raising Children**

*Femeia* wanted to help its readers with raising children to help them fulfill the RCP’s agenda. It wanted to assist mothers in raising good Socialist children as a guarantee that Romania’s future generations would be good Communists. The magazine also wanted to encourage its female readers to accept their roles as mothers, no matter how many children that brought them. This would increase Romania’s population in the long term, allowing for the country to have more workers. Ceaușescu was an extreme nationalist, and any nationalist leader wants to increase the country’s population in order to ensure that, in case, there are more Romanians in the future.

Ceaușescu believed that women’s most important responsibilities were those of motherhood and child education.\(^{25}\) These two duties were necessary for the growth of the country as they assured a large, educated, and hardworking population. Ceaușescu also was under the impression that rearing a large family was a source of pride for women.\(^{26}\) In this manner Ceaușescu involved state matters into the private lives of its citizens.

\(^{26}\) *Ibid.*
The magazine achieved the party’s goals by both offering advice columns and presenting examples of mothers with many children. It often advertised the party’s groups and organizations that were meant to help mothers and guide youths. *Femeia* was a method of communication of the party with its people so that they could advertise the programs they made available for the people and show how they were supposed to help mothers with raising their children.

In its November 1973 issue, *Femeia* asked its readers “What kind of Children do we Owe Life?”

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The article describes that, in theory, a woman knows how to take care of herself during her pregnancy. However, putting this into practice is something else. “With the more this is realized, during a woman’s pregnancy, a large network of medical care, free medication, a legislature that will honor her rights, and that will provide her with numerous rights and social conditions, specially created for her to be able to create life and raise healthy children will be available to her.” This article means to say that a woman that becomes pregnant will be taken care of. There will be social services that will support her medically and socially. This means to give woman almost little reason for wanting to terminate an abortion seeing as she would receive so much support during her pregnancy and afterwards. There should have been no reason to fear the responsibility that comes with pregnancy and child rearing. Having and raising children was meant to be the supreme joy and supreme responsibility of women. By doing so, they were the nation’s true mothers.29

This article also gives examples of many women, in different stages of pregnancy, that came into medical clinics to seek care and received not only medical care but social care. The article states that “we shall underline that it is necessary that pregnant women need to be paid attention to in clinics and needs to be permanently under medical observation.” This serves as not only a warning to women to not try to attempt any abortion methods, but also as a comfort to women who think they might get pregnant in the near future. It assures them that they will be taken care of and will receive the proper attention they and their babies need.

_Femeia_ shows that it wants to support woman by giving them examples of woman that have received care during their pregnancy from government institutions. By advertising these

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29 Oprea, “Between the Heroine Mother and the Absent Woman: Motherhood and Womanhood in the Communist Magazine _Femeia._”
organizations *Femeia* is encouraging women to go ahead and have children because they will have a safety net to rely on. The government provided mothers with facilities such as day cares or nurseries, and motherhood allowances to help relieve the burden of childrearing.\(^{30}\)

Furthermore, these women will see that *Femeia* consistently, issue after issue, provides advice as to how to raise children. So, Romanian women would receive support from the government and through *Femeia* consistently.

Below is an article published in a February 1975 edition of *Femeia*:

![Article Image](image)

The article describes how the RCP opens a “wide horizon towards all directions of development, and it solicits us to meditate on and take action on the concrete paths that will led

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

to the creation of humane and social coordinates that it wrote.” This means that the RCP expects its citizens to take on responsibility that will better themselves and better their nation. This can be applied to motherhood and the responsibility that comes with it. In this article, the writer, Cici Iordache, wrote “Every mother today interprets maternity as not only a personal problem of the mother and of the family, but also one that is intimately related to the interests of society, one that assures the perpetual youth of the nation.” This implies that a mother’s duty is not only to raise children that will honor her image and that of her family, but also that of the nation as a whole. The country will be in the children’s hands in some years, making it essential to the RCP that they are raised to be loyal patriots, but most importantly Communists.

The article goes on to describe how government programs can help families with raising their children. “These programs help in the continuation of life, the youth of the nation, the progress of the nation, through the work of all the citizens of an active age, who make up the work force.

“From the Ministry of Health there come the calculations on the actual models of the family made up of workers and young people who have many children, time in which they functionaries and intellectuals, in most cases… speak about what needs to be changed in order to achieve the level of the population foreseen in the demographic prognoses.”

The woman can further be assured that after she has given birth, she can rely on sources like Femeia to teach her how to best raise her children. Many articles in Femeia discuss disciplining, educating, and feeding children. This same article also discusses how mothers can make sure their older children are receiving the “right” kind of education and spending time with the “right” kind of children. Cristina Luca is interviewed in the magazine discussing the benefits
of having young people join UCY (Union of Communist Youth). This was an organization that trained the future leaders of the RCP. The article says that the UCY offers youths a chance to meet other patriots which they can then marry and start their lives together. “The couple will desire children and they will see in them a source of happiness and fulfillment in their lives. From this point of view, it is obvious that the UCY takes on the responsibility to help youths, and this is meant to be a part of their day to day responsibilities.” This article wants mothers to trust their children to the UCY and believe that it will help form them into good citizens for the future, even making sure that they meet good future spouses that share the same political and nationalistic interests.

In terms of raising their children, Femeia wanted to teach its readers to take advantage of state resources offered to help with childrearing in order to raise a healthy, happy, socialist child that would grow up to become an ideal comrade. The magazine wanted to make sure that women did not fear having children, or even having many children, because it was such an honor to their country to raise many future workers. Reassuring women would allow the RCP to achieve its goals of increasing the nation’s population because women would be more encouraged to have larger families.

Women Working

Femeia consistently provided examples of women in the workforce to inspire their readers. They often featured articles showcasing ordinary women working in factories. This was meant to encourage women to advance themselves in their careers after reading articles about

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32 Gilberg, Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship, p. 85.
these strong women. The Communists wanted to make the sexes equal in the workforce and reduce any intimidation women might have had.

Ceaușescu wanted to eliminate the national debt. In order to do this every citizen needed to work as much as possible to produce as much as possible. Romania’s products were often exported, and those earnings were used to eliminate the debts. Communists brought women into the work force as equals to men. There was no preference between the genders when it came to promotions or hiring.

_Femeia_ wanted to celebrate women just as much as it wanted to encourage more women to push themselves to advance in their careers. The RCP also wanted to celebrate the average factory worker more than the citizen with an intellectual profession such an architect, doctor, professor, lawyer. All the women celebrated in _Femeia_ work in a factory that produces a good.

The follow spread comes from a May 1973 edition of _Femeia:_
This article describes the opening of a textile factory in Arad. The factory opened for the first time at the beginning of 1973 and, according to this article, had enjoyed great successes in its first year. It had the ambition of being the textile factory that produces the most in all of Romania.

The article describes an interview with the factory’s union leader, Ecaterina Veres, who is a woman. She talks about how the drive to lead the country in textile product was not one that blossomed overnight, “when we undertook this important ambition, we relied on our workers, on their accomplishments every year, and on our tradition of leading.” The workers in this factory were mostly women, as evidenced by the multiple photographs published in the spread. The significance of this determination and drive is that a factory of women managed to get an

honorable title from the RCP about how much they were able to produce. Not only do these women seem like they are Ceaușescu’s ideal women for advancing in their careers, but they are also painted as doing a service for their country.

“The significance of this profound Communist honorable title “leader in the socialist race” shows not only exemplary professional qualities, but also high moral and political ones.”

The article implies that these women should not only be proud of their work in the factory in terms of producing textiles, but they should also be proud of themselves for setting such a great example for the rest of the nation. Women across Romania reading this article were supposed to be inspired to take on more responsibility and put in more effort into their work so that they could achieve similar results. Making production in the factory a sort of competition between factories across the country gives workers additional motivation to push themselves and care more about their work.

The national recognition the women in the particular article enjoy was meant to give them a sense of pride and honor. Other women who would wish to feel that same sense would have to work just as hard as these women to earn it. Encouraging workers to produce even more, faster, gives Ceaușescu the opportunity to sell more products and pay off his nation’s debts more quickly.

