

MOBILIZING GENDER FOR SOCIALIST MODERNITY:
THE WORK OF ONE TRANSYLVANIAN CHAPTER OF THE UNION OF
ANTIFASCIST WOMEN OF ROMANIA AND THE UNION OF DEMOCRATIC WOMEN OF
ROMANIA, 1945 TO 1953.

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Abstract

My thesis looks at the role of two communist women's organizations in Romania between 1945 and 1953 in processes characteristic for Stalinist modernity and seeks to understand how what Kotkin terms "the grand strategies of the state" were formulated centrally, implemented and altered locally by activists and resisted and/or negotiated by those constructed as "beneficiaries". Specifically, I look at the involvement of the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania (UAWR) in the production of discourses on women's citizenship as part of an essentially modernist process of expanding the political community implicitly pursued by the Romanian Communist Party. Secondly, I trace the way in which the Union of Democratic Women of Romania (UDWR) contributed to social engineering projects meant to bolster the population by appealing to women to change their mothering practices. Thirdly, I look at the involvement of the UDWR in the "persuasion work" carried out in favor of collectivization beginning with 1949 and the way resorted to rhetorical strategies meant to portray their work as successful, despite the overt opposition and resistance mounted by women.

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List of Abbreviations

FDWR- The Democratic Federation of Women of Romania

GAC-*Gospodarii Agricole Colective* (Collective Agricultural Farms)

MADOSZ- *Magyar Dolgozók Országos Szövetsége* (Union of Hungarian Workers of Romania)

RCP- The Romanian Communist Party (name used between 1945 and 1948)

RWP- The Romanian Workers' Party (name used following the merger with the Social Democratic Party in 1948, until 1965)

UAWR –The Union of Antifascist Women of Romania

UDWR-The Union of Democratic Women of Romania

WIDF– Women's International Democratic Federation

CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

My thesis looks at the role of two communist women's organizations in Romania between 1945 and 1953 in processes characteristic for Stalinist modernity and seeks to understand how what Kotkin terms "the grand strategies of the state" were formulated centrally, implemented and altered locally by activists and resisted and/or negotiated by those constructed as "beneficiaries"¹. Specifically, I focus on the activities of the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania (active between 1945 and 1947) and the Union of Democratic Women of Romania (formed in 1948 and disbanded in 1953), analyzing materials published by these organizations as well as the archives of the Satu Mare (in North-Western Romania) chapters of these organizations. Relying on a conceptualization of Stalinist modernity and of state-society relations influenced by the "post-revisionist" paradigm in Soviet studies, the thesis attempts to flesh out the impact of these "grand strategies" on the construction of gender and the experiences of women. In discussing the imagination and implementation of social engineering projects I attempt to capture the interaction between discourses in propaganda materials, discourses and practices elaborated at the local level and the reactions of the women targeted by the campaigns of the organization-as reflected in reports produced especially by the local chapter of the UAWR and UWDR from Satu Mare county, in North-Western Romania. Through this approach I aim to contribute, firstly, to complicating the dominant narrative of the "Stalinization" of Romania by

¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic mountain : Stalinism as a civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

focusing on how this process entailed the forging of a peculiar, Soviet-inspired vision of modern progress and ways of achieving it and its contestation by “little people” through a range of tactics. In aiming to do this however, it is not my intention to deny the repressive character of the consolidating communist regime in Romania, but rather to show how the state functioned not merely by using coercion but by molding people to regulate themselves. Secondly, I wish to contribute to a growing body of work which seeks to re-conceptualize the role of women’s organizations’ within socialist states and, implicitly, on the articulation of gender regimes in state socialist systems.

In the first chapter of my thesis I construct a theoretical framework for my analysis by discussing previous studies on Stalinist modernity and on communist women’s organizations in relation to the three major paradigms which have emerged in Soviet studies. The chapter also contains an outline of the methods and sources used in this study. The second chapter looks at the involvement of the Union of Antifascist Women in Romania in the Romanian Communist Party’s project of the expansion of the political community, through the inclusion of women in. It argues that in the interaction of several groups of actors, both at the apex of the organization and at its base, at the level of local chapters, a vision of citizenship for women emerged that incorporated the Soviet notion of *aktivnost*-energetic, enthusiastic civic action as defining feature of communist citizenship, as well as expectations of gratitude towards the Party, local initiative and physical mobility². The chapter also shows how the organization defined itself and forged a tenuous unity of message on citizenship through representations of and discourses on “backward women”’s need of enlightenment by committed UAWR activists. The third chapter looks at the

² On *aktivnost* see Golfo Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less: Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 3 (2006).

involvement of the Union of Democratic Women of Romania in the state's attempts at improving the population and enhancing social control. I show how, although this modern interventionist project was implemented by drawing on practices and discourses from the USSR, it is rooted in the ideas of European Enlightenment. The UDWR (and particularly the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR) participated in this project by contributing to the remaking of mothering practices and food consumption habits and through spatial practices meant to rationalize physical and emotional reproduction. Throughout I show how women resisted these attempts at transforming them and how local factors shaped the carrying out of this project. The fourth chapter looks at the participation of Satu Mare UDWR activists in the "persuasion work" meant to reduce peasants' opposition to the collectivization of agriculture. I argue that both activists and the peasants to be persuaded sought to negotiate the terms of their interactions, through tactics such as avoidance and stalling (in the case of peasants) and the manipulation of definitions of successful activism in work reports, in the process acting upon meanings of gender. The conclusion of the thesis restates the main arguments made in the thesis and points toward directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2- FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

2.1. Introduction

I place my thesis at the intersection of research on the gender regimes of state socialisms, communist women's organizations and movements, explorations of "Stalinist modernity" and investigations of state-society relations in state socialist regimes. From this intersection I aim to make a contribution to the history of women and gender in Central and Eastern Europe as well as contribute (modestly) to the broadening of historical interpretations of the "Sovietization" of Romania between 1945 and 1953 towards a consideration of the mechanisms through which the values and aspirations of "Stalinist modernity" were replicated, diffused, altered, internalized, avoided or overtly opposed by a range of actors.

In this chapter , therefore, I contextualize my research endeavor in relation to previous approaches to the study of Stalinism and the historiography of the early years of the communist regime in Romania. I then outline (by discussing works by Stephen Kotkin and James Scott, among others) the way I conceptualize for the purposes of this thesis the interaction between the state and citizens in modernist socialist regimes. Having staked out a general conceptual frame on this topic, I proceed to discuss previous studies on or touching upon women's organizations in the USSR and Central and Eastern Europe highlighting the way I integrate their insights into my own project. The general theoretical discussion and literature review is supplemented and refined through more topical discussions of relevant literature in each of the analytical chapters that follow. Finally, in this chapter I outline the epistemological assumptions and methodological choices made and point to the sources used in connection to this thesis.

2.2. Paradigms in understanding state and society in socialist systems: totalitarianism, revisionist social history and post-revisionist (cultural) history.

The study of the Stalinist period in Soviet history has undergone two “paradigm shifts” beginning with the 1970s (resulting in three main approaches, namely the “totalitarian”, “revisionist” and “post-revisionist” paradigms)³. Each shift brought a certain rethinking of the key theme of state-society relations in Party-States and introduced new research foci. As outlined by Sheila Fitzpatrick in her 2007 article, “Revisionism in Soviet History”, the very politicized clash between “totalitarianists” (or “traditional Sovietologists”) and “revisionists” over how to describe the Soviet Union occurred beginning with the 1960s in the United States on the background of the Cold War and social historians’ increasing interest for an area of research which had mostly been the purview of political scientists⁴. The “revisionists” (a group of scholars associated with Columbia University, among whom most visible and contested was Sheila Fitzpatrick herself) quite consciously sought to contradict the image of state-society relations constructed by such scholars as Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski⁵. In Fitzpatrick’s description, the “totalitarian model scholarship” the revisionists were reacting to in the 1970s:

“portrayed the Soviet Union as a completely top-down entity. The destruction of autonomous associations and the atomization of bonds between people produced a powerless, passive society that was purely an object of regime control and manipulation. The main mechanism of control was terror,

³ This interpretation of research approaches to Soviet history into three “paradigms” was inaugurated in the article by Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Soviet History,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007). Although it is somewhat reductive, as it associates revisionism with practitioners of social history and post-revisionists with those of cultural history despite the inter-(sub)disciplinary nature of many recent studies, I employ it here because it enables an easier tracing of changes in scholarly conceptualizations of “the state” and “society” (their polarization, interaction or relation of identity-dependence on the paradigm) in Stalinist state socialisms.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵ *Ibid.* The work most often associated with the “totalitarian paradigm” is Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship and autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956).

with propaganda used as a mobilizing device in a second place. The regime (for which ‘the party’ and ‘Stalin’ were often used as synonyms) was a monolith whose actions were guided by the ideology articulated in the classics of Marxism-Leninism and obligatorily quoted in all Soviet pronouncements. After the end of the 1920s, when the Stalin period began, there was no political opposition, no independent press, no representation of interest groups, no tolerance of deviation from the ‘party line,’ and no pluralism of any kind, including cultural. This was in effect the mirror image of the Soviet self-representation, but with the moral signs reversed (instead of the party being always right, it was always wrong).⁶”

“Revisionists” challenged the idea that society was monolithic and largely passive. In opposition to the top-down approach of the totalitarianists --an approach which, Patrikeeff argues, constructs a pyramid-like image of the Soviet Union, with Stalin at the top and the population at the bottom, a society characterized by a “politics of perfect control”- the social historians focusing on the Soviet Union in the 1970s looked at the factors that ensured the continuity of the regime, based on the assumption that repression alone could not explain the functioning of the system⁷. The themes they approached were upward social mobility (arguing, for instance, that a new generation of bureaucrats and especially technical specialists were supporting the regime since its “affirmative action” policies had created them),they highlighted inconsistencies in policies, administrative malfunctions and unintended consequences and, beginning with the 1980s, looked at instances of resistance⁸. By and large, despite the fraught political context, the “revisionists” refrained from clearly denouncing the Soviet Union as politically pathological and rejected comparisons between communism and Nazism, two of the reasons which attracted accusations from “traditional Sovietologists” of “whitewashing communism”⁹.

⁶ Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 80.

⁷ Ibid., 81. Felix Patrikeeff, "Stalinism, Totalitarian Society and the Politics of "Perfect Control"," in *Redefining Stalinism*, ed. Harold Shukman (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 28.

⁸ Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 82;84;86.

⁹ Ibid., 79; 81.

Although the revisionist school has not had a similar “paradigm-shift” influence on American (and, I would add, European) popular perceptions of the Soviet Union, Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that partly due to a change of generations the “revisionist paradigm” had become the mainstream one in the field by the 1980s¹⁰. This paradigm was challenged in its turn by the 1990s by a generation of historians of the USSR which integrated insights from cultural theory in their work. Grouped around the journal *Kritika*, the fairly heterogeneous group whom Fitzpatrick terms “the post-revisionists” draw (especially) on the work of Michel Foucault and have formulated research directions very much in relation to Kotkin’s innovative approach on state-society relations in his *Magnetic Mountain*, a monograph of the industrial town of Magnitogorsk¹¹. One of the most important features of this new direction in the study of the USSR is the exploration of so-called “Stalinist subjectivities”-- entailing a conceptualization of ideology as a collective construction (something akin to *Weltanschauung*)- and a focus on the USSR as a system which was underpinned by the aspirations of modernity (rather than decisively shaped by Marxist ideology) and governed through technologies similar to those shaping state-society interactions in liberal democratic systems¹².

A different discussion of the “state of the art” in studies of Stalinism, Mark Edele’s, notes (more critically) further shifts that have occurred in the field, in his view especially as a result of the “linguistic turn”. He argues that the *turn* has moved the focus from conceptualizing

¹⁰ Ibid., 79, 87.

¹¹ Ibid., 87. Kotkin, *Magnetic mountain : Stalinism as a civilization*.

¹² Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 87.