Furthermore, this article demonstrates female leadership when it discusses the female head of the union. Veres is not only taking upon herself the responsibility to produce more, but also the one to lead her fellow workers. Communists wanted to get their citizens as involved as possible and seeing positive examples of this was meant to be inspirational.

Articles describing and promoting working women gave female readers encouragement to join the workforce themselves. These magazine spreads normalized the female presence in the
workplace. Women would be less self-conscious starting a new job, especially in typically masculine fields, after reading the example of real women in *Femeia*. The total number of workers in the country would increase significantly with the inclusion of females in the workforce, increasing the production of the nation and allowing Ceaușescu to pay back the debts quicker.

**Other forms of Propaganda**

Magazines were not the only form of propaganda that the RCP used to target women, movies were often used as well. Films were also heavily riddled with Communist ideals, showing Romanian women examples of ideal Communist women. Since there were no private enterprises, the government owned and operated the movie production companies. Every movie produced was on a subject matter that pleased the government and could have been filled with a much propaganda as they desired. Women were presented with Communist ideology in every type of media they consumed and in every official Women’s Committee meeting they attended.

In May 1975, the movie *Toamna Bobocilor* was released in theaters. It was highly successful and has become an integral part of Romanian culture, starting a series of movies that continued with *Iarna Bobocilor* and *Primavara Bobocilor*. However, the original picture was commissioned under Ceaușescu’s orders, making it clearly Communist propaganda.

*Toamna Bobocilor* is set in a small Transylvanian village that is traditional and conservative. Among the main characters is Varvara. She is meant to be an example to

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Romanian women watching the movie. Varvara is the head of the local RCP’s women’s committee and therefore an integral member of the RCP in local politics, a major influence in the village’s issues, a wife, mentor to her young niece, and mother to three children, including a newborn baby.\textsuperscript{36} Her husband is the town mayor and head of the local collectivization chapter.

The movie begins with the birth of Varvara’s first son and continues with her participating in the RCP meeting in city hall later on that day. Normally she would have been present at this meeting, but since she is still bedridden after giving birth a few hours earlier, she participates by listening to the conversation via a radio and showing her agreement with her husband’s proposals by asking her niece to hold a white flag out her window or showing her disagreement by displaying a black flag. Even though she was not in the room, her vote was taken very seriously in the meeting, visibly scaring her husband. Below is a still of Varvara, in bed, and her niece listening to the radio that transmits the meeting.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Toamna Bobocilor}, Directed by Mircea Moldovan, May 26, 1975.
Once Varvara realizes that she disagrees with the consensus of the meeting, she immediately tells her niece to display a black flag out the window. The meeting was being held across the street, so the RCP members would clearly see the black flag out of Varvara’s window. Below is a still of the niece getting ready to display the black flag.

\[37\] Ibid.
The topic of this meeting was whether to accept the intentions of the new French teacher, doctor, and agricultural engineer that just moved into the village after graduating university, or to be vary of them. The mayor does not want to trust them because he fears they will change the traditional ways their village. Varvara wants to encourage them to stay in the village and improve their quality of life. The movie has several scenes that involve disputes between Varvara and her husband. One of them, at the dinner table, is pictured below.

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When Varvara realizes that her husband stubbornly still does not want to accept these young, educated professionals into village life, she rallies up the women of the village in a women’s committee meeting. Altogether they go to the mayor and threaten to vote against him in the upcoming elections in the winter unless he makes efforts to accept these new professionals. The mayor is so intimidated by the revolting women of the village that he listens to his wife and allows them to stay and influence their traditional lives. Below is an image of the town’s women rallying up against the mayor.

39 Ibid.
This movie is riddled with Communist ideological subtexts, as should be expected since Ceaușescu commissioned its production. Varvara is clearly the most powerful figure in the dynamics of this small town, easily overshadowing her husband, the mayor. She is heavily involved in village concerns and has a strong sway over the women of the village, who individually all have some influence over their own husbands like Varvara does over hers. She does not miss a second of local politics even after having a difficult birth of her third child.

Varvara is guaranteed some influence over local politics as head of the women’s committee, but she extends her power to affect the mayor, the collectivization chapter, the school, the clinic, and the youth’s committee. Never in the course of the movie, which takes place the week after she has given birth, does Varvara hesitate about her role in her village’s politics or her roll in motherhood, or being able to handle both at once. In several scenes she is

40 Ibid.
picted talking to her husband about the young professionals and their influence while holding her newborn son and tending to her two older daughters. Varvara is so devoted to her work and the politics of her village that even while she was bedridden with her newborn baby, she still voices her opinion and votes during RCP meetings, even if it means having to display a flag outside her window. Her physical inability to walk across the street to city hall did not stop her from working or exerting her power. She exemplifies that children do not impede a woman’s influence in the workplace nor her success. She effectively eliminates the notion that a working mother can no longer be a viable force at work and has lost influence over everything not related to her children.

Ceaușescu wanted Romanian women to see themselves in Varvara. She was a mother who had three kids and did not give any indication that she was done having children. As an extremely strong, influential, and astute woman, she never indicates that her responsibilities as a mother and homemaker are hindering her work or power in village matters. She was confident in her beliefs about what was good for the village and realizes that her children are going to grow up there, so a better village meant a better environment for her children. She fights for what she believes in and what she thinks would benefit her nuclear family.

She does not wait for someone else, especially a man with a political title, to come around and do what she considers needs to be done. She takes matters into her own hands by exerting her influence to get what she wants, and thinks is necessary for the village. Ceaușescu wanted Romanian women to see this example and realize that they had the same power over their own lives and conditions. If every woman was as strong and determined as Varvara, the circumstances in Romania would be greatly improved. Ceaușescu wanted his people to realize
that there was much that they could do to help themselves, instead of waiting for the government to implement these changes.

Ceaușescu had an ideal that he wanted all of his female citizens to strive to become. Varvara was such a woman, although she is fictional. The perfection that she embodied was meant to be an inspiration and a motivation for women who, for instance, did actually live in small towns like the one where Toamna Bobocilor takes place. The example Varvara sets in the cinematic setting was another reminder to women that Communist ideologies can be applied to every aspect of their lives. Varvara uses her determination and hardworking attitude to improve her village and other Romanian women could apply these principles to their lives as well.

Seeing examples of strong women such as Varvara also encouraged women to be more assertive and take on more leadership roles. She gave them the inspiration they needed to realize that simultaneously balancing careers and children was very doable. Varvara was just another way for the government to promulgate the ideal woman and pressure average Romanian into striving to that epitome.

Other Women’s Magazines in the World

This analysis of women’s magazines allows us to see that the strategy of the RCP was not purely corrective. The magazine attempted to use popular culture to help women in acclimating to the new demands and expectations cast upon them. In fact, women’s magazines all around the world were doing something similar. Romania was not the only place where women were forced to navigate the complex balance of working and child rearing, among other contradictory demands from the state and from their culture. A comparative examination of women’s
magazines from several countries allows us to see that the RCP was engaged in a task that many others were also engaged in but was doing it in a particularly Romanian way.

Women’s magazines became hugely popular in the twentieth century. The East German *Für Dich* and the American *Cosmopolitan* provide examples of *Femeia*’s contemporaries. These magazines were all targeting the increasing modern women, that started to take greater roles in the workplace alongside men and gained more independence than ever. The differences between these magazines are very significant and they are representative of the era and country they were published in.

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) had a comparable magazine to *Femeia*, called *Für Dich*. This magazine was specifically devoted to the female comrades of the GDR. I examined an issue of *Für Dich* from January 1968. Some articles contained similar content between the two magazines, while others were rather different.

Many articles in *Für Dich* were similar to those in *Femeia*. Several articles described the role of women in the household, especially when it came to balancing their work and raising their children. Other articles described women in the workplace and what their responsibilities were there. These articles were meant to both inspire the readers into assuming more responsibility and pride in their work at their workplace. The articles also meant to encourage women to undertake the double responsibility of motherhood and worker. Many articles described these efforts as for the good of all the comrades, or for the good of the nation as a whole.

There were several differences in the magazines. For example, *Für Dich* did not describe many women working in industry as *Femeia* did. For example, the Germans spoke mostly about women that were teachers, gardeners, librarians, etc. These jobs are more traditionally feminine
in comparison to the steelworker, welder, weavers, ironworkers, that were constantly mentioned in *Femeia*. *Für Dich* spoke about many women working together in groups, when *Femeia* described mostly women working alongside men. *Für Dich* also contained many cultural articles, such as ones describing the interior architecture of a church, or a recent gallery opening. Such articles were few in *Femeia*. Whereas *Femeia* discussed the RCP and its intentions and policies in every issue, the political structures of the GDR were nowhere to be found.

Below is a clipping discussing, Christina Schulz, an orchid grower in Naumburger. The article describes how the orchid season is just beginning and how much work Schulz has in front of her and praises her for raising 6,000 orchids a year.\(^{41}\)

Although Schulz does not have an industrial job, she is still producing something that stimulates the GDR’s economy and for this she is praised in this article. Although the text about her is brief, it still admires her devotion to her work, especially as a woman. Even though she is growing flowers, this still is contribution to the country’s economy. This clipping is part of a larger article that describes the livelihood of many women such as a school librarian, a school

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42 Ibid.
teach, a worker that makes purses for dolls, and another woman that volunteered to reach women in rural areas.

Another article praises for women for their hard work that moved up a factory’s timeline in the production of diodes by working hard to be efficient and putting in long hours.

Helga Korn is described in this article as a thirty-year-old worker, married, with three children. She is quoted as saying that “It is up to the workers to spot irregularities to prevent issues further down the line” when speaking about the remarkable efficiency of the factory that allowed them to move their production timeline up. As for the motivation for this great

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44 Ibid.
efficiency she says that “the women themselves [who work in this factory] take pride in the work they do along the assembly line and are more than willing to provide quality control because they know, in their consciousness, that they are the ones that will end up buying these products in the store for use in their own homes and they want them to be of good quality.”45 This thinking can be applied by any women in any field of work she may be in. If she produces something in a factory and knows the very item she works on could end up in her own home, she holds herself to a high standard because she wants the products she and her family use to be of that high standard. If she teaches children, she knows someone else is teaching her children, so she does the best she can teaching knowing another woman is also doing her best to teach her children.

The example of the women working in this factory gives Für Dich’s readers an example of women that are not only working very efficiently to make as much as possible in a short as possible period of time, but also to make sure that the products they end up making are of the utmost quality.

I would not be surprised to have seen such an article in an edition of Femeia. Many articles in the Romanian women’s magazine wanted to inspire its readers to work hard in the workplace and produce a lot to help the country as a whole progress. Maybe the type of factory and number of women working there may have differed, but in all these types of articles were sending their readers the same message: work your hardest to make your country proud.

Another captivating article in Für Dich described specifically the home life and work life balance, asking if they are exclusive.

45 Ibid.
The conclusion of this article was clearly that they are not exclusive, because this was a publication that was sanctioned by the GDR’s government, which wanted its women to balance careers and childrearing. The article says that children do not suffer because of their mother’s careers because every member of the child’s family as a responsibility in his upbringing. This directly places some of the child raising efforts on the father, grandmother, etc. which was not seen in Femeia; Femeia just assumed all women would do the bulk of child care. This German article goes on the say that a mother that has a job has increased prestige in her family, and this can be interpreted to mean that she commands more respect in her family. The article says that women should handle their dual responsibility by sending their children to government run

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institutions, such as day cares. This a similar solution to this dual responsibility that the RCP gave. The article says that “the Capitalist State did not offer any special help, and the mothers were forced to often leave their children unsupervised.” This simultaneously criticizes capitalism while lauding the progresses of socialism. It explains how socialism was meant to take care of its citizens from more than just a political and working point of view, but also from the point of view of the family. It was supposed to show that they are a caring and considerate government.

The comparable American magazine from this time period was *Cosmopolitan*. I examined the January 1968 edition of Cosmopolitan. The greatest difference that was immediately visible between the Communists and the Capitalist magazine was the number of advertisements present. The Communist ones had a few advertisements in the entire issue, while *Cosmopolitan* had page after page of full length advertisements. For example, below is an advertisement from the May 1968 edition of *Femeia*. It is one of the three advertisements in this entire issue and the only full page one. It also serves as the back cover for the issue, which is why it takes up an entire page. The advertisement is for the textile factory in Galați and lists out all of the patterns that they make.

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Cosmopolitan, however, has five full length advertisements before the actual content of the magazine (excluding the table of contents) even begins. A typical example of an advertisement is shown below. It is full length and largely displays an image of the product the

ad is about along with the name of the brand in large writing, so it is clear to reader who is selling what.

Whereas the Romanian advertisement described a factory from a respective city that produced a type of product, the American advertisement described a brand that produced a specific item and described its use. The Romanian ad did not describe the purpose of textiles because it would be obvious to any reader what their purpose was. The American ad goes into detail about why this particular product is the best at doing this one specific job better than anything else comparable on the market.
So Coty Originals invented instant make-up remover pads.

Now, taking off make-up is a snap. Thanks to Coty Originals' new Face Make-Up Remover Pads. One little pad is all you need per job. Because each is loaded with a great new make-up dissolver. Enough to get even heavy stuff off with a few wipes and a rinse. You've never felt cleaner quicker.

Same goes for eye make-up. It all wipes off with a few fell swoops of an Eye Make-Up Remover Pad. The oil in these helps protect skin. So leave some on at bedtime.

Then follow with Freshener Pads. Coty Originals' pad way to zing up skin. (And not just at night, either.)

Neat? So's our new Moisturizer, last step after a thorough clean-up, first step when you're starting your Coty Originals' make-up. It's all so simple. No muss, no fuss. Just the Care Essentials. Another big idea from Coty Originals. The Care Essentials By Coty Originals.

SPECIAL FREE OFFER
Right now, to introduce the Care Essentials, you get the Eye Make-Up Remover Pads free when you buy the $2.50 Face Make-Up Remover Pads. And the Freshener Pads free with the $3.50 Moisturizer.

The issues of *Cosmopolitan* were about four times the length of the Communist versions and almost every other page seemed to be an advertisement for one product or another. Many articles were written about spiritual topics such as horoscopes and dream interpretations, or others such as new movies, sex, and open advice about relationships.

One page of *Cosmo* had a suggestion as to how to make a recipe for a dinner for two. Whereas the articles in *Femeia* would have described how to make meals for the entire family with few ingredients, increasing the likelihood its readers had access to all these, *Cosmopolitan* described how to make the meal as quickly as possible for just two, presumable the women reading the article and her significant other. The *Cosmo* article also advertised the dinner as being “gourmet” whereas *Femeia* would have advertised its dinners as being nutritious and filling. This represents how these two groups of consumers were looking for two different types of meals that represented the social conditions of the societies they lived in. Another article in *Cosmo* mentioned refurbishing furniture as a way to save money, whereas many articles in *Femeia* taught women how to reuse and waste little because of lack of availability of products on the market, regardless of their cost.

The only article in the entire edition of *Cosmo* that mentioned women working (other than actresses where the focus was more on their personal lives rather than their careers) was one article encouraging women to become writers. In this article, Faith Baldwin, “America’s most popular novelist” writes about how writing is the ideal career for a woman. She describes how a woman does not “have to go to an office… and be away with half [her] mind on [her] household… wondering if it rains, did [she] close the window.” This article in this way

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discusses some fears the women might have in terms of writing as a distraction from her household responsibilities by saying that the writing can be done in the actual household. The article does not mention anything about the responsibilities of raising children and how this can be done alongside writing or working in general. The article continues to describe how a woman can get started writing and give advice as to how a woman’s writing can improve, but it does not say anything else about balancing other responsibilities besides writing.

Comparing Femeia to the women’s magazines in other countries at this time, we can see how strongly present the RCP’s voice was in the articles. The subtle hints of telling women how easy it is to sew your own clothes, feed your family with the rations, have children and rely on the state’s help, and finally, how interesting working in industrial factories is, now seem not so subtle. The comparison between pure content for women and Communist propaganda weaved between the women’s content seems much clearer.
It's a shame more women don't take up writing

America's most popular woman novelist offers some encouraging advice to women who want to get more out of life

By Faith Baldwin

I think it's very unfortunate that many women with real writing talent bury it under a mountain of dishes.