“society” to exploring “the everyday”, as well as the deconstruction of “class” or “nationality” (previously conceptualized as structures)¹³. Or, in Fitzpatrick’s formulation:

“The new scholarship on Stalinism focuses on Stalinism as culture.[...] And there are real secrets here too, many of them in the realm of everyday life and the private sphere, considered by the Soviet regime and previous generations of Western historians alike to be inappropriate objects of historical studies. Historians of the new cohort often approach Stalinism like anthropologists, analyzing practices, discourses, and rituals; sometimes, however, they seem to be reaching for yet-undeveloped methodologies to examine the Stalinist soul.¹⁴”

In Edele’s view, this focus on “the everyday” and the formation of specifically Stalinist subjectivities (which, in conjunction with the USSR’s continued commitment to social engineering, constitute the bedrock for Kotkin’s considering Stalinism a *civilization*), point out that “*the Stalinist political system was not simply external to the rest of society or to the individual*”, that “*it was part of both and was reproduced to a considerable degree because of these “micro-physics of power¹⁵”*. (Nevertheless, in his article, Edele calls for a recovery of the insights of Durkheim and Weber, who conceptualized the state as part of society and one of multiple foci of social integration)¹⁶.

To sum up, the three approaches to the study of Stalinism reviewed in this section (with some overlap in the case of the “revisionist” paradigms) construct different images of the relationship between the state and society during Stalin. The somewhat outdated totalitarian paradigm saw society as atomized, powerless, an undistinguished base of a pyramid maintained in place by repression and propaganda. In other words, state-society relations were characterized

¹³ Mark Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (2007).

¹⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalinism : new directions* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 3.

¹⁵ Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered," 368.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

by (in Foucault's terms) the exercise of the dictator's sovereign power to "take life or let live"¹⁷. On the other hand, the "revisionist" paradigm focused less on repression, probed the sources and reasons of support for the system and highlighted how "*Homo Sovieticus was a string-puller, an operator, a time-server, a freeloader, a mouther of slogans, and much more. But above all, he was a survivor.*"¹⁸ In this case, the power of the state is seen as negotiable through a number of practices (such as *blat*/ freeloading) and networks (such as kinship) and its functioning mediated by them. It is also one that does not further itself merely by coercion. Thirdly, the "post-revisionist" paradigm focuses to a greater degree on the mutually-constitutive interaction between state and society, with power seen as operating not merely through coercion, but also through the internalization of Stalinist values by individuals.

2.3. The historiography of the early years of communism in Romania.

The focus of my study has developed in part as a reaction to the reductive totalitarian model, a model which (despite its contestation in the English-speaking academic space) is the dominant approach in the recent historical scholarship written by Romanians on the communist period in general and on the years between 1945 and 1953, in particular. While the choice of paradigm is (ultimately) linked to the researcher's system of beliefs, in post-socialist Romania the totalitarian perspective on recent history has been further entrenched and encouraged by state efforts of "coming to terms with the past"¹⁹. Such attempts bolster the conclusions of a previous

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society must be defended : lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 240.

¹⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism : ordinary life in extraordinary times : Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 227.

¹⁹ The *Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania*- convened by President Traian Basescu and led by political scientist Vladimir Tismaneanu, released its *Final Report* in 2006. The Introduction of the report sets as the aim of the document "to try to untangle the way in which the complete disorganization of the RCP as political organism was produced and(...) meditate over the institutional responsibility for the catastrophe

body of research on the rule of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1945-1965) in Romania from which “the history of everyday life” is entirely absent, with privileged topics being regime repression and the political history of the Romanian Communist Party²⁰. Also, discussions of the imposition of Stalinist regimes in Romania have proceeded from an examination of legislative and institutional changes in order to conclude that the Communist Party of Romania sought to very faithfully carry out Stalin’s will²¹. The general picture of the early years of communism in Romania which emerges from the available secondary literature is of the dichotomy between the state (generally equated with the Party and sometimes reduced to the ruling elite) and society (conceived of as deprived, atomized and strongly against communist rule).

Some recent works have prompted a rethinking and renewal of mainstream accounts. For instance, Stefano Bottoni’s work questions the absence of popular support for the regime (hence the idea of brutal Soviet imposition), especially in the Transylvanian context. In a 2010 article he argues that the Communist Party of Romania managed to consolidate its power in the postwar years not simply due to a favorable international context (i.e. strong support from the USSR), but

represented by the totalitarian regime in our country.” The report devoted one third of its 666 pages to discussing the evolution of the Romanian Communist Party, another third to discussing repression and the final third to discussing “culture, economy and society”, with subchapters on food shortages, the criminalization of abortion under Ceausescu and mechanisms of social control between 1965 and 1989 (the Ceausescu regime). Comisia Prezidentiala pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din Romania (The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania), “Raport Final (Final Report),”(2006), http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf.

²⁰ Some of the most oft quoted works on the period are: Dennis Deletant, *Communist terror in Romania : Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).; Stelian Tanase, *Elite si societate : guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, 1948-1965 (Elites and society: the Gheorghiu-Dej rule, 1948-1965)* (Bucuresti: Humanitas, 1998); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all seasons : a political history of Romanian communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). For a (at times superficial) discussion on post-communist Romanian historiography on the communist period see Cristina Petrescu and Dragos Petrescu, “Mastering vs. coming to terms with the past: A Critical analysis of post-communist Romanian historiography,” in *Narratives unbound : historical studies in post-communist Eastern Europe*, ed. Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi, and Péter Apor (Budapest; New York: CEU Press/Central European University Press, 2007).

²¹ On the Sovietization of Romania see Nicoleta Ionescu-Gura, *Stalinizarea României : Republica Populara Româna 1948-1950 : transformari institutionale (The Stalinization of Romania: The Popular Republic of Romania 1948-1950: institutional transformations)* (Bucuresti: Editura BIC ALL, 2005).

also because between 1944 and 1953 it acted as a "transnational body" and pursued integrative policies, thus being able to alleviate ethnic (especially) tensions in multiethnic regions such as Transylvania. It's class-based, rather than ethnicity-based logic of functioning appealed to Hungarian and Jewish minorities. Finally, the willingness to maintain inter-war bureaucrats and officers in their positions after 1945 gained the PCR the acquiescence of parts of the Romanian middle class.²² Another important step forward is the volume edited by Constantin Iordachi, *Transforming Peasants*, which deals with the process of collectivization in Romania²³. Through its multi-disciplinary approach, the attention to local processes, peasants' tactics of (non-violent) resistance, the endeavor to capture the relationship between party officials at the center and activists in the villages, as well as the conceptualization of collectivization as a modern social engineering project, the volume poses for the Romanian context some of the questions asked by revisionists and post-revisionists in the case of the USSR. Finally, Robert Levy's biography of Ana Pauker examines through the lens of the Party leader's actions social processes occurring in Romania between 1945 and 1953 (such as collectivization and Jewish emigration from Romania) and highlights conflicts on policy matters between the leaders of the Romanian Worker's Party and tensions between Bucharest and Moscow²⁴. Somewhat surprisingly, his biography does not discuss Pauker's involvement with women's issues while in power (through her founding of the UAWR and honorary presidency of the UDWR, for instance).

²² S. Bottoni, "Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania: Violence, Institutional Continuity, and Ethnic Conflict Management," *East European Politics & Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010).

²³ Constantin Iordachi, ed. *Transforming peasants, property and power : the collectivization of agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

²⁴ Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker : the rise and fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley, Calif [u.a.]: University of California Press, 2001). His approach can be contrasted to that of Vladimir Tismaneanu. The latter stresses personal animosity among the elite of the RWP as a main dynamic. According to Tismaneanu, "*The conflicts between the three centers analyzed in this chapter primarily arose from personal, subjective hostilities. All the Romanian communists, without exception, vied for the Kremlin's support and endorsement. For all of them, it was a matter of ex Oriente lux – their sun rose in the East, in Moscow.*" Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all seasons*: 105.

2.4. State, power and modernity

Telling a more complex story of the role of communist women's organizations in Romania between 1945 and 1953 than the ones from within the totalitarian paradigm presupposes going beyond "the politics of total control" in conceptualizing what and who made Stalinist states function. I build such an alternative image by drawing on approaches from within or congruent with the "post-revisionist paradigm" in Soviet studies, a paradigm which--as discussed in a previous section- emphasizes the modern character of Stalinist governance, the constructive power of language and the internalization of authority by citizens . Like the "revisionists" (and to a greater extent than "post-revisionists"), I also emphasize systemic malfunctions, bureaucratic failures and mechanisms of coping as features of everyday life in state socialisms.

In the introduction to *Magnetic Mountain*, Kotkin argues with Foucault that (state) power is not only repressive but also productive. Yet while Foucault has highlighted both the delocalization of power and the possibility of resistance, Kotkin argues that the philosopher "*never gave resistance the empirical attention it deserved*"²⁵. So, drawing on Foucault, Bourdieu and deCerteau, Kotkin argues that while "*the grand strategies of the state*" create fields of action, they are nevertheless shaped by the individuals' "*little tactics of the habitat*"²⁶. Thus, the processes by which individuals turn themselves into subjects in relation to the state can be seen to be shaped by a "*two way struggle, however unequal the terms, over the drawing of lines of authority, a struggle that involved the continuous, if usually indirect, challenges to the perceived*

²⁵ Kotkin, *Magnetic mountain : Stalinism as a civilization*: 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

*rules*²⁷.” In order to capture this two-way struggle between, on the one hand, the norms and practices of a state whose welfare ideals were rooted in the ideas of the European Enlightenment and, on the other hand, city inhabitants who manipulated but most often circumvented state practices, Kotkin suggests concentrating on “*the rule articulation process in the encounters of daily life*²⁸”. In analyzing the interaction between the “center”’s vision for the UDWR (of Politburo members and UDWR Central Committee members), local chapters’ understanding of it and women’s reactions, in my thesis I employ Kotkin’s conceptualization of the functioning of power in the USSR and its implicit methodological proposition of looking at “rule articulation processes”.

In provocatively arguing that “*rather than being viewed as a pathological case (deviating from the European norm because of the country’s backwardness or agrarian social structure, the long history of Russian authoritarianism, the experience of the Civil War, Marxist ideology, the single-mindedness of Leninism, or the evilness of Stalin) the USSR in a narrative of the welfare state might appear as the standard whose uncanny success challenged the rest of the world to respond*”, Kotkin (and most “post-revisionists”) departs from West-centric accounts of modernity, which stress the rise of industrial capitalism and liberal democracy, beginning with the 18th century as defining processes²⁹. Instead, “post-revisionists” stress the advent of ideas about the state’s duty to provide for its citizens and justifiability of state intervention as defining characteristics of modernity. In this line, I adopt the perspective on modernity proposed by David Hoffmann (congruent with Kotkin’s approach, yet less susceptible to misinterpretation), who

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 22.

²⁹ Ibid., 20. David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist values : the cultural norms of Soviet modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7.

defines it “*in terms of two features common to all modern political systems-social interventionism and mass politics.*”³⁰ James Scott’s work on the development and functioning of modern statecraft techniques provides further arguments for seeing the ideas and values of European modernity as shaping the outlook of both liberal and authoritarian polities (or capitalist and socialist). In *Seeing Like a State* he argues that in the past two centuries the outlook of European polities has been shaped (to a greater or lesser degree) by the aspirations of “high modernism”,

“a strong version of the beliefs [rooted in Enlightenment thinking-n.n.] in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and in North America from roughly 1830 until World War I. At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.”³¹

The desire to order and rationalize the world motivates and underpins, in Scott’s view, the development of statecraft techniques of *simplification* and *rationalization*, which make possible the *legibilization* of people and things and facilitate administrative ordering.³² According to Scott, “authoritarian high modernist states” pushed the quest for legibilization and social engineering projects to extreme forms.

³⁰ ———, *Stalinist values*: 7.

³¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state : how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 89-90.