Actually, writing is an ideal profession for women. You don't have to go to an office, you don't have to be away with half your mind on your household... wondering, if rain, did you close the windows? And for the woman who is tied down to her home, writing is a wonderful emotional release, to say nothing of the extra income it can bring.

There are many things only a woman can write about from firsthand experience. That's why, unlike many other fields, the welcome mat is really out for women in writing. Take the insistence, Please Don't Eat the Daisies. No man could have written that book.

Don't say, I don't have time.

Saying you 'should write' if you "have time" is an excuse. The fact is I've had a home to run most of my life. And, what with unexpected illnesses, I think I've spent more time in hospital waiting rooms than almost anyone.

Even without the responsibilities of a home, starting my career wouldn't have been easy. It's hard to learn to write when you're working all alone.

I've often wished that when I was in my twenties I had known a professional writer who would have been honest with me. As it was, I learned by inspection and rewriting — by trial and error.

Years later, I began to wonder if there wasn't an easier way. Wouldn't new writers have a better chance of making good faster, if they could train in their own homes from successful writers?

A new kind of writing school

Several years ago such an opportunity became available for the first time, when I joined with eleven other authors to start the Famous Writers School. They included Bennett Cerf, Borton Evans, Bruce Catton, Hippos G. Etherart, John Cephos, J. D. Ruzoff, Mark Wissen, Max Shulman, Russell Flesch, Red Smith and Rod Serling.

Our aim was to help qualified men and women develop their skill and craftsmanship... and to pass on to them our own secrets of achieving success and recognition.

We piloted everything we knew about writing into a set of textbooks and writing assignments. Then we worked out a system for giving every student, through home-study, the many hours of individual guidance a developing writer needs.

Every one of our instructors is a professional writer or editor who has himself met and solved the problem of writing for publication many times.

You are a 'class of one'

When you return an assignment, one of these writer-instructors carefully edits it. He goes over your work line by line, word by word, blue-penciling his changes right on your manuscript, just as my editors do. Then he returns it to you with a long, personal letter of advice and guidance on how to improve your writing. While this writer-instructor is appraising your work, nobody else competes for your attention. You are, literally, a class of one.

After you get the basic principles, you move on to specialized training in the field of your choice: Fiction, Non-Fiction, Advertising or Business Writing. You learn step-by-step.

Because we twelve who started the School have very definite ideas about the teaching of writing, we regularly visit the School and work with the instructors.

Students break into print

This training works well. Our students have sold their writing to more than 100 publications, including the Reader's Digest, Readers' Digest, Parent's Magazine and Good Housekeeping.

Dora Stetson of South Cvntury, Conn., writes, 'Your Course made it possible for me to sell six articles to Womans Day for $2,000.'

"Not only am I thrilled to have McCafferty begin its new monthly series with my article," reports Amy Ann Bammeier of Springfield, Vt., "but they also sent me a $1,000 check. This one sale has made it all worthwhile."


Doris Agee of San Marcos, Cal., says, "The view from this part of the world — the top — is indescribable. I've just received a big, beautiful check from the Reader's Digest for a 'Most Unforgettable Character' piece. There's no question about it, without the Famous Writers School, the article would never have been written."

Eileen Thompson Patencki, a Los Angeles, N.M., mother of four, has had four young people's books published by Abelard-Schuman. One of her books was recently nominated "best juvenile mystery of the year" by the Mystery Writers of America. And Dodgley O'Toole of East Point, Ga., writes, "For me it is 'nibbling' just a little. I've just sold an article to Good Housekeeping."

Have you the urge to write? If so, get busy! It's a wonderful feeling to see your name in print. And that first check, no matter how small, is a tremendous thrill.

But the greatest reward of writing professionally is something much less tangible... the feeling of communicating with your readers. If one sentence you write opens a door for another human being... makes him see with your own eyes and understand with your mind and heart, you'll gain a sense of fulfillment that no other work can bring you.

Writing Aptitude Test offered

Faith Baldwin and the other Famous Writers have designed a revealing Aptitude Test to help you determine if you could benefit from professional training. The postpaid card will bring you a copy of the Test, along with a brochure describing the School.

When you return the Test, it will be graded without charge by a member of our staff. If you show aptitude, you are eligible to enroll in the Famous Writers School. However, you are under no obligation to do so. (Of the card is missing, write to Famous Writers School, Dept. 6522, Westport, Conn. 06880. Please give your name, address, age and ask for writing Aptitude Test.)
Conclusion

The RCP mainly used propaganda to pressure its female citizens into becoming the Ideal Communist Woman. This woman would have a career that would contribute to the nation’s GDP, and simultaneously raise many children that would take her role in the country’s economy in the future.

Femeia was the main source of such propaganda. There were a lot of issues that affected Romanian society between 1965-1975 that were not mentioned in Femeia. Repressive legislation, anti-Communist sentiments, discrimination, domestic abuse, (illegal) abortions, birth control, and a desire to not have children are some of them. These topics were ones that Romanian women dealt with, to some extent, and were not represented in any media. This is just one example of how restrictive and controlling Communist society was.

The presence of propaganda in Femeia is very distinct in comparison to other women’s magazines published in other nations at the time. Femeia had articles published in every issue that were meant to teach women. Teach them how to be Socialist mothers, clever housewives that easily managed the shortages of the Communist regime, as well as workers that labored harder in the factories than any of their male colleagues.

Communism was world-renowned for its propaganda. The RCP wanted to advertise that every Romanian woman was working, producing an extremely large quantity in the factory, raising a dozen children and was still dressed in and elegant and feminine way. This was, clearly, not the reality. Many women struggled with this precarious balance and needed the help of others to manage. It must have been an overwhelming realization that every woman displayed in media were gliding through life, balancing their responsibilities effortlessly, when the real women consuming the media were struggling on a daily basis.
Chapter 3:
The Reality of Women’s Lives Under Ceaușescu’s Romania (1965-1975)

The 1999 documentary Diamonds in the Dark offers a bleak picture of life realities for women in Communist Romania. The documentary interviews women on their experiences as women under Ceaușescu’s rule. One of the older women interviewed was a Heroine Mother, who had seven children, and she was recognized for this with a medal. She was very proud, wearing her medal pinned onto her shirt in the documentary. She explained that it was her choice to have that many children. She took care of her children by having the older ones care for the younger ones along with the help of her father in law. His principal role was to make sure they didn’t get into trouble. This same woman worked at a collectivized farm and said it was very hard work especially for a woman as she worked a hectare of land. These were considered harder farms to work because the large majority of the production went to the government, so it was not up to the farmer to decide where, when, or to whom to sell to nor for what price.

This Heroine Mother also said that Ceaușescu wanted each family to have many children, but that there were not always the conditions to be able to care for them. “Ceaușescu was presented as some sort of God, the father of the people, and Elena Ceaușescu as the mother, the good mother of the people….” What Ceaușescu wanted did hold a great deal and weight. Extraordinary efforts were done to make sure that his goals for the country were fulfilled. Women worked hard and did raise many children. This older woman said in her interview that

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1 Diamonds in the Dark. Directed by Olivia Carrescia. 1999.
2 Gilberg, Nationalism and communism in Romania: the rise and fall of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship, p. 62.
3 Diamonds in the Dark. Directed by Olivia Carrescia. 1999.
she labored, alongside the other people that lived in her village, at the collectivized farms. The Heroine Mother described that she had to be at work in the fields at seven in the morning and sometimes “they brought their children along because they had no one to leave them with. They were very hard times.” Work was so necessary for this woman’s family’s livelihood that children were brought along to the workplace. It is remarkable to note the amount of pride in her voice when she discussed her children and her Heroine Mother medal. She stood up straight and taller and was pleased to say that even though she lived a very hard life and did a lot of manual labor on the farm, she still managed to raise seven children that went on to be Romanian patriots. She also felt satisfaction that she did her duty as a woman to her country and to Ceaușescu.

This story reminds us of the complicated nature of Romanian family policies. One was hand it was a success. From the perspective of the number of children that were born from 1965 to 1975 and the number of women that entered the workforce, Ceaușescu’s policies were successful because more children were born, and more women entered the workforce. The RCP was, however, responsible for certain successes in Romanian society. The infant mortality rate dropped drastically from 50 deaths per thousand in 1953 to 26.3 deaths per thousand in 1989. This along with the governmental pressure on women to bear more children resulted in population increases. The population increased from 16,311,000 in 1950 to 21,245,000 in 1975. Their policies did show results: women were having more children. These children were not only meant to be raised as Romanian patriots, but also to be educated. In 1968, a series of legislation was passed that mandated children needed to start going to school at six years of age and had to

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4 Jinga, *Gen și reprezentare in România Comunistă*, p. 143.
pass at least the tenth grade. Ceaușescu did not want uneducated children in his country, he wanted educated laborers that would be able to contribute to Romanian society as they grew up. Starting with the 1966 to 1967 school year, many five-year technical high schools were introduced, with specialties that included industry, agriculture, and economics. These vocational schools were intended to give students technical training that was immediately applicable in the workforce. Numerically, the Communist regime did create certain improvements in Romania. There were more Romanians, and they were healthier and more educated than previous generations. The relentless propaganda discussed in previous chapters was effective from this point of view. The reason for these successes cannot be fully attributed to the policies of the RCP without recognizing the personal efforts that Romanian women put into maintain the balance of raising their children and maintain their careers. Previous chapters have shown how aggressively the RCP pursued this kind of family structure. This woman’s story and these statistics show that they were successful.

This story, however, reminds us that there was a human cost as well. Through all of her pride, it is clear that the woman in the documentary led an extremely challenging life. This chapter will address Communist realities as recalled by women who lived during this era, specifically in terms of how they managed to bridge the gap between the help that the government gave them and what they actually needed to be both mothers and workers at once. Previous chapter have used government or propagandistic media sources, this chapter will use a different source house: oral histories. The chapter will have three sections. In the first, I will explore the issue of childrearing, examining how Romanian women balanced children and work.

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In the second, I will address the more difficult question of abortion, asking what it was like for Romanian women to seek out an abortion in a country where it was illegal. In the third section, I will explain why Romanian women did not become politically organized in the way that women did in both East Germany and the United States at just the same time.

Exploring oral histories in this chapter will reveal the story behind the increase in births and female workers as well as the point where Communist ideology was no longer enough and had to be supplemented by the human spirit. Although Ceaușescu and the RCP intended on helping women balance their two responsibilities, many of the women who had told their stories did not rely on the government programs. In order to research this dynamic, I conducted interviews during the summer of 2017 with four Romanian women who worked and raised their children under Ceaușescu’s reign. These women are now in their seventies and eighties, and all raised multiple children in Communist Romania during the 1960’s and 1970’s. The women interviewed were my family members, family friends, and acquaintances. Due to their relatively close relationship to me, none of the women cared to share intimate and more shocking stories, such as if they had gotten a backroom abortion or managed to illegally get other methods of birth control. I choose to interview these women because they represented a variety of careers, from a farmer, to a teacher, a more traditionally female role, to an economist, a less traditionally female role. The women whose stories I heard expressed that they did not think the government’s help was significant enough to ease them of their burden, so instead they had to find ways to help themselves.

I asked them to tell me their life stories, especially in regard to how they raised their children and who helped them with childcare. I specifically wanted to know about whether the women took maternity leave and what they did with their children during the hours when they
were at work. Although these women did have jobs and responsibilities outside the house, the 
interviews did not focus on their careers. Historian Jill Massino has collected oral histories and 
used them to understand how Romanian women worked and fit into their workplaces, 
particularly when it came to women working alongside men doing traditionally masculine jobs 
such as sorting ball bearings. My interviews focused on how the women’s children were 
brought up and who helped with childrearing. I did not ask these women a set of standardized 
questions, but rather listened as they spoke and noted what they chose to include or not include. 
These women represent the educated middle class and the agrarian forces of Romania that 
Ceaușescu wanted to promote and expand. In this way, they represented a variety of 
socioeconomic classes present in Romania at the time.

Oral histories are a rich and vivid source of information, especially from a society like 
Communist Romania that had censored media, no freedom of speech, and often relied on 
disinformation to maintain the people’s uncertainty and dependency on the centralized 
government. The women I interviewed provide the point of view of the average Romanian 
women at this time, in contrast to what the RCP wanted them to think. One must take into 
account that oral histories are memories of the past that are filtered through the lens of the 
present and are influenced by current realities and concerns. Any retrospective reflection will 
be marred by the person’s experiences since, but nonetheless these oral histories are still a rich 
source of information because they give us honest accounts of what an average life was like in 
Communist Romania.

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8 Penn and Massino, Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central 
Europe, p. 22.
10 Penn and Massino, Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central 
Europe, p. 7.
Oral histories are always documents of the present as well. One particular impact current events may have on the recollections of the women I interviewed is that of communist nostalgia. This is veneration of the socialist past is partly due to dissatisfaction with joining the European Union, the market economy, political processes, and crime.\textsuperscript{11} This is a longing for “the good old days” where unemployment did not exist, everyone could afford to buy a home and times were simpler. Although given the option none of these women would actually choose to switch back to Socialism, there are elements of Communist society that they miss. Their stories were likely impacted by how they saw their children raising their grandchildren. For example, most of the women interviewed are grandmothers, which means that their children were facing the same hurdles of trying to raise kids and balance careers. Even though I did not interview any woman who solely relied on state-run nursery or day care for childcare, they lamented that their children did not have the option of taking the grandchildren to free daycares. In other words, they did not take the option of free government daycare for their children, but they liked having that option available. The interviews may have been influenced by the elimination of free state-run day care facilities in modern Romania where these women’s grandchildren are growing up, in comparison to where their children grew up.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Penn and Massino, \textit{Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe}, p. 7.

Childcare in Communist Romania

Around the globe, women are confronted with the issue of balancing child-rearing and professional advancement. This equilibrium is different in different places. In the United States, for example, families during the time period examined in this thesis often relied on the help of grandparents, stay at home mothers, or private daycares for childcare. In East Germany, socialized day cares where the norm. As Donna Harsch has shown, state-run childcare was hugely popular in East Germany. Factories often offered childcare for their workers. By 1970 23.6% of infants and toddlers were in nurseries, with the rest of the slack mostly being picked up by the 571 church-run nurseries13. Some family care also was responsible for childcare.

What did childcare look like in Communist Romania? I asked this question of several women who lived through this era. I discovered that the reality in Romania was quite different from the ideology. Although the RCP promised to take care of the nation’s children, the state-run nurseries and daycares were few and far in between, even where they did exist they were viewed as poor in quality. In practice, Romanian women seemed to act more like their American counterparts, by bringing nannies and grandparents into the home in order to avoid the socialized system whenever possible.

In this section, I will describe some of my interviews in detail in order to give a sense of the daily lives and organization of families in Romania. One of my subjects was Elena Puia.14 She was a Romanian teacher during Ceaușescu’s reign who gave birth to her first daughter the year she began teaching. She and her husband had two daughters which they never took to a state-run nursery or daycare. Although she said it hurt her soul to give her daughter to a nanny so

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13 Harsch, Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic, p. 277.
that she could return to work, she knew that her passion for teaching would touch many students. Hiring a nanny was the only way that she could fulfill her duties as both a mother and a teacher and a member of society while knowing that her daughters were in the best conditions possible.

Mrs. Puia had responsibilities that included preparing her lessons, grading papers, taking care of her daughters, and running the household. Her mother had passed away and her father lived several states over, so she and her husband were left alone to raise their daughters. Her duties as a woman were hard to fulfill in these conditions and were very exhausting. However, Mrs. Puia did mention that it feels much easier now that she was looking back on her experiences than it felt at the time. Retrospectively, she was generalizing what happened and could not reflect on the day-to-day struggles. It felt like she had to do everything all at once, and it was very difficult to manage to do so. There was no alternative for her, so she had to be able to succeed.

She mentioned that there were daycares that she could have taken her daughters to, but she did not want to risk her daughters catching colds and flus from the other children that were also there. There were daycares and nurseries that would take care of children at every age, from newborn to four years when they would start preschools.