³² Ibid. Although Scott’s conceptualization of *legibility* becomes clearer with reading, the closest the author comes to giving a concise definition is in the book’s introduction where he states that: “*efforts at the sedentarization of populations [were] a state’s attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion.*” *Seeing like a state*, 2. Simplification is achieved, in Scott’s view, through the collection and aggregation of “interested, utilitarian facts; static facts; (...) standardized facts.” They “bring into sharp focus certain limited aspects of an otherwise far more complex and unwieldy reality” *Seeing like a state.*, 11. Rationalization refers to a propensity for ordering that which is to be made legible according to a modernist aesthetic (clean lines, grid patterns etc.)

Based on these perspectives, state socialist regimes were not “outside modernity”, but rather very much a part of it. In this vein, I see the Romanian Communist Party once in power as guided by a view of modernization that beyond industrialization, entailed (as in the case of the Soviet Union) political mobilization and commitment to social interventionism due to an aspiration to forge and instrumentalize the “new (wo)man”. This vision of modernity supplanted, to a certain extent, the predominant conception of the interwar years (which linked modernity with a capitalist economic system, liberal democracy and industrialization)³³. On the other hand, the Romanian state’s preoccupation for improving birth rates and living conditions (for instance), furthered (and in many ways made more benign) an interventionist ethos that was emerging in the Romania of the 1930s in connection to eugenics and the professionalization of social work³⁴.

A final point that needs to be made in connection to my conceptualization of Stalinist socialist states as modernizing states is that their vision of transforming, rationally ordering and controlling populations and territories was hampered by malfunctions inbuilt in the system and bureaucratic failure. On the one hand, as Scott has argued, these malfunctions are built into the process of legibilization characteristic of all modern states, regardless of guiding ideology. Thus, he states that:

“Those who gather and input aggregate data understand that there is a certain fictional and arbitrary quality to their categories and that they hide a wealth of problematic variation. Once set, however, these thin categories operate unavoidably as if all similar classified cases were in fact homogenous and uniform.³⁵”

On the other hand, as the work of Janos Kornay has highlighted, state socialist systems, because of central planning and centralized redistribution systematically produce shortages, shortages which are navigated by the population through such adaptative mechanisms as “the black market”. In this context, the black

³³ For a discussion of debates on the meanings of modernization and modernity in Romania, see Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁴ Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and modernization in interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

³⁵ Scott, *Seeing like a state*: 81.

market and related practices become features of the system and allow its perpetuation³⁶. And, as Lynne Haney has pointed out in her analysis of the functioning of the Hungarian welfare state, although the general aims and techniques of the modern state may be applied through a wide range of bureaucratic apparatuses, these apparatuses do not work in unison. She argues that “*states comprise layers of social policies and institutional practices [...], a composite of subsystems that can be in sync or at odds with one another.*”³⁷ It is in such a state, and one marked by the trauma of war and social divisions that I wish to place the activities of the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania and the Union of Democratic Women of Romania and its activists³⁸.

2.5. Previous Studies on Communist Women’s Organizations

Women’s organizations in the state socialisms of Central and Eastern Europe were, broadly speaking, meant to deal with “solving the woman question”- a question for which the writings of Engels, Bebel or Kollontai had, in appearance, provided a blueprint. In fact, these organizations’ mission (“the solving of the woman question”) had an ambiguous and changing meaning. On the one hand, by promoting women’s political representation, women’s taking up paid employment and changes in gender relations they were following the Bolshevik blueprint for women’s liberation(itself marked by contradictions)³⁹. On the other hand, through their emphasis on the protection of mother and child (for instance) and provision of certain social

³⁶ As reviewed in Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered," 359.

³⁷ Lynne A. Haney, *Inventing the needy : gender and the politics of welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 8.

³⁸ On the importance of taking into account the effects of World War II on the population as a factor in the installation of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, see Jan T. Gross, "Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe," *East European Politics & Societies* 3, no. 2 (1989).

³⁹For a discussion of contradictions in the writing of Bolshevik theorists on the woman question see Lynne Attwood, *Creating the new Soviet woman : women's magazines as engineers of female identity, 1922-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 12-20.

services, they were emphasizing gender difference and, thus, a less than revolutionary conception of gender relations. Or, as Goven has pointed out in the case of the Hungarian DAHW, they were (in conjunction with other state policies) pursuing both gender homogenizing and gender differentiating strategies⁴⁰. This is because, as I seek to show throughout my thesis, remaking gender became entangled with, bolstered by and (to a certain extent) subordinated to the modernist social engineering projects of Stalinist regimes.

In a comprehensive review of studies on communist women's organizations, Basia Nowak argues that the totalitarian paradigm has influenced post-socialist scholarship on the topic towards an emphasis of their role as state agents and complete subservience to the Party⁴¹. In her doctoral dissertation on the Polish *Lyga Kobiet* ("Women's League"), Nowak attempts to refine these assessments not by arguing against the League's connection to the Party, its top-heavy character or over-bureaucratization, but by emphasizing "*differences between local and national initiatives, signs of dissatisfaction with and resistance to the party and assistance [provided to women]*".⁴² Her investigation focuses on the different incarnations of the Women's League between 1945 and 1989. Her discussion of the League between 1945 and 1953 stresses continuities with interwar women's organizations, through their focus on what she terms "philanthropy" (i.e. a concentration on the protection of mother and children or the organization of home economics courses)⁴³.

⁴⁰ Joanna Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 9, no. 1 (2002).

⁴¹ Basia A. Nowak, "Serving women and the state: the League of Women in communist Poland" (Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2004), 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

In a 2005 article, Nowak focuses specifically on the propaganda and agitational work carried out by League activists during the Stalinist period. (This is also a topic covered in her dissertation). She argues that agitators were trained by the League to engage in “constant conversations” on political topics (such as “peace”, industrialization and other Party policies) due to the assumption that women in general were politically unreliable and in need of “enlightenment”⁴⁴. In her analysis of discourses on agitation and agitators’ own descriptions of their experiences, she highlights how in spite of official representations of such volunteers as excited and enthusiastic about their work, the actual agitators (especially the ones from rural areas) often felt unprepared. Furthermore, agitators encountered a variety of responses and reactions from the women to whom they talked: from polite listening, to criticism or signs of disinterest⁴⁵. Thus, her account highlights for the case of agitators’ work the “little tactics” used to counter the “grand strategies of the state”. In my study I aim to integrate Nowak’s emphasis on the “on the ground” factors (such as possible listener’s tactics of avoidance or “state agents”’ lack of preparation) in my attempt at complicating the image of the Romanian UAWR and UDWR, organizations that were (like the League) tied to the Party and heavily bureaucratized. I depart from her perspective to a certain extent by highlighting how so-called “philanthropic activities” were not merely continuations of practices of previous women’s organizations, but rather part and parcel of a modernist state’s interventionist ethos. (This is not to say that continuities did not exist, but rather that they occurred not out of inertia but because they fit the outlook of the state).

⁴⁴ ———, “Constant Conversations: Agitators in the League of Women in Poland during the Stalinist Period,” *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 490-91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 503.

In analyzing the activity of the UAWR and UDWR as part of processes connected to a Soviet-inspired inflection of modernity, I connect their priorities and practices to those of women's organizations functioning at different points in the Soviet Union. The totalitarian paradigm notes the transfer of institutions and policies from the USSR to "Sovietizing" countries. On the other hand, Joanna Goven (whose approach fits loosely within the "post-revisionist paradigm") conceptualizes the replication of Stalinist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe as marked by the selective adoption of models and practices; these models may have been applied in the USSR at different times across its three decades (at the end of World War II) of existence⁴⁶. Such selectivity and syncretism was evident in approaches to the "woman question" in Hungary, since the regime implemented policies of "liberating women" similar to the ones conceived in the USSR during the NEP, but also encouraged practices convergent with the greater gender conservatism of Stalinism⁴⁷. I adopt Goven's perspective on the construction of Stalinist states in Central and Eastern Europe and interpret some of the practices and discourses produced by the UAWR and UDWR as incorporating elements from the activity of women's organizations active in the USSR not only after World War II but also earlier. Because of this, I see the "utopianism of the Zhenotdel" during the NEP, as well as some of its principles as permeating (at least partially) the Romanian UAWR's own conception of women's mobilization⁴⁸. At the same time, the UAWR and (especially) the UDWR's attempts at remaking

⁴⁶ Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state," 5-6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁸ Barbara Evans Clements, "The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 3 (1992). She argues that the Zhenotdel-the Communist Party's Department for Work among Women Workers and Peasants (especially through the writings of leaders such as Alexandra Kollontai and Inesa Armand) forged a utopian vision of women's emancipation that was distinct from that of socialist men's. The differences were due, on the one hand, on their insistence that the emancipation of women was central to the building of communism and on the other hand, because they focused to a much greater degree on the restructuring of private life (by constructing the image of "the new

domesticity hark back to the “wives movement” active in the USSR in the 1930s and the gender conservatism it espoused⁴⁹.

The association of women’s organizations with Stalinist “grand strategies” (essentially, modernist projects of transforming the world towards greater rationality and order) is made clear in Joanna Goven’s study on the Hungarian Stalinist gender regime. She argues that the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (the Hungarian equivalent of the UDWR) was involved in the process of making domesticity legible; this involvement was manifest, for example, in their encouraging women to monitor household expenses and remit their books to the Hungarian National Office of Statistics⁵⁰. Furthermore, Eva Fodor has argued that the creation of organizations specifically for women was one of the techniques through which the Hungarian state constituted women as a “corporate group”, a homogenizing move which ultimately contributed to social control⁵¹. These arguments highlight how women’s organizations in Hungary were agents of the state not merely in the sense of explicitly implementing party policies, but by implicitly working to create the possibilities for social engineering projects characteristic of “authoritarian high modernist states”.

Finally, an article by Susan Zimmermann on the Hungarian gender regime during state socialism points out that the Hungarian Union of Democratic Women did not challenge the

woman” as sexually liberated, productive, active and displaying a lot of initiative and enthusiasm). Another important feature of Zhenodtel vision of the liberation of women in a socialist society was their insistence on local organizing, supported by women’s own initiative. Women were to make their own revolution, as men did not have enough interest in the issue and the state did not have the resources. Thus, facilities for communalization of byt, such as kindergartens, crèches and cafeterias were to be built not by a centralized state but by local women’s organizations. The Zhenodtel was disbanded in 1933, its agitprop functions integrated into the Party’s Propaganda Office.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Balmas Neary, "Mothering Socialist Society: The Wife-Activists' Movement and the Soviet Culture of Daily Life, 1934–41," *The Russian Review* 58, no. 3 (1999).

⁵⁰ Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state," 13, 18.

⁵¹ Éva Fodor, "Smiling Women and Fighting Men," *Gender & Society* 16, no. 2 (2002).

assumption that women were in charge of household work due to a strategy of defusing the gender struggle ensuing in the wake of the state's massive promotion of women's entrance on the labor market⁵². Her study thus highlights how socialist states' promotion of conservative values and family-friendly policies is (partially-I would argue) linked to the conscious management of social tensions generated by the states' modernizing logic.

The few studies by Romanian historians on the UAWR and UDWR approach the topic from within the totalitarian paradigm. Nevertheless, they constitute an important starting point for documenting the institutional evolution (especially) of these two organizations. Virgiliu Tarau's study on "the woman question" in the context of the installation of the communist regime in Romania devotes an ample space to the evolution of the UAWR, UDWR and the different national and international federations in which they were members. His analysis emphasizes the subordination of women's organizations to the goals of the Party, their lack of popularity and the "salami tactics" used in 1946 by UAWR activists in order to take over older women's organizations with a view to dismantling them⁵³. His general conclusion is that the totalitarian system in Romania not only did not liberate women but also "*managed to subjugate woman in more ingenious and, at the same time, more absurd ways than had been imagined until then*"⁵⁴.

Luciana Marioara Jinga's study of structures created by the Communist Party of Romania to mobilize women, although reviewing a wealth of interesting archival material, fails to provide a

⁵² Susan Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism," *Aspasia* 4, no. 1 (2010): 10.