She said she was lucky because her teaching schedule was only four hours a day and hired a nanny to take care of her daughters while she was teaching. At the time salaries were relatively small so it was not a financial burden on her and her husband to pay the nanny. She said that she took her daughters to a daycare once they turned three. She would generally organize her class hours so that they lined up with her school hours so that she would be working when her daughters were in school and she would be able to pick them up from school and go home with them. She said the woman is the one in a family that realizes its consolidation and organization.
Mrs. Puia and her husband realized that they could afford better care for their children than could be provided by the state-run daycares and nurseries. She did not rely on the government’s assistance because she found a private way to resolve the issue. Theoretically, the government had room for her daughters to join the daycares and the responsibility of childcare during her work hours was taken care of. Mrs. Puia and her husband did not want to take their young, newborn daughters to daycares along with so many other children and risk them getting colds or not getting ideal care, so for them, the issue of childcare was in fact not taken care of. Mrs. Puia had to put in extra effort to find a nanny that she thought would care well for her daughters and to devote a portion of the household income to paying the nanny. Of course, not all Romanian women could afford nannies, so some were obligated to take their children to the state-run nurseries and daycares.

I also spoke to Maria Stănescu. She told me that she considers that much of the work that goes into maintaining a family and making sure that it is a strong as possible, especially when it comes to making sure the upbringing of the children is as good as possible depends on the mental strength that God gives you,” Mrs. Stănescu said, “this is where the woman’s role is prominent”. She also said that every woman has passion and learns how to divide her time evenly so that she gets done everything that she is responsible for. She also said that women are more sensitive and aware than men and that is part of where their ability to balance everything at once comes from – because they can notice and pick up on what is necessary. That was how she was able to balance her career as a French teacher and taking care of her daughter.

Mrs. Stănescu said that she was lucky because her mother lived in the outskirts of Târgu Mureș, where she and her husband were raising their daughter. For that reason, the grandmother

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could come and help with childcare as often as she was needed. This was not only very cost effective for their family, but also made sure that their daughter was being treated as well as possible. Mrs. Stănescu mentioned she did not trust that a nanny, who was a stranger essentially, would care for the child as well as possible, and certainly not as well as the child’s own grandmother could.

In the case of Mrs. Stănescu, there was truly no need for her to take her children to state-run daycares and nurseries. She relied on family to fill in what was needed for her to be able to teach French and raise her daughter at once. The RCP intended on stepping in to fill this gap for all women, but Mrs. Stănescu found a way to do so that worked better for her family and gave her peace of mind that her daughter was in better care under the emotional connection with the grandmother.

I also spoke to Eugenia Călușer about her experiences raising her daughter and her son.\textsuperscript{16} When asked about the state-run nurseries and daycares, she looked at me right in the eyes and bluntly told me that they she and her husband could afford better conditions for their children. She said the nurseries were generally overcrowded and over solicited. Generally, people who took their children to such places worked in industry. They had moved from the countryside to the city to work in a factory and were no longer close to the grandparents or aunts or uncles of the children. Since there was no family member nearby that could care for their children, the workers had to rely on taking them to a nursery or daycare.

Mrs. Călușer relied on her mother to take care of her daughter and son after her twenty days of maternity leave were over. She explained that it was very hard to manage to get maternity leave, not every woman got these days off. There were many women who had to take

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\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Eugenia Călușer. Interview in Târgu Mureș. May 13, 2017.
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vacation days after giving birth or were forced to go back to the office two days after having given birth.

As she and her husband moved from Luduș, a smaller city, to Târgu Mureș, a larger city where her husband got a promotion, Mrs. Călușer and her husband hired a nanny to take care of their children. The nanny was a young woman from the countryside that wanted to move to the city and needed work. She had helped raise her younger siblings on the farm she grew up on, so she had plenty of experience with children.

After that nanny decided to go back to school, Mrs. Călușer hired several more nannies. She said that they often came and went as the young women’s career goals changed. When she was in the second grade, however, Mrs. Călușer’s older daughter refused to have anyone else in the house and insisted that she was capable of taking care of her youngest brother. To compromise, Mrs. Călușer started sending her daughter to after-school activities, specially ballet and piano lessons, to allow the nanny to take care of her son, who was still very young at the time, until she came home from work. Eventually Mrs. Călușer trusted her daughter to take care of her younger brother for the two hours between when they got out of school until she came back from work. It was convenient because she had to be at work at seven in the morning, so her work schedule allowed her to get home earlier to take care of her children. Every time she came home, she would find her children plopped on the living room floor reading each other stories in the winter or playing in the neighborhood park during the warmer months.

The reason Mrs. Călușer had to hire so many different nannies is that the girls would quit when they felt that they had moved on to the next stage of their lives. For example, the first nanny Mrs. Călușer hired took care of the children for a few years until she decided to go back to school and educate herself to learn the skills she needed to work in a factory. The nanny
considered this to be a career path with greater longevity. Several other of the nannies the Căluşer family had followed a similar path while the others married and quit to be able to work closer to home to take care of their own children.

Mrs. Căluşer said that it was very difficult for her and her husband to balance taking care of the children, keeping house, and maintaining their careers. They regularly went to bed at two or three in the morning to make sure that everything that needed to be done for their children was done. She originally wanted to have more than two children, but that never happened. She realized that it was difficult enough to have two children and retrospectively is not sure that she and her husband would have been able to take care of more.

Her husband died when both of her children were in high school. Mrs. Căluşer said that it became significantly more difficult to take care of both of them one she was the sole income for the household. But, again, her mother stepped in and came to help her care for both the children and for the household. Often the grandmother would help with cooking and cleaning, and Mrs. Căluşer said that that was an enormous relief that she is not sure she could have managed without.

Mrs. Căluşer told me that since she lived in a large city and her husband occupied an economically important position in their state, she never really felt pressure from the RCP to have a third child. She said that she was not sure that this would have been the case for women who lived in the country side and worked in agriculture. Women on the farm may have been encouraged to bear more children so that they would have more hands to help work the farm.

Women in the countryside may have had less access to any black-market contraceptives and backroom abortions. When they became pregnant they truly had no other option than to have the child. Women in cities, may have had a friend who was a doctor and was willing to perform
the procedure illegally for a fee, for example. Connections and relations such as they would have been severely limited in the countryside, limiting what choices women had once they became pregnant whether they were legal or not.

Older siblings and other family members helping the raise the youngest children was a rather common practice on farms. When I spoke to Silvia Moldovan, she told me that the issue of childcare never really crossed her mind.¹⁷ She raised her children in a small, rural town, Ideci, on the outskirts of Luduș, where her mother lived in the same house as her and her sister lived in the house next door. When Mrs. Moldovan had to go to the fields or tend to the livestock she would leave the children with some family member who was around the house. Her sister had children that were older than her own, so Mr. Moldovan would often leave her children in the care of their older cousins. Once her daughter grew up, she would take care of her younger brother and the children would play in the yard. Mrs. Moldovan also told me that she did not have a strict work schedule that was nine to five, and this was an advantage because she could drop everything and take care of her children when they needed her. She could also take days off when necessary, such as if the kids caught a cold or flu. Mrs. Moldovan worked on the family property, and so the kids were never really out of sight if they were outdoors.

Mrs. Moldovan lived in the countryside but still only had two children. She admitted that she and her husband did not have a very easy time conceiving and would have had more children if they had been able to. In their town, there were two women that were honored as Heroine Mothers. They each had a dozen children. Mrs. Moldovan said that these families were admired for being able to raise that many children and take such good care of them. She also did confess,

rather reluctantly, that even if she had been able to carry more pregnancies she never would have wanted to get to that many children.

Mrs. Moldovan had several Heroine Mothers in her town that served as examples for what Ceauşescu’s ideal woman was. These were women that were toiling on the land and raising many children all at once. Although Mrs. Moldovan herself did not have enough children to earn a Heroine Mother’s title, she still felt the influence from the RCP, through media especially, to follow in that path. And to add to the national pressure, Mrs. Moldovan felt additional pressure from having Heroine Mother’s examples in her town that she personally knew.