⁵³ Virgiliu Târau, "De la diversitate la integrare-"Problema femeii" si instaurarea comunismului in Europa Centrala si de Est. Cazul Romaniei (From diversity to integration-The "woman question" in the installation of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. The case of Romania)." in *Conditia femeii în România în secolul XX : studii de caz (Woman's condition in the Romania of the XXth century: case studies)*, ed. Ghizela Cosma and Virgiliu Târau (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitara Clujeana, 2002).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

focused interpretation. It is nevertheless the best source of information on UAWR and UDWR. Her discussion of the multiple institutional reorganizations of what she terms “work with women” supports her argument of a continuous commitment towards the increasing centralization of women’s organizations. At the same time, some of the evidence she presents indicates the existence of recurrent debates among party leaders (with sides divided, perhaps unsurprisingly, by gender) over the political propriety and logistical feasibility of separate women’s organizations. In 1949, for instance, Vasile Luca argued in a party meeting that it was time for the Party to correct the mistake of having allowed the UDWR to become a mass organization for all women, since it led to isolationism and because “*this method and form [of mobilizing women] have lived their time.*”⁵⁵ The organization was not disbanded, however. One of the leaders of the organization, Constanta Craciun even stated publicly in 1950 that “*There was an opinion that work with women was passé [depasita], there were rumors that the organization will be disbanded.[...] As a result there was a period when this work became weakened, just as it was supposed to grow.*”⁵⁶ What some of the sources cited by Jinga show then is how top members of the RWP were divided between approaching the “woman question” through strategies of (in Goven’s terms) “gender homogenization” or rather “gender differentiation”⁵⁷. Furthermore, such debates hint towards the existence of a degree of pressure on the leaders of the organization to justify its approach and efficiency and the probable diffusion of this pressure towards local activists. So, while previous studies on the UAWR and UDWR are of little help in constructing conceptual frameworks for studying gender and

⁵⁵ Quoted in Luciana Marioara Jinga, "Forme de Organizare ale Muncii cu Femeile in Cadrul P.C.R. (1944-1954) (Forms of Organization of "Work with Women" Within the RCP (1944-1954))," *Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului in Romania (The Yearbook of the Institute for the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism in Romania)* 3(2008): 70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁷ Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state."

modernity, they are nevertheless important building blocks in writing histories of women and women's movements.

2.6. Method and Sources

Study has been shaped by the assumptions about the nature and purposes of social research embedded in feminist epistemology. To the extent that a specific “feminist epistemology” can be outlined, it is one that shares in the postmodern distrust of grand narratives and questioning of the scientific or “truthful” character of research⁵⁸. Many feminist researchers also adopt an interpretivist stance on ontology, seeing social life as “*based on social interactions and socially constructed meanings*”⁵⁹. Specific to the feminist approach to research, however, is an emphasis on gender as a category of analysis. According to Kathleen Canning, “*gender is a category of social analysis that denotes the relational character of social difference*” and also, “*a symbolic system or signifier of relations of power in which men and women are positioned differently.*”⁶⁰ From this perspective, gender becomes an interesting lens through which to analyze the working of power in different historical and social settings, among which state socialisms.

I integrate these approaches and concepts in attempting to flesh out in my thesis how constructions of gender produced by two women's organizations through official discourses as well as in everyday interactions during the early years of state socialism in Romania varied due to these organizations' entanglement in a modernizing state's social engineering projects. I have

⁵⁸ William Lawrence Neuman, *Social research methods : qualitative and quantitative approaches* (Boston, Mass.: Pearson, 2006), 89.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁰ Kathleen Canning, *Gender history in practice : historical perspectives on bodies, class & citizenship* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), 4.

chosen as a focus of inquiry two organizations for women (as opposed to a clear relational approach) because, as Goven has argued for the case of Hungary, state policies and Party initiatives (such as the creation of dedicated organizations) specifically addressed women in their attempts at recasting gender⁶¹.

Because my thesis seeks to capture not only the ways in which the state sought to engineer people and places, but also the different ways in which these plans reached the people to be transformed, I gathered my primary sources with a view to being able, on the one hand, to reconstitute and interpret official discourses and representations and, on the other hand, to piece together their effects at the local level. Thus my project relies on print materials published by the UAWR and the FDWR and the archives of the Satu Mare chapters of the UAWR, the FDWR and the UDWR.

The work reports, memos and some correspondence held by the Satu Mare County Direction of the National Archives were classified in three separate fonds (one dedicated to the UAWR and FDWR with materials from 1945 and 1946 and two-mistakenly separated, dedicated to the UDWR covering the period between 1948 and 1953. Because of the scant archival records of for the Satu Mare UAWR and FDWR, I also examined the records of the Turda (Cluj county) chapter of the UAWR. Also, I looked at the archives of the UDWR from Cluj county for the year 1953, as the records from Satu Mare county for the year were (again) very limited. The choice (although not initially planned) turned out to be serendipitous, as-it emerged from analyzing the magazine of the UAWR, the Turda chapter was presented in the magazine appearing between 1945 and 1947 as a “model chapter”. Its records thus served as a basis for comparison with what

⁶¹ Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state," 7.

appears from the few records to have been the disorganized and disoriented Satu Mare chapter of the UAWR. Therefore, consulting the records of other chapters, although not initially scheduled, has played an important part in shaping this thesis. The print materials analyzed are collections of the *Drumul Femeii (Woman's Road)* magazine, published as the magazine of the UAWR between 1945 and 1947 and of *Femeia (Woman)* magazine (whose issues I have examined for the years 1948-1953). I also look at the two propaganda brochures issued by the UDWR as well as relevant legislation.

The nature of the materials I had access to shaped the focus of the thesis to a great degree. The work reports sent by local chapters are functional texts produced during a period in which embellishment of reports was common and the identification of problems to be fixed was a Stalinist ritual to be performed by their authors⁶². Rather than attempting to establish the reliability of accounts contained in reports, I conceptualize these texts as narratives that were meant to persuade or justify (rather than merely report). I grant a central place to the narrative character of archival sources throughout my analysis by paying attention to linguistic constructions and rhetorical strategies contained within them and the discourses which they produce. I apply a similar framework of interpretation for published sources. Because of this and because accessing local newspapers from Satu Mare county was impossible and I did not conduct interviews, rather than being a richly descriptive study of "local communism" in a particular Transylvanian town, my study entails an exploration of (among other themes) the way in which the language of Stalinism as used by (often) less than articulate activists constructed center-periphery relations in Romania between 1945 and 1953.

⁶² This has been noted (among others) by Nowak, "Serving women and the state: the League of Women in communist Poland," 17.

Finally, in order to ensure confidentiality, I use only the surname initial for persons mentioned in archival records. All translations from Romanian into English are mine.

2.7. Conclusions

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework underpinning my thesis, sources used and interpretative framework adopted. The first sections' general discussion of the main "paradigms" in the study of Stalinism frames a review of the Romanian historiography of the period 1945-1953 which notes the predominance of studies from within the totalitarian paradigm and the (mostly) recent emergence of alternative outlooks and interpretations. The third section clarifies the conceptualization of state-society relations I use in this thesis, while the fourth section reviews previous studies on communist women's organizations. The "post-revisionist" framework that emerges conceptualizes the process of Stalinization as the selective and syncretic adoption of not only policies and institutions, but a broader ethos of state intervention and social mobilization. Rather than seeing Stalinist state socialisms as mere political pathologies (while fully acknowledging the repression which accompanied the installation of the regime), I conceptualize them as representing a specific inflection of modernity. Their modern character is given not only by the belief in progress, development and rationality but by the application of techniques of legibilization which, according to Scott, underpin the rise of the modern state. Furthermore, like in capitalist states, the Stalinist state does not only coerce but relies on individuals' internalization of power. At the same time, power exercised in such a way is resisted through tactics which circumvent the system. The "grand strategies of the state" create fields of action, yet within them people negotiate power through a range of practices. While Stalinist states were not "outside modernity" they shared specificities, among which the chronic shortages

produced by central planning. They also shared an official discourse (rooted in Marxist theory) on gender equality and women's liberation. The fourth section of the chapter argues that organizations dedicated to women were pursuing an agenda on the "woman question" marked by contradictions and, as becomes apparent from a review of the relevant literature, were involved in subtle ways in state legitimization projects. All the while, their actions were shaped by institutional expectations and the reactions of the women whom they addressed.

CHAPTER 3- EXPANDING THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY: THE UNION OF ANTIFASCIST WOMEN OF ROMANIA, CENTRAL ACTORS, LOCAL ACTIVISTS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDERED CITIZENSHIP

3.1. Introduction

Between 1945 and 1947, the organization at the core of the articulation and dissemination of a new, Soviet-inspired vision of women's role in a society which the communist-dominated government was beginning to build, was the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania. While its role in the destabilization of older women's organizations (be they focused strictly on philanthropy or also on feminist activism) is usually emphasized⁶³ its role in the discursive production of gendered citizenship in post-war Romania has been generally disregarded. Yet, in these years of "post-war fluidity" which preceded the Cold War and its increasing ideological regimenting and in the absence of the economic basis-which, in theory, constituted the bedrock for the solving of the "woman question", the RCP and UAWR linked their calls for the increased mobilization of women exactly with the proper performance of citizenship. In fact, it could be said that one of the most important processes occurring during this period in Romania was the expansion of the political community through the tense, uneasy yet driven process of including women into the polity, formally-through the granting of voting rights and symbolically-through

⁶³ See Jina, "Forms of Organization of Work with Women." Also, Stefania Gáll Mihailescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc : studiu si antologie de texte (1929-1948) (From the history of Romanian feminism: study and anthology of texts (1929-1948))* (Bucuresti: Polirom, 2006).

encouragement of women's performance of citizenship. But just how was citizenship and women's mobilization understood? And how did these meanings emerge?

This chapter analyzes the actors involved in the production at "the center" of new discourses and representations on women's involvement in the public sphere between 1945 and 1947, the articulation of this vision in propaganda publications and its incorporation and negotiation by two local UAWR organizations (from the counties of Turda and Satu Mare) into the narratives of their work reports. It argues that during this relatively short period of time, the emancipation of women became associated with the performance of citizenship understood as enthusiastic work outside the home, the display of a sense of local initiative and physical mobility within the framework of a women's organization such as the UAWR. Also, women's citizenship functioned as a signifier of modernity, associated as it was with movement and the idea of improving the world through mass political mobilization. While such imagery had a correspondent in the Stalinist vision of citizenship, I aim to show how a diversity of meanings ensued through the interactions between actors at the apex of the UAWR or the Romanian Communist Party, between the central organization and local chapters and, on the ground, between activists and women to be persuaded .

Thus, after offering a brief overview of the domestic context in Romania between 1945 and 1947 in the second section of the chapter, in the third section I analyze the involvement of three groups of actors connected to the Romanian Communist Party which had a part in shaping the discourses of the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania on citizenship. Specifically, I looks at the reasons put forward by the Romanian Communist Party for the public involvement of women through women's organizations and then break down the women involved in shaping

the priorities of the central UAWR into “state high officials” and “idealistic intellectuals”, emphasizing the differences in their discourses on gender and citizenship. The fourth section of the chapter looks at representations of local action in the magazine of the UAWR, *Woman’s Road* (Drumul Femeii) and argues that the discourses on “womanly achievement” through physical mobility constructed an image of modern “forward-ness” which stood in opposition with the political backwardness with which women were associated. The fifth section discusses the activity of the Turda and Satu Mare local chapters as reflected in the scant archival material preserved and analyzes the incorporation in their narratives of activism of different discourses on mobilization and their accounts of women’s reactions to their strategies.