The interviews with these women were interesting because none of them relied exclusively on the state-run childcare facilities that the RCP insisted on building. They all dealt with the issues of working and raising their children that the RCP recognized, but they all found private ways to handle it. Their attitudes implied that Ceauşescu’s solution was not enough for them. Parents are extraordinarily protective of their children and want to make sure that they have the best conditions possible. The women I interviewed considered that they could find better surroundings for their children elsewhere, even if this meant hiring a nanny and paying her a salary or relying on help from family members instead of going to a free daycare.

Even the parents that relied on family members to help care for their children were sure that they were assuring better care for their children. Showering the kids with their grandmother’s love instead of taking them to a preschool where a teacher had to care for dozens of children at once.

Oral histories are a rich source of information that can give us a glimpse into the realities of everyday life in Communist Romania, a society that was closed off and censored. They describe what happened in society that cannot be reflected by the numbers and propaganda
campaigns of the RCP. From the interviews I conducted, I realized that many women did not rely on the government’s daycares and nurseries for childcare, even if it meant having to pay for a nanny. None of the woman I spoke to exclusively relied on a state-run nursery or daycare to care for their children. Most of them at one point or another hired a nanny to come watch their children or asked a grandmother to do the same. In terms of birth control access, regardless of status of legality, women from the city and from the country had different opportunities. Women in the countryside likely had fewer opportunities to get backroom abortions, although they could possibly attempt “home remedy” abortions. I also learned that women did recognize their peers that were awarded the title of Heroine Mother, which means that Communist propaganda was successful in drawing attention to these exceptional women and highlighting them as examples for the rest of society.

These were some stories of women who succeeded in maintaining the balance between childrearing and work, like women in other corners of the globe also succeeded. Romania was unique, however, in the harshness of its restrictions on abortion. In order to understand a more complete picture of this story, we will now return to the theme of abortion.

**Abortion**

Abortions are still a controversial subject today. Although they are legalized in modern day Romania and many other European countries, there are still many places in the world where they are illegal or considered shameful. In in 1970s, the legalization of abortion was still a contested topic, while women’s groups arguing that women should have to right to decide what
to do with their bodies and traditionalists arguing for that abortion is murder. In the United States, *Roe vs. Wade* only settled the issue of abortion in the Supreme Court in 1973.\(^{18}\)

East German women also had limited access to abortion, until bans were lifted in the 1970s. They pressed for increased access to contraceptives and abortions\(^{19}\). And they got their wish. In 1971 first-trimester abortion was legalized as part of a new movement to incentivize births, but force women into having unwanted children\(^{20}\). The reforms were expanded in 1972 to include free birth control pills for women sixteen and older\(^{21}\). These two simple legislations made a tremendous difference in the lives of women. They were no longer slaves to their reproductive systems and had the freedom to exert control of their lives and the lives of their families. Romanian women did not have as much liberty over their bodies.

I did not ask the women I interviewed about abortions. It is such a private and challenging subject and I am not trained in these sorts of interviews. Others, however, have done so. The documentary *Diamonds in the Dark* offers a less perfect picture of the balance Romanian women maintained when it came to caring for their children and advancing their careers under Ceaușescu’s regime. In contrast to the women I spoke to, the ten women presented in this documentary told more intimate and more scandalous stories.\(^{22}\) We must recognize that it is possible that the stories told in this documentary were exaggerated by paying the women that were interviewed royalties. More scandalous abortions stories would have sold more copies of the DVD, which was in the interest of the documentary’s producers. While we should take these

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19 Harsch, p. 239.
22 *Diamonds in the Dark*. Directed by Olivia Carrescia. 1999.
stories with a grain of salt, that does not belittle their importance. The women interviewed for this documentary are still Romanian women that lived in Communist Romania and experienced the governmental pressure to bear children and work that has been discussed previously.

One woman explained that in 1966, when abortions were banned, “giving birth was considered a patriotic duty.” The laws against abortions were suddenly “a big problem” to most women because “a person needs to decide when she’s ready to welcome a child.” She told the story of how she “got pregnant many times. [She] provoked miscarriages at home and had some legal abortions… [She] did this about once a year, sometimes twice.” She said that she could have had 10-15 children, but she considered that children need certain conditions to grow up with and if you cannot provide those conditions, you should not have those children. “[She] knew of many people that had abortions like this, especially colleagues at the factory. Some were caught and sent to jail…” She easily had the opportunity to have enough children to earn the title of Heroine Mother, but for various reasons she decided that this was not the right path for her and for her family. Even though the RCP has incessant propaganda that encouraged women to bear children, she saw through that and realized that what was good for Romania in Ceaușescu’s eyes was not necessarily good for their country.

Even though Ceaușescu wanted women to have as many children as possible, some did not think that that was the best decision for them and for their families. These women felt that they had to resort to these extreme measures to provide the quality of life they wanted for themselves and for their families. The risk for getting caught was high, but it was worthwhile for them. Better the risk of getting caught or getting hurt than bringing children into the world that they could not afford and did not have the time to care for. Ceaușescu wanted to provide women with nurseries and daycares for their children, while the women were asking for abortions. That
is a really interesting paradox that shows government policies were not in line with what the people needed.

The home remedies to provoke a miscarriage stemmed from the lack of birth control and lack of options available to women. They were desperate enough to get pushed to such an extreme measure. This was an extra pressure placed upon women in Communist Romania. If they already had children, this pressure was felt more heavily. They already were in the mist of balancing their careers and their responsibilities towards their children. Another child would have disrupted this balance, and many women thought, to an unmanageable extent. Women in Communist Romania were severely limited by the abortion ban. Suddenly they had no options once they got pregnant but to bear the child to term. This was an invasive policy by the state in which the government could control what happened to women’s bodies and use them to fulfill their agendas.

A major difference between the lives of women in Romania and in the GDR was that German women were restricted by de facto abortions regulations that were further relaxed in 1965.23 Starting in 1966 Romanian women could not get legal abortions, with rare expectation that was heavily regulated by the Securitate. This gave German women much more control over their bodies, their futures, and the wellbeing of their families. Romanian women did not have an option, but German women had options. That is a major difference between how these two women could lead their lives.

Abortions in the ‘60s and ‘70s were a huge indication of how much control women had over their future. Living in a society such as Communist Romania after 1966 gave women no

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23 Harsch, Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic, p. 301.
legal alternative other than the bear whatever children they became pregnant with. If a woman was too young, or not financially stable enough, or already had several kids, she was still legally obligated to have the child. This lead hundreds of desperate women to get backroom abortions, or even worse, attempt to self-abort. It is unclear exactly how many women died trying to get illegal abortions, since many deaths were covered up in documentation as due to other causes. Women in East Germany initially faced the same struggle that Romanian women faced. But the East Germans pushed for legalization of abortions and in the ‘70s they were granted this freedom.

The Politicization of Romanian Women

One of the largest puzzling things of this time period is that circumstances were so difficult for Romanian women, but they did not begin to organize or create some form of indigenous Romanian feminism. In East Germany, women did, in fact, begin to organize in these ways.

The German Communist Party (SED) was likely trying to earn the loyalty of Germans so strongly that it would overshadow their loyalty to their families. However, Ceaușescu wanted Romanian families to model themselves after him and his wife Elena, thus strengthen the personality cult. By using the Ceaușescu family as an example to strive towards, Romanian families were supposed to have loyalty to their idols.

East German women awoke a female consciousness in themselves that is their motivation to do right by their families and fulfill their obligations. They began participating in riots, protests, and industrial unrest to draw attention to their needs.\(^{24}\) Comparing this to the Women’s

Committee meetings discussed earlier, we realize that RCP members wanted to idealize their situations. Instead of critiquing what was wrong, these meetings discussed how everything was constantly improving, leaving no room for criticism.

Both East Germany and Romania focused on bringing women into industrial sectors. In both countries, in heavy industrial sectors, women did feel some stigma from their male colleagues because they were doing “men’s work,” but officially, in the eyes of their respective Communist parties, women were men’s equals. Forcing equality was meant to get women comfortable in their new roles in the workforce so that they would be efficient and produce goods for the country. The Communist societies realized that housework and childrearing would get done regardless because they are necessities. Encouraging women to work on top of their already-given responsibilities was meant to force them to achieve both.