3.2. A modern project after the war, before “high Stalinism”: a greater political community in uncertain times

The years between Romania switching sides in World War II (from an ally of the Axis since 1941 to an aspiring co-belligerent of the Allies by August 1944) to the abdication of King Michael in December 1947, represented a period of transition from an ailing constitutional monarchy to a “popular democracy”, Stalinist regime. Politically, a weak Romanian Communist Party (RCP), with the heavy backing of the Soviet High Command stationing troops in the country, sought to expand its membership and clout through the creation of “national fronts”. These fronts were loose coalitions of left-leaning parties, dissident factions of the National Liberal and National Peasants’ Party and “mass organizations” (workers’ unions, left-wing organizations of ethnic minorities, organizations’ of leftist intellectuals). Until 1947 (but especially up to the November 1946 elections) all parties sought to mobilize and gain supporters, with the Peasants’ Party emerging as a favorite. Administratively, local bureaucracies were in

disarray while members of ethnic minorities in Transylvania (especially) aimed for territorial autonomy in a state which was recovering its interwar nationalizing and centralizing reflexes⁶⁴. Materially, most of Romania was affected by post-war inflation, damaged infrastructure, strains on the budget posed by reparations to be paid to the Soviet Union and severe droughts in 1946 and 1947 that led to famine, especially in Eastern Romania. Bucharest, the capital, was the scene of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations organized until 1946 by competing parties.⁶⁵ Turda-part of Southern Transylvania during the war, was regrouping after serving as a major center for refugees to and from Northern Transylvania during the conflict⁶⁶. And, in the border town of Satu Mare-in Northern Transylvania, Hungarian and Romanian inhabitants stopped from claiming the damaged city (due to heavy Soviet bombing in 1944) for Hungary or Romania only to individually defend the purchase of goods confiscated from several thousand Jews deported from the city's ghetto in late 1944, goods claimed back after the war by the few survivors of the death camps.⁶⁷ With commemoration of war victims problematic for both the new and old elites, the elaboration of a provisional vision of the political community- meant to promote a sense of post-war unity in a polity which had been characterized by "low political integration"⁶⁸- made less recourse to discourses of reconstruction and the collectively-damaging experience of war⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866-1947*: 512.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 535-7.

⁶⁶ Holly Case, *Between states : the Transylvanian question and the European idea during World War II* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 117.

⁶⁷ Faur Antonio, *Starea de spirit a locuitorilor din judetele de Nord-Vest ale Transilvaniei in anul 1945 (The morale of the inhabitants from the counties of North-Western Transylvania in the year 1945)* [The morale of the inhabitants from the counties of North-Western Transylvania in the year 1945] (Oradea: Editura Universitatii din Oradea, 2006), pp.292-354.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary breakthroughs and national development; the case of Romania, 1944-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p.123. Briefly, political integration is defined by Jowitt as the feeling of belonging to a political community.

⁶⁹ On the factors shaping post-war commemoration (or lack thereof) in Romania see Petru Weber, "Remembering the victims of the Second World War in Romania during the communisation of the country(1945-1950)," in *Graduate Conferences in European History* (Budapest2007).

Instead, the communists' vision of a non-capitalist road to development and a more inclusive polity would emerge as the dominant discourses.

Although marked by infighting and publicly making moderate claims of political change, the RCP was becoming involved in one of the grand projects of (Soviet) modernity: universal inclusion into the polity and civic mobilization⁷⁰. Because the major legislative and institutional changes which characterize the state socialist modernization project (and were seen as the bedrock for women's full inclusion into the polity) would not be implemented until 1948, provisional reasons for why women had to mobilize and how they were to do it during the "transition years" had to be put forward. Thus, between 1945 and 1947, the UAWR was involved in linking the "solving of the woman question" with the performance of citizenship through mobilization. This type of symbolic inclusion was followed by full formal inclusion-through the granting of voting rights for all women only shortly before the 1946 parliamentary elections.

⁷⁰ According to Yannis Kotsonis, "*If we understand modernity as the pursuit of mass mobilization, mass participation in politics (voluntary or not), and integration into a larger whole, then the vote [and by extension, what he terms 'recongizable political democracy'-a.n.] is only one of the ways in which historical actors pursued it [political participation]; for the same was at issue in Russia under the Romanovs, increasingly in Bolshevik one-party dictatorship, and in Stalin's one-person dictatorship. Modernity was disputed and debated not only in the contained conditions of parliamentary representation, but also in some of the most violent periods of Russian history.*" Yanni Kotsonis, "Introduction: a Modern Paradox-Subject and Citizen in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Russia," in *Russian modernity : politics, knowledge, practices*, ed. David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (Houndsmills; New York: Macmillan Press ; St. Martin's Press, 2000), p.5. Of course, citizenship did become structured around notions of class, while formal exclusion of women or un-landed, uneducated people was replaced with arbitrary coercion and/or formal deprivation of rights for other categories such as kulaks and suspicious ethnic groups. Nevertheless, formally, political, civil and social rights were expanded in state socialist systems to unprecedented numbers of people. See Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less: Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging."

3.3. As far as the center stood: types of actors and different visions for citizenship

As outlined in the previous chapter, the multiple and often contradictory visions of how women were to support the construction of a socialist state and polity were as much the product of theoretical ambiguities in the writings of Bolshevik theorists on the woman question, the top-down reconstruction of gender in the Soviet Union to fit policies and the syncretism entailed by the import of Soviet models into Central and Eastern Europe⁷¹. The communists involved in defining women's role in the provisional political order in Romania between 1945 and 1947 often drew on different experiences. While a contradictory picture emerged, the common theme in the views of the RCP elites seeking to mobilize women for strategic political gains, of the women who due to their old activist credentials became state officials and were consciously formulating and disseminating the emerging vision of the Party on the "woman question" in uncertain times, and of the female intellectuals drawn to the cause especially after 1945 was the general political "backwardness of women". As I will show in this section, by backward women, they meant mostly illiterate, rural or politically passive women. Far from the center of things, these women had to be enlightened through outreach.

The institutional actor with most weight in shaping the mobilization of women for the building of future socialism and implicitly, for their formal integration into the emergent political community was the Romanian Communist Party. While by no means the only element involved

⁷¹ For a review of the different theories on the "woman question" formulated in the Soviet Union on the basis of Marx and Engels's writings and the changing official discourses on gender and representations of women to fit industrial and agricultural policy, see Attwood, *Creating the new Soviet woman : women's magazines as engineers of female identity, 1922-53*: pp.1-15. For a discussion on syncretism in the adoption of Soviet models in Central and Eastern Europe see Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state."

in the creation of new meanings for gender and citizenship, as suggested by authors building on the totalitarian paradigm, between 1944 and 1947 the strategic considerations of the party which was increasingly dominating the government influenced decisively whom activists sought to mobilize and the rhetorical strategies used⁷². Thus, during this period, the need to gain more members and some legitimacy among the population led to the party favoring the inclusion of previously excluded groups (such as women) and a strong interest for attracting intellectuals to the cause. Furthermore, because it sought to conclude alliances with other political groups, antifascism, rather than social revolution, served as the umbrella-cause. Finally, throughout this period, the RCP also sought to dismantle or co-opt older political parties and organizations.

These types of considerations permeated the call for the mobilization of women issued in October 1944 by the party. The *Project for Special Claims for Women* called for the mobilization of women for the war effort, the cleansing of the state apparatus of fascist elements and for the “*creation of the greatest democratic freedoms*”⁷³. These goals would be achieved by gaining political rights for women, equal work for equal pay, women’s protection in the workplace and, because the party sought to reach the masses everywhere, the “*protection of mother and child in the factory, neighborhood and village*”. The *Project for Special Claims* represented women as both brave and worthy of equal rights and politically ignorant. Thus, it was stated that “*through her combativeness, woman represents a force, politically and economically, which should be*

⁷² As discussed in the previous section, the totalitarian paradigm tends to over-play the power and administrative capacity of the Party-State in governing communist societies and to downplay the role of bureaucrats, cultural producers integrated into the state apparatus and mere contingency. Romanian studies on the UAWR and the UDWR such as Marioara Jinga’s, *Forms of organization of work with women* or Stefania Mihailescu’s *The Growth and maturing of the movement for the emancipation of women* stress the influence of the RCP/RWP over the priorities of these organizations but do not point out other factors which may have had some kind of influence on the workings of other organizations.

⁷³ Gáll Mihailescu, *From the history of Romanian feminism (1929-1948)*: 372.

activized". On the other hand, the main priority for activists was to be "*raising women's political level against the fascist reactionary education woman has received*".⁷⁴ At this point, mobilization of women was to occur not through a special organization but through women's sections within local party structures⁷⁵.

A separate organization dedicated to the mobilization of women within a communist framework was founded in April 1945. The Union of Antifascist Women of Romania (UAWR) was created on the 9th of April 1945, by women within or with ties to the elite of the Romanian Communist Party. The aims of the organization were:

*"1.The fight against fascism through a) support for the front; b) combating internal fascism c) the struggle for equal rights d)the strengthening of ties with the antifascist organizations of women from neighboring countries: the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and other democratic countries. 2.Improving the cultural and political level of women from cities and villages (...). 3. Improving the sanitary state of women from towns and villages(...) 4. Protection of children"*⁷⁶.

In order to incorporate other organizations and impose partial unity of goals, the Federation of Democratic Women of Romania-FDWR was created in March 1946. The UAWR was the main member of this Federation. Other women's organizations, such as the Organization of Orthodox Women, the Union of Working Women and the women's sections of the National Peasants Party, the Patriotic Defense and MADOSZ also became members.⁷⁷ The goals of the Federation replicated those of the UAWR, but allowed members to maintain their autonomy

⁷⁴ Idem

⁷⁵ Luciana Marioara Jinga, "Forme de Organizare ale Muncii cu Femeile in Cadrul P.C.R. (1944-1954) [Forms of Organization of "Work with Women" within the C.P.R. (1944-1954)] " *Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului in Romania* 3(2008): 54.

⁷⁶ Gáll Mihailescu, *From the history of Romanian feminism (1929-1948)*: 378-9.

⁷⁷ MADOSZ-Magyar Dolgozok Szovetsege/The Union of Hungarian Workers.

otherwise.⁷⁸ In fact, the FDWR seems to have been an institutional construction meant to facilitate a planned unification of women's organizations. Through its planned local chapters, a magazine (*Drumul Femeii*- "Woman's Road") and brochures it published the UAWR aimed to fulfill the RCP's vision of nation-wide mobilization. The UAWR's membership in the Women's International Democratic Federation- a left feminist organization founded in December 1945 by feminists from Western Europe, Australia and the Soviet Union granted the organization a transnational dimension (a topic which, although important, I leave unexplored in my thesis)⁷⁹.

The UAWR's vision of mobilization, beyond the Party's strategy, was shaped by two groups of women active at the top of the organizations. On the one hand, the group I term "high state officials" was made up of some of the founders of the UAWR and members of its Central Committee. These women were long-time party activists and through their functions in government or their connections to the men at the top of the RCP hierarchy, were part of a powerful if divided elite. Among the members of the UAWR's initiative committee were Ana Pauker⁸⁰, dr. Florica Bagdasar⁸¹, Elena Patrascanu⁸², Constanta Craciun⁸³, Ana Toma⁸⁴, Ofelia

⁷⁸ Jinga, "Forms of Organization of Work with Women," pp.63-65.

⁷⁹ For an interesting discussion on the creation of the WIDF, see Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: the case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010).

⁸⁰ Ana Pauker (1893-1960) - One of the three leaders of the Romanian Communist Party/Romanian Workers Party, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1947 until 1948, Agriculture Secretary of the RWP-charged with overseeing the process of collectivization, between 1948 and 1952, when she was arrested and ousted from the leadership of the RWP)See Levy, *Ana Pauker*.

⁸¹ Florica Bagdasar (1901-1978)- Doctor, Minister of Health between 1946 and 1948, member in the Great National Assembly between 1946-1951. See Anghel Costin and Mihai Stirbu, "Uniti intru iubirea si sanatatea semenilor (United for the love and health of fellow human beings)," *Jurnalul National*, 9 December 2005.

⁸² Elena Patrascanu -Architect, party activist and wife of Lucretiu Patrascanu, who served as minister of justice between 1944 and 1948.

⁸³ Constanta Craciun-Party activist since the 1920s, Minister of Culture between 1948 and 1956. A brief mention of her can be found in Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all seasons*: 77.

⁸⁴ Ana Toma- Party activist, long-time secretary of Ana Pauker. See Levy, *Ana Pauker*: 172; 75.

Manole⁸⁵⁸⁶ Although the feminist credentials of most of these women are usually questioned (when mentioned at all) and their personal stances on the emancipation of women are hard to disentangle from the Party line in some of their speeches, it should be noted that-for instance, both Ana Pauker and Constanta Craciun had been involved in organizing women and the promotion of equal rights for many years before the war⁸⁷. The other large group of women involved in the central organization of the UAWR, “the idealistic intellectuals”, were most likely new(er) to the cause⁸⁸. Thus, Theodosia Graur, the director of the “Woman’s Road” magazine, was a scholar focusing on French literature⁸⁹. Maria Banus, a known poet before the war, became a regular correspondent⁹⁰. Writer Cella Serghi contributed short stories regularly and remained involved in the UDWR at least until 1953⁹¹.

Because of their different backgrounds, these two groups put forward slightly different views on why women’s mobilization was important and which women were supposed to

⁸⁵ Ofelia Manole-Member of the RCP’s Propaganda Office between 1945 and 1948. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all seasons*: 148.

⁸⁶ Gáll Mihailescu, *From the history of Romanian feminism (1929-1948)*: 378-80.

⁸⁷ Throughout the 1930s, Ana Pauker was involved in organizing women workers and running women’s antifascist organizations in Romania. In fact, her first speech delivered to the assembly of the fledgling CPR, in 1922, was on the “women’s revolutionary movement”. She also spoke at the founding conference of the Soviet Women’s Anti-Fascist Committee in 1941, probably because following her much-publicized arrest, trial and detention in Romania in the late 1930s she had become a symbol of communist anti-fascist resistance. See Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all seasons*: 51; 76. de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms," 562. Constanta Craciun was among the first speakers at the “feminist study group” initiated in 1936 by celebrated Romanian feminist Calypso Botez. Gáll Mihailescu, *From the history of Romanian feminism (1929-1948)*: 292.

⁸⁸ While Anna Pauker joined the Party in 1922 and Constanta Craciun was active during the period of “illegality” of the (then named) Communist Party of Romania, most other intellectuals must have joined after the end of the war, following the re-legalization of the RCP and the Party’s calls for intellectuals to join, since according to Tismaneanu, on the 23rd of August 1944 the RCP had less than 80 members in Bucharest and a total of 1000 members across the country. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all seasons*: 87.

⁸⁹ The only references I could find to Theodosia Graur are in connection to her authoring, in 1929, a book on Amadis Jamyn, a poet connected to Ronsard.

⁹⁰ Maria Banus (1914-1999)-poet who gained accolades for her 1937 *Tara Fetelor* (Maiden’s Land) volume. She joined the Communist Party after World War II. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, "Banus, Maria," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2007).

⁹¹ Cella Serghi (1907-1992) – Novelist. Titles published include *Mirona* (1950), *Cantecul uzinei* [The song of the industrial plant] (1950) or the memoir *Pe firul de paiianjen al memoriei* [On memory’s spider thread]. Anca Dragomir, "Cella Serghi," *Romania Libera*, 28.04.2011 2011.

mobilize. An analysis of the contents of the Woman's Road magazine reveals these discrepancies between the discourses of "high state officials" and of the writers contributing to the magazine ("the idealistic intellectuals") on the question of women's political participation. On the one hand, "high state officials" were, as expected, linking women's public involvement through mobilization with the other immediate political goals of the party. Also, generally, their views were more conservative. For example, the magazine published the following report of Anna Pauker's speech: "*She [Anna Pauker] showed that the hate of women against fascism is a fruitful hate(...) She then talks about the need to unite all women to take the fight further against all the saboteurs and profiteers who hinder the reconstruction of the country and calls for women to fight for their rights saying that soon women will have the right to vote, she encourages them to use their rights in order to support democracy.*"⁹²

Maria Rosetti, vice-president of the Federation of Democratic Women of Romania, stated in 1946 that "*women grouped in the Federation commit to support with all their forces the first woman minister (Florica Bagdasar, Minister of Health-a.n.) in the great task of improving the health of the people and of supporting the Petre Groza government which gave women full rights, consolidating and defending peace.*"⁹³ Declarations such as these, which emphasized women's duties towards the party or government were present in all issues of the magazine. However, the discourse on duty owed by all women for rights granted was by no means the only one shaping the vision for women's mobilization.

⁹² Drumul Femeii, "Marele meeting al Uniunii Femeilor Antifasciste (The great meeting of the Union of Antifascist Women)," September 1945, 19

⁹³ Drumul Femeii, "Meetingul Federatiei Democrate a Femeilor din Romania (The meeting of the Democratic Federation of Women of Romania)," July 1946, 16.

The “idealistic intellectuals” most often addressed and appealed to other intellectuals in making their case for public involvement. For example, Theodosia Graur, the director of the magazine stated that: “ *If there is someone who must roll up her sleeves nowadays, that is certainly the intellectual woman from Romania, who must gain for her sisters from the country side the time lost, and who must clarify for others and even for herself-the historical truths.*”⁹⁴ Thus, the writers for the magazine envisioned a prominent role for women like themselves in the provisional social order after the war.

Also, despite the emphasis of the RCP and state officials on reaching working-class and peasant women, the magazine mostly addressed the concerns and hopes for the future of urban, educated women. Of course, attracting intellectuals was part of the RCP’s strategy during these years. Nevertheless, in describing the state of affairs at the time and promising a better future, the writers of the magazine went above and beyond the constraints of the official message. For example, in an extensive article on “women and work”, the author stated that:

“ We are witnessing, for the past hundred years the hardest(...) and most heroic moment (sic) from woman’s existence. (...) Here she is running from the office to the dust rag, from the plant to the kitchen, from the workshop to the baby’s crib, from the teacher’s desk to the iron. Here she is stopping from her way to college to cram, in her bag full of medical treaties, the vegetables for tomorrow’s soup(...) Here she is, hiding among the stenographed pages from the ‘boss’s’ office the recipe for economical pancakes obtained from a smart colleague. Here she is transporting her knitting materials to literary or teachers’ meetings, as her hand does not have the right to rest even though her brain is focusing.(...) Here she is pausing the writing of an article in order to negotiate with the seller the price of a kilo of tomatoes .”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Drumul Femeii, “De am putea intelege-din cuvintarea rostita in fata Congresului Femeilor Democratice din Romania (If only we could understand-from the speech given in front of the Congress of Democratic Women of Romania)”, April 1946, 4-5.

⁹⁵ Drumul Femeii, “Femeia si munca (Woman and Work)”, July 1945, pp.4-5

What is striking about this excerpt is that, although it mentions briefly the experience of the double burden for the working woman, the ultimate emphasis is on the situations of white-collar professionals. Compared to other texts from the magazine dealing with woman's condition, the level of detail and the reference to what was probably the authors' own experience ("pausing the writing of an article..") connote a genuine preoccupation for the topic. That the material was published even though it strayed in tone and approach from the other materials, indicates a degree of autonomy for the magazine and an implicit perception that urban, literate women were the intended audience for the publication, rather than the incidental one.

Futhermore, mirroring the utopianism of the Russian Zhenotdel during the Civil War⁹⁶, immediately after WWII authors associated with the UAWR and its magazine even dared to imagine a distant future. According to an article, technology and science, harnessed by a true democracy, would liberate women from the drudgery of domestic work and enable them to pursue their professions. For instance, the same article on "women and work" stated that:

"The developed democratic society can do much more for the woman. It is capable of easing to such an extent her domestic work that it can turn it into an agreeable sport. It can, through a development of industrial production unhindered by personal interests, provide a comfortable dwelling, with washable walls, with simple and hygienic furniture, a dwelling in which electricity will successfully replace all the domestic personnel. With central heating-or cooling, with warm running water, with scientifically distributed electric light, with electric cooking machines (...) cleaning becomes a domestic amusement."⁹⁷

Again, the level of detail seems to go beyond the promises made at this time by the communists and connect the solving of the woman question with a vision of modern progress.

⁹⁶ Clements, "The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel."

⁹⁷ Drumul Femeii, "Femeia si munca (Woman and Work)", July 1945, 5.

Although not explicitly placing this image in an urban setting, it seems quite clear that the future was imagined for a city dweller. Peasant and small town women didn't quite fit.

If educated women were expected to join the UAWR out of a conscious commitment to the party or for the sake of a luminous utopia, once mobilized they were expected to enlighten the masses of illiterate, over-worked women. As Alexopoulos has argued for the Soviet Union, citizenship was associated not so much with formal rights, as with the practical duty of being active, of displaying *aktivnost*⁹⁸. The tasks at hand for the intellectuals who were called upon to join was summed up in the pages of the magazine by Theodosia Graur:

“Why is the Romanian woman uncultured? Because schools were open to her with great stinginess, because we did nothing or very little, us intellectuals, to dispel the unfortunate idea of the peasant ‘What do girls need literacy for?’(...) We have left women in the dark, humble and overworked, quiet and unknown. (...) The Romanian woman is not stupid, as some, driven by base interests, would want her. She is just spent by work, stifled by ignorance, tired of always being considered the most patient animal of the house. The work of her re-education has begun. Democratic organizations, led by the Union of Antifascist Women fight with courage and energy to enlighten and inform the broad masses of women...”⁹⁹

Women, as a group, were also described as “backward” in propaganda materials and by high-level party officials from Hungary or Poland¹⁰⁰. Yet the publications of the UAWR linked backwardness not only with supposed defects acquired by women through a deficient education (such as lack of interest for politics or becoming informed). For the organization it was also a label acquired specifically by women in Romania, through their failure to organize into an antifascist resistance during the war. Joining the Union of Antifascist Women after the end of

⁹⁸ Alexopoulos, "Soviet Citizenship, More or Less: Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging," 523.

⁹⁹ Drumul Femeii, "Femeia si dreptul de vot (Woman and Voting Rights)", December 1945, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Fodor, "Smiling Women and Fighting Men." for a discussion on Hungary. For the case of Poland, Nowak, "Constant Conversations: Agitators in the League of Women in Poland during the Stalinist Period."

the war was one of the ways in which women could make up for this short-coming. Or, in the formulation of a September 1945 magazine article: *“Women! In wars our sisters from other countries have covered themselves in glory by fighting in the regular army or as partisans. Unfortunately, too few of us followed their example. But now we should fight for peace. We should spread in our houses and around us the absolute and unflinching trust in the democratic peace being forged today.”*¹⁰¹,

All in all, rather than articulating a unified message on which women, how and to what end should perform citizenship, those supposed to mobilize women through policies promoted or materials written drew on different types of answers to the “woman question” and , to a certain extent, produced different discourses of mobilization. Nevertheless, all actors defined solutions for “others” around a common broad problem, “backwardness”. Yet in order to create a more concrete picture of what active citizenship entailed, the center depended on representations of local action.

3.4. Representations of gendered local action and syntheses of socialist citizenship

As represented in the UAWR’s magazine, the central leadership of the organization and the women who contributed to the publication imagined a radiant distant future and defined woman’s condition after the war in relation to an oppressive past. Increasingly, in the years 1946 and 1947, reports of the activities of the local chapters of the UAWR appeared in the pages of the magazine. Besides depicting the organizations’ success in reaching women everywhere, these

¹⁰¹ Drumul Femeii, “Drumul nostrum [Our road]”, September 1945, p.3

articles-usually appearing in a rubric titled “Womanly achievements”, served to further define the proper performance of citizenship by women. By contrast with the tone of many such reports beginning with 1948, the activity of the local chapters was always described in positive terms.

Basia Nowak has argued that agitators from the Polish *Women’s League* were expected to engage in “constant conversations” on the themes of politics and government policy¹⁰². Similarly, according to the *Drumul Femeii* magazine, for local UAWR activists, civic *aktivnost* meant engaging in political discussions. These however, were to be carried out while also physically laboring. So, for instance, an article titled “Let’s talk” stated that: “*As usual, our hands will be working while we talk. And so, step by step, we will see the cobwebs and the lies and the ignorance clearing. So that, in the end, our homes, our country and our souls will become our mirrors.*”¹⁰³. Also, a September 1945 article discussing post-war reconstruction stated that:

“Through each word that flies out of her mouth, through each gesture she makes, woman has the duty to spread around her encouragement and suggestions for the realization of a new and happy world.(...) But speaking and encouragement are not enough. Steadfastly, woman must aim for concrete and personal achievements in all the domains where democracy opens the gates widely. More [illegible] and conviction in the political arena, more order and [illegible] in the household, more devotion in social work (...) more energy for progress.”

As the above quotes show, the “concrete realization” of political participation became a prerequisite of citizenship. Simply being informed would not suffice. The worthy female citizen made herself visible and produced tangible results. And, as the reports strove to show, some local

¹⁰² Nowak, "Constant Conversations: Agitators in the League of Women in Poland during the Stalinist Period."

¹⁰³ *Drumul Femeii*, “Sa stam de vorba (Let’s talk)”, July 1945, p. 19

activists did fulfill this vision. For instance, the members of the UWAR from Cluj county were reported to have mended clothes and collected crockery for an orphanage in the city. What is more, together with other organizations, they submitted a memoir to the City Hall for the general improvement of the institutions' situation¹⁰⁴. While this is an example of involvement constructed around the organizations' maternalist program for child protection, some local chapters were praised for their members' willingness to go beyond traditional gender roles for the sake of the common good. The magazine of the UAWR praised the work of two local chapters, whose members had contributed to the rebuilding of roads and the creation of a dike. The article stated that: "*City works, which in different times would have never made the objects of women's preoccupations, were realized due to their commitment in work.*"¹⁰⁵

As discussed by Barbara Evans Clements, the Zhenotdel emphasized local initiative and women's reliance on other women in order to get things done¹⁰⁶. Similarly, the UAWR praised local action and women's initiative, despite the fact that the central leadership also continued to emphasize that women struggled alongside men for a better future, albeit with special methods¹⁰⁷. For example, writer and RCP member Elisabeta Luca stated that "*Us, women, we understood that only we alone can solve our problems, consolidate the basis of the family and create a happy life for our children. Noone imposed this work on us. By ourselves we came up with the initiative, with our experience from everyday life and started off on the road to*

¹⁰⁴ Drumul Femeii, "Popasuri in cateva orase din Transilvania (Stops in several Transylvanian towns)", January 1947, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Drumul Femeii, "Femeile au realizat (Women have achieved)", April 1947, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Clements, "The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel."

¹⁰⁷ Drumul Femeii, "Meetingul Uniunii Femeilor Antifasciste (The meeting of the Union of Antifascist Women)", August 1946, 10.

achievements. *This is what practical democracy means.*¹⁰⁸” Also, Alexandra Sidorovici, vicepresident of the UAWR mentioned how “*in factories, our UAWR women went, together with union representatives, in the offices of the owners and shook up the passivity and malevolence of some and had no rest until they saw the creation of the first kindergartens and maternity houses.*”¹⁰⁹ It should be mentioned however that local initiative and a degree of autonomy may have been mentioned also because the UAWR was not supported financially by the state. The organization relied on members’ dues and donations for its limited funds. Or, as one leader of the organization put it: “*We have no funds, but we have the power to persuade.*”¹¹⁰

Finally, when representing the work of local chapters, the *Drumul Femeii* journalists stressed the physical mobility which accompanied work. Mobilization through the UAWR was associated with travelling, especially to the areas considered most backwards. An article on local chapters in the region of Transylvania gives a sense of the expectation of ubiquity formulated by the central organization. It stated that:” *More and more women are becoming aware of their higher purpose in the democratic regime and understand that their activity cannot be limited to the family and to the domain of motherhood, but must aim to ensure a better, fuller, happier life for everyone. They have begun to be present and want to be present everywhere where it is being decided on their fate, on the fate of their children, of the future generation which they are preparing*”¹¹¹.” In fact, one of the most important activities of the UAWR entailed the evacuation of children (some of whom were temporarily sent to Poland and Hungary) from drought-stricken Eastern Romania. The massive operation and its questionable results (many children were

¹⁰⁸ Drumul Femeii, “Dreptul nostru de vot (Our right to vote)”, September 1945, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Drumul Femeii, “Muncim de doi ani (We have been working for two years)”, April 1947, 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Drumul Femeii, “Popasuri in cateva orase din Transilvania (Stops in several Transylvanian towns)”, January 1947, 22.

displaced permanently or simply disappeared) presented travel and movement as diserable. Not only did the reporter meet the children in the train station and interviewed them while travelling, but also followed some of the children all the way to their homes.¹¹²

Of course, the greatest feat of mobility for the mobilization of the population was prior to the 1946 Parliamentary elections. Considered crucial for the final takeover of power by the communists, the elections and voting procedures were to be popularized among women by the UAWR. In her review of two years of UAWR activity, Alexandra Sidorovici stated that: “*A serious political exam which, at the same time, proved the organizational maturity, skill and force of the UAWR was the electoral campaign meant to entrench the victory of democracy in Romania. Thousands of our teams visited each home in turn in the cities and sometimes even in the countryside and clarified for women the importance the strengthening of the democratic regime has upon their status.*”¹¹³ In this case, the “backwardness” of women concerning their formal citizenship rights was countered exactly by women stepping forward to perform citizenship through mobilization.

3.5. “They would not collaborate”: local chapters representing and performing mobilization

The centrally-published materials of the UAWR, by depicting the activity of local organizations in a certain way, also shaped the way in which local activists themselves perceived and portrayed their work in reports sent to the central committee. Some, like the Turda (Cluj

¹¹² Drumul Femeii, “Se intorc copiii din Polonia si Ungaria (The children are returning from Poland and Hungary),” September 1947, 3.

¹¹³ Drumul Femeii, “Muncim de doi ani [We have been working for two years]”, April 1947, 3.

county) chapter, fared better both in performing citizenship and in portraying it in official reports. Others, like the seemingly embattled Satu Mare chapter, struggled, especially because the center's representation of local, engaged citizenship fit their local context uneasily. This subchapter sketches the activity of the Turda "model chapter" and the struggling Satu Mare chapter, based on the few reports and work plans preserved in the Satu Mare county and Turda county archives. While it seeks to create a general image of the often less than energetic activity of these chapters, the subchapter focuses especially on the integration of discourses on backwardness, energetic action, local initiative and mobility into these narratives of civic engagement.

An article from 1947 dedicated to the activity of the UAWR in Transylvania listed the achievements of the Turda chapter: it had opened a kindergarten in a factory, a bazaar for children's toys, collected funds in order to buy clothes and school supplies for orphan children¹¹⁴. One of the first local chapters of the UAWR to be created, the Turda chapter sent comprehensive reports regularly. In October 1945, it organized a tea party for the benefit of war widows and orphans¹¹⁵. In December 1945, it reported that it had organized the "Week of the poor student" and a Christmas tree celebration. Because the central UAWR at this point officially encouraged the collaboration with other women's organizations, the Turda chapter reported that the Red Cross, the Prince Mircea organization and the Reunion of St. Mary had not

¹¹⁴ Drumul Femeii, "Popasuri in cateva orase din Transilvania (Stops in several Transylvanian towns)", January 1947, 22.

¹¹⁵ UAWR Turda, "Raport de activitate pe intervalul 20 decembrie 1945 la 25 Ianuarie 1945 (Activity report for the interval 20 December 1945 to 25 January 1945)", UFAR, 3/1945: 2, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Cluj Napoca direction (Cluj Napoca, Romania).

been responsive to their offer for the creation of a common front¹¹⁶. The authors of the reports seem to have had a good grasp of what was expected of them. In 1946, the chapter reported that it had made two work trips to neighboring towns, in order to hold political meetings. It also mentioned that it was only the UAWR which became involved in the founding committee for the Democratic Federation of Women of Romania. In this way, it portrayed its members as active and committed.

By contrast, the only preserved report of the UAWR chapter from Satu Mare revealed the degree of confusion and disorganization it had to confront. The report, from June 29, 1945 stands out among all the archival records examined (UDWR included) as the most candid. It begins with the following statement : “*By the end of May we received some instructions from Cluj, on the basis of which we began to organize the Union.*”¹¹⁷ The author, Maria Z. then goes on to discuss how the president nominated initially would not accept the position. She then mentions that most of the members are Hungarians, since “*we could not get close to the Romanians.*” Ms. Z. then goes on to mention the most important achievement of the organization in the following way: “*Not only do we not have any funds, we also arranged a tea party on the 1st of July.*” With its emphasis on unsuccessful attempts at mobilizing women, Ms. Z’s narrative is hardly one that perfectly fits the UAWRs image of “womanly achievements”. Nevertheless, the listing of several unsuccessful attempts at organizing creates the image of a tenacious, if solitary spirit of local initiative. Ms. Z’s performance of *aktivnost*, then, was less about enthusiasm and more about

¹¹⁶ UAWR Turda, “Raport de activitate pe intervalul 20 decembrie 1945 la 25 Ianuarie 1945 (Activity report for the interval 20 December 1945 to 25 January 1945)”, UFAR, 3/1945: 2. County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Cluj Napoca direction (Cluj Napoca, Romania).

¹¹⁷ UAWR Satu Mare, “Raport despre miscarea Uniunii Femeilor Antifasciste in Regiunea Satu Mare (Raport on the movement of antifascist women from the Satu Mare region)”, 29 June 1945, UFAR-Filiala Satu Mare, 1/1945:21, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

persistence in battling the local issues (such as ethnic tensions) that the UAWR's magazine, for instance, did not touch upon. Furthermore, the Satu Mare UAWR's attempts at being worthy citizens through mobility were also thwarted. Thus, according to Ms. Z's report, despite the fact that members travelled to the neighboring town of Carei, they were unable to recruit members for the UAWR because the women present at the meeting organized were uninterested in joining a women's organization, preferring to join MADOSZ- The Union of Hungarian Workers.

3.6. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the involvement of the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania in the definition of a quintessentially modern project the Romanian Communist Party was contributing to, while pursuing its immediate political goals: mass political mobilization. I have argued that in the "transition years" towards a communist government women's citizenship became linked not only to their possession and exercise of the right to vote (awarded to all women only in 1946), but also to a Soviet –inspired vision of citizenship that emphasized the need to perform emotions while involved in civic work . Rather than being a straight-forward import from the Soviet Union, this view of citizenship was given domestic interpretations by, for instance, communist intellectuals' involved in the UAWR directing their appeals of involvement mostly towards other intellectuals and the production of discourses which stressed local initiative and physical mobility. Communist citizenship was given further meanings in the process of writing work reports by activists from local chapters, such as the one in Turda or the one in Satu Mare.

CHAPTER 4- THE UDWR'S INTERVENTIONISM: ATTEMPTING TO CHANGE DOMESTICITY AND MOTHERING

4.1. Introduction

Woman-mother and woman-housewife replaced woman-citizen in most UDWR propaganda representations of “ordinary women” beginning with 1948, as the state-now unambiguously ruled by the Communist Party of Romania - began to engineer progress in agriculture, industry and ...people. Or, in the more optimistic words of CPR leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej speaking in February 1948, “*we have all we need to fulfill the historic mission our democratic regime, our democratic forces have taken upon themselves: the liquidation of our economic backwardness, the transformation of Romania in an advanced industrial-agrarian country and ensuring a high living standard for the working masses.*”¹¹⁸ But what did a “higher living standard” entail? Certainly, it encompassed the promise of state provision for material needs. Yet, following the example of the Soviet Union, it also entailed the aspiration of remaking everyday life, of forging a new kind of people in the process of reordering the world. A good part of this task consisted in making women, constructed as the ones in charge of domestic work and caring for children (“children, the future of the country”) alter the ways in which they organized their homes and cared for their offspring. So, when the Union of Democratic Women of Romania (the women’s organization that replaced the UAWR in 1948) changed its statutes in

¹¹⁸ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, The Political Report of the Central Committee of the RWP, 1948 qtd. in Tanase, *Elites and Society*: 30.

1950, it was codifying post-facto a set of priorities that had structured central discourses and local organizational practices since 1948. Thus, a 1950 memo from the Central Committee of the UDWR stated that: “*The UDWR has the task to be especially preoccupied with raising the cultural and housewifely/civic level (ridicarea nivelului gospodaresc) of women from villages and of housewives, to mobilize them for cultural, political life and for the civic tasks of the village and the neighborhood*”¹¹⁹.”

This chapter examines the interplay between the official discourses of a (by 1948) much more coherent central organization and local UDWR discourses and practices in attempting to flesh out how the UDWR contributed to the state’s project of engineering people by constructing a specific vision of rational, modern motherhood and of proper practices relating to domesticity based on the model of the Soviet Union. Rather than dismissing without examination the process of importing Soviet models as an overwhelmingly successful case of imposing mothering and housewifery practices, I aim to show how 1) these attempts at transformation were part of a broad (European, rather than simply Soviet) “high modernist” vision of social intervention meant to secure and improve the strength of the population in an industrializing state as well as bureaucratic control and order and 2) that rather than consisting of a quasi-perfect, socially-atomising process of expanding coercive practices into the “private sphere” it was a flawed process of disciplining women and regulating the family through techniques of “legibilization” and “rationalization”. This flawed process met, within concrete communities, with types of

¹¹⁹ UDWR Central Committee, 1950, “*Indrumar in legatura cu prelucrarea anteproiectului de statut al UFDR (Guidelines concerning the dissemination of the preliminary project for the UDWR statutes)*”, Organizatia Raionala UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1950:181, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

reactions that usually did not heroically pit women and activists against each other, but rather led to processes of internalization, avoidance or accommodation¹²⁰.

I proceed by showing, in the second subsection of the chapter, how the pronatalist policies of the Romanian Popular Republic and the priorities of the UDWR beginning with 1948 fit within a broader “high modernist” vision of state intervention, albeit one decisively shaped by attempts in the Soviet Union of forging distinctively Bolshevik values and practices. I then move on to discuss the discourses and practices through which the UDWR sought to transform the meaning and experience of caring for children and, generally, of physically and socially reproducing the family and how these projects were implemented and reacted to locally by UDWR local activists and, respectively, the women to be “remade”. Building from the themes most salient in the records of the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR (rather than from the centrally-published propaganda materials), I thus examine attempts at reconstituting the relationship between education provided by mothers in the family and the one provided by teachers in schools, the importance of representations of spaces connected to reproduction in the process of reconstructing gender in connection to rational motherhood and the campaign to change the eating and hygiene habits of the population by appealing to women as wives and mothers.

¹²⁰ James Scott, the proponent of the concept, defines “high modernism” as “a strong version (...) of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and North America (...). At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs and (...) an increasing control over nature...” See Scott, *Seeing like a state*: 90-1.

4.2. High-modernism and rational, legible, Soviet domesticity

4.2.1. A “unified” communist women’s organization and the reproduction of the population

If the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania focused on defining citizenship for women and encouraged a kind of mobilization (or representations of it) that revolved around movement and action outside the home, especially, the Union of Democratic Women of Romania (UDWR)-the organization which absorbed in 1948 the UAWR and the few older women’s organizations still functioning between 1945 and 1947, employed similar mobilization techniques, yet defined their activity less in terms of encouraging women’s citizenship and public participation and more in connection to fostering proper domesticity and healthy mothering practices, in order to improve the “welfare of the population”. Created on the 3rd of January 1948, the UDWR’s stated priorities were: improvement of living conditions for the family, “raising women’s cultural level”, combating illiteracy, the protection of mother and child, obtaining equal rights for women and men in the field of law, improving the lives of women from rural areas and full equality in the eyes of the law between legitimate and illegitimate children¹²¹.The objectives of the UDWR were similar to those of the UAWR (discussed in the previous chapter).It differed from the UAWR through its greater administrative capacity, the increasing control exercised by the Romanian Worker’s Party (WRP) and (due to a

¹²¹ Organizations that were absorbed into the UDWR were the UAWR, women’s sections from labor unions, the Women’s Organization from the Plowmen’s Front, Organization of Women from the Magyar Patriotic Union and older women’s organizations that had been taken over by the UAWR. For a more detailed discussion of the organizations absorbed and priorities of the UDWR see Jinga, *Forms of organization*, 68. For an account of the tactics used by the UAWR or the RCP in order to “hollow out” or forbid so-called “bourgeois” women’s organizations see Târau, “From diversity to integration.”

changed international context) the increasingly strong pro-Soviet Union, anti-American rhetoric¹²².

Through the increased emphasis on the protection of mother and child and the improvement of living conditions for the population, the UDWR became part of the state's encouragement of reproduction and the promise of higher living standards. Following a trend in rapidly industrializing states and, more specifically, "the bright example of the Soviet Union", despite the fact that the state had few resources to invest to improve the actual living standards of the population, it created plans and encouraged practices meant to bolster the numbers, improve the health and foster the efficiency of the population. The pronatalist policies of the era, inspired by similar measures in the Soviet Union, are part of the increasing preoccupation with population as resource¹²³. Because of this, the 1948 Constitution, besides specifically stating in art.21 the full equality between women and men, codified women's relationship to the state in terms of their role in the reproduction of the population by stating in art.26 that "*The mother, as well as children up to 18 years of age, enjoy special protection established through law.*"¹²⁴ In 1950, the state began awarding "state family assistance"-aid in money for the children under 5 years of

¹²² The increased control over the UDWR is obvious from the creation of a Women's Section within the Romanian Communist Party in late 1947, meant to "bolster the activity" of the UAWR (and from 1948 the UDWR) and the subordination in 1950 to the Section of Leading Party Organs (*Sectia Organelor Conducatoare de Partid*), which controlled the naming of personnel across the country in such organizations as workers' unions, the Union of Working Youth etc. and the way in which the decisions of the Central Committee of the RWP were being applied by these organizations. See Jinga, *Forms of Organization*, 72.

¹²³ In Gail Kligman's formulation, "The control of societal reproduction was fundamental to the enormous project of socialist transformation. [...] The radical alteration of social relations and the organizing structures of everyday life was a primary objective of the development strategies promulgated by communist planners." Gail Kligman, *The politics of duplicity : controlling reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 22. Also, for a comparative discussion of pronatalist legislation in the USSR and the rest of Europe, see David L. Hoffmann, "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000).

¹²⁴ *The Constitution of the Romanian Popular Republic* (1948), Pro Democracy Association-Legislative Resources, http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/const_1948.php (accessed 13 June 2011).

families who had over 4 children, while in 1952 it began awarding the “Heroine Mother” award to women who had given birth to their first child¹²⁵.

Certainly, the UDWR (especially in its magazines) did discuss aspects relating to women’s experiences as workers, touched upon gender relations and the division of household labor and devoted ample space to letters from readers and to chronicling the activities of local chapters¹²⁶. Nevertheless, the types of activities the UDWR was involved in with most dedication and energy revolved around the remaking of the aforementioned mothering and domestic practices, as evident from the great numbers of prescriptive articles published on child-rearing, cooking and cleaning. More importantly, if magazines the organization published did deal with women as laborers or discussed gender relations with a view to changing them, the records of the Satu Mare county (and also Cluj Napoca county) which I have examined, provide little indication that the UDWR was actually active concerning these topics.

Finally, a notable change compared to the UAWR is a different type of relationship between the central leadership and regular activists. For instance, local chapters or activists continued to be praised, but praise was accompanied by equal doses of harsh criticism and mockery¹²⁷. It can be concluded, therefore, that the organization no longer needed to define itself by making very visible the work of local chapters, since central policies and the means to implement them were much clearer. Instead, “the center” was involved in the state’s attempts of

¹²⁵ Valeria Melega, “Grija pentru mama si copii in RPR (The care for the mother and children in PRR)”, *Femeia (Woman)*, May 1950, 14-5. The “Heroine Mother” award was instituted through Decree 226 of 1 August 1952.

¹²⁶ Several articles in *Woman* magazine encouraged men to help their socially-engaged wives. The titles ranged from “I must help her” to “Letter of a proletarian man to his wife.” However, the theme was touched upon approximately once a year.

¹²⁷ One instance of the change of tone is the representation in the comics on the “Humor” pages of *Woman* magazine (a type of rubric which appeared intermittently throughout the period discussed here) of incompetent local activists, inactive local chapters etc.

making the population “legible” by insisting on uniform, standardized practices and compliance with policy¹²⁸.

4.2.2. Soviet models, European ideas on mothering and domesticity

The intertwining of gendered mobilization, domestic ideologies and social interventionism certainly had precedents in the Soviet Union and counterparts across the Eastern block¹²⁹. Yet the combination could be found in European liberal democracies and in some of their colonies, becoming especially popular in the 19th century. In fact, as Donzelot has argued, French women’s charities (and women in client families themselves) beginning with the 18th century were involved in the transformation of power relations specific to the modern state by instilling the family with regulatory techniques and strengthening the idea of the state as administrator (and thus rational owner) of the population¹³⁰. In this sense, women’s organizations were part of the proliferation of what Donzelot, drawing on Foucault, terms “the biopolitical dimension”, which he defines as “*technologies that invested the body, health, modes of subsistence and lodging-the entire space of existence in European countries.*”¹³¹ Or, in James Scott’s more concrete formulation:

“ The idea that one of the central purposes of the state was the improvement of all the members of society-their health, their skills and education, longevity, productivity, morals, and family life-was quite novel. There was, of course, a direct connection between the old conception of the state

¹²⁸ James Scott identifies legibilization as one of the purposes of all modern states and characterizes it as a preoccupation with creating and imposing “those standardized characteristics that will be easiest to monitor, count, assess and manage” since “the utopian, immanent and continually frustrated goal of the modern state is to reduce the chaotic, disorderly, constantly changing reality beneath it to something more closely resembling the administrative grid of its observations.” Scott, *Seeing like a state*: 82.

¹²⁹ The UDWR had counterparts in most countries which by 1948 were considered to be under the Soviet sphere of influence. In Hungary, the organization was titled the *Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women*. In Poland, the organization was named the *Women’s League*. See Goven, “Gender and Modernism” and Nowak, “The Liga Kobiet in Poland”.

¹³⁰ Jacques Donzelot, *The policing of families* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 18-20.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

and this new one. A state that improved its population's skills, vigor, civic morals, and work habits would increase its tax base and field better armies; it was a policy that any enlightened sovereign might pursue. And, yet, in the nineteenth century, the welfare of the population came increasingly to be seen, not merely as a means to national strength, but as an end in itself.¹³²

Yet, what Scott terms "authoritarian high modernist states" (among which the Soviet Union is an example) inflected their vision of population welfare associated with modern progress in different ways at different times. In the case of the Soviet Union, belief in science and progress was not merely associated with "civilization", but increasingly with a specifically Bolshevik socialist one¹³³. Social engineering projects relating to improving living conditions, access to medical care, combating illiteracy and drunkenness (which David Fox terms "small letter cultural revolution") were couched as much in the language of *progress*, sui generis, as in the language of a specifically socialist culture¹³⁴. The Bolshevik double project of enacting revolution within oneself (especially if one was an activist or Party member) and upon others, was especially evident in the long-winded process of remaking *byt-* everyday life¹³⁵. The values and habits to be instilled in the population at large were those of neatness, punctuality, order and hygiene. According to Hoffmann, these values were the ones social reformers in Western Europe sought to instill in the working classes, perceived as threats to public health and sources of disorder¹³⁶. They were also the qualities associated with a modernist aesthetic which treasured clean lines, order and pattern¹³⁷. Implicitly, they were part of a certain idea of what was good (because rational) and thus necessary to be brought about through social reform. Yet, unlike in other systems, in the Soviet Union during Stalin the emphasis on individualism was replaced

¹³² Scott, *Seeing like a state*: 91.

¹³³ Kotkin, *Magnetic mountain : Stalinism as a civilization*: 14.

¹³⁴ Michael David-Fox, "What Is Cultural Revolution?," *The Russian Review* 58, no. 2 (1999). Also, Hoffmann, *Stalinist values*: 7-10.

¹³⁵ David-Fox, "What Is Cultural Revolution?," 187.

¹³⁶ Hoffmann, *Stalinist values*: 18.

¹³⁷ Scott, *Seeing