The GDR had 45% female workers and 68.4% of all women aged sixteen to sixty were employed in 1960. But by 1970, it had the highest rate of female employment in an industrialized economy. Both East Germany and Romania saw an increase in women’s employment, education, and skill level. Whereas Ceauşescu would try to convince his female citizens that mothers could also be good workers, the SED had to convince its female workers that they could also be good mothers. The East Germans tried to achieve this by bringing the family back into vogue. They did this by commemorating the nuclear family and bringing in marriage counseling, as the divorce rates kept rising and husbands felt no obligations to share

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26 Harsch, Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic, p. 247.
27 Ibid., p 303.
28 Ibid., p 285.
inner familial functions. These attitudes created increased tensions in families that were greatly exaggerated in comparison to those in Romanian families. Some women got calls from their children’s teachers in Germany, explaining that they children needed more education and caring at home. In Germany, marital and work expectations were heightened which led some women to believe that they could not manage balancing both effectively. The SED attempted to encourage women to assume their roles as mothers by extending maternity leave to several weeks, increasing child allowances, and increasing the quality of childcare facilities. The government recognized that they could not survive economically without the females’ labor, but they also needed to maintain their population. East German women and men both indicated in surveys that they wanted more time for home and family-related activities. The Romanians, however did make time for these activities since family units depended on each other for stability and survival.

Women in Communist Romania did not start a feminist movement to get more rights from the government, such as legalization of abortions. They lived in constant fear of the government and of Ceaușescu’s Securitate, the secret police forced used to monitor the citizens. The Securitate was by far the most ruthless police force in the Warsaw Pact. Fear of imprisonment, disappearing, and of their government kept Romanian women in line. They accepted the system even though it made their lives much more challenging. These women learned how to deal with these challenging circumstances and still managed to raise their children, however many they had, and work.

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29 Ibid., p 286.
30 Ibid., p 300.
31 Ibid., p 310.
32 Ibid., p 317.
Conclusion

The RCP’s goals as to how women should balance their dual responsibilities towards their work and towards their children was not necessarily how Romanian women chose to handle this equilibrium. Romanian women were less likely to use state-run nurseries and daycares in comparison to their East German counterparts. The RCP and the SED both wanted to get women into the workforce and produce more goods for their respective countries. However, the SED tried to separate women from their families and this resulted in many disputes between women and their employers and their government. Romanian women heavily relied on their families to help them achieve everything the RCP expected of them. German women had much more control over their bodies and their futures since they had the option to get abortions and Romanian women did not have this option legally. This created a great difference between how these women controlled their futures and the futures of their families.

Interviews I conducted with women in Romania who raised their children under Ceaușescu showed that most families relied on privately paid for nannies or family members, instead of the state-run nurseries and day cares. Women in the countryside generally had more children and also mostly relied on family members raising the youngest children, whether it was a cousin or grandmother or even an older sibling. The ugly reality of banning abortions was that women resorted to backroom abortions and risked their lives doing so, to protect their families from another child. These women believed that a baby would tip the balance between family and work life to a point where it would no longer be manageable. Women in Romania did not politicize to protest their rights for abortions due to fear of the Securitate.
Conclusion

My own mother faced the challenge of raising me and simultaneously maintaining her career. In order to help her daughter and granddaughter, my pensioner grandmother assumed great responsibility in taking care of me. My mother could go to work every morning reassured that my grandmother would be there to pick me up from school, take me to my after-school activities, cook me dinner, and help me with school projects every day her help was needed. My mother knew that I was in the best hands possible and did not have to compromise by choosing to either raise me or pursue her profession. However, my mother did not work in post-Communist Romania her whole life – part of her work experience has been in America, where I was raised.

The society that Communists built in Romania was marred with many injustices and lack of civil freedoms, but it did ensure equality for women in the workforce and in the educational system, teaching them that they not only could, but were expected to, be workers and mothers simultaneously. The legacy of Communism, can still be felt in the lasting effects it had on the generations that lived through it. Romanian women are educated, well represented in academia, as well as in industry. And most importantly, they are considered their husbands’ equals. Today Communism is dead in Romania and the country has joined its Western counterparts in the European Union. The new, “Western” influences have improved the country from economic and international relations perspectives, but they are also making some women hesitate about their abilities to concurrently maintain their careers and raise children.

Romanian women faced strong pressure from the Communist Romanian government to simultaneously have children and maintain careers from 1965 to 1975. Even though this was a
huge task to ask of the nation’s women, the RCP recognized the difficulties and put into place policies to try to help women. Media outlets such as movies and the women’s magazine *Femeia* were channels for the government to deliver its propaganda encouraging and pressuring women to have babies and go to work. Interviews with Romanian women who raised children during the ‘60s and ‘70s to collect oral histories revealed that women did not generally rely on the government’s strategies for maintaining the work-life balance.

The RCP put into place policies to help women maintain this balance and encourage women. Ceaușescu created a personality cult around himself where he advertised himself as a patriot and a nationalist to earn the nation’s trust. He was obsessed with paying off the nation’s debts, that were originally taken out to pay for the industrialization of the country. Producing more workers by increasing the birth rate and bringing women into the workforce were two strategies to raise the productivity of the country so that the debts could be paid off as soon as possible, leading to an independent Romania. Ceaușescu believed in the ideal Communist Woman, his wife Elena was considered the nation’s model for this role. The ideal woman was an educated, young, mother with a career in either industry or STEM. The personality cult of Ceaușescu also extended to his wife. Romanian society was still patriarchal in the household. Other policies the RCP established included allocation for parents for their kids, taxes on young adults that did not have children, March 8th celebrations, Heroine Mothers and the National Women’s Committee. These committees established a channel of communication between the government and the female citizens. It gave them an opportunity to voice concerns and involve themselves in politics. But it was also another way for the government to disseminate propaganda. There was also a restriction on birth control, including a ban on abortion in 1966. This led to increasing numbers of dangerous backroom or self-abortions that caused many
accidental deaths. The menstrual police performed gynecological checkups at work to make
“catch” pregnant women. State-run daycares and nurseries were theoretically supposed to have
enough room to take care of all the nation’s children while their mothers worked.

Media was used to disseminate propaganda to women. *Femeia* pushed for the ideal
women and was used as a teaching tool for women. It taught them how to deal with shortages,
raising Communist children, and assume their new roles in the workplace. The articles had gentle
tones of encouragement.

Women’s magazines across the globe rose in popularity in the ‘60s. East German
women’s magazines also included articles to encourage women to work, but they pushed more
feminine professions. American women’s magazines focused much more on consumer culture.

Magazines were not the only media outlets with propaganda, as movies were riddled with
it as well. *Toamna Bobocilor* is a famous Romanian movie that portrays a strong female lead.
She is head of her town’s women’s committees, a mother to several children including a new
born baby, a wife, a mentor to her young niece, and an integral member of the RCP in local
politics. Giving birth does not distract her from her roles in her village and from making her
opinions heard in her town. She is meant to be an example for Romanian women.

Oral histories of women who lived during this time period do not match up exactly to
Communist policy ideals. Most women relied on family members, such as grandmothers, or
nannies to care for their children. Abortions were punishable by jail time, but this did not stop
women from attempting to get them illegally. Romanian women likely did not protest their awful
conditions due to fear of the Securitate.

The issue of raising children while working was not unique to Communist Romania from
1965 to 1975. It is something that affects women all over the globe in any historical time period.
I expect that this is an issue that I will personally have to deal with in the future. At that time my husband and I will have to find a way to manage this balance. It is possible that we will rely on our mothers to help or hire nannies, just like the generation of our grandmothers in Communist Romania.

What was unique about Communist Romania from 1965 to 1975 was the pressure that the government put on women to fulfill both the roles of workers and mothers, as well as the state’s attempt to help them fulfill both these roles. The government distinctively recognized that this was a heavy burden to put on its female citizens. In order to help their women manage this balance, they put into place a series of policies. The efficiency of them is questionable, but the intention is dissimilar from any other nation. It is easy to look at this time period and criticize its authoritarianism and violence, but we would be remiss to overlook its policies in helping working mothers. Have other countries done much better in terms of managing this balance for mothers in modern times? We could ask ourselves if there are policies the American government could put into place to better help women simultaneously be both workers and mothers, since many women currently abandon their careers to become homemakers and thus do not use their educations to their fullest potential.
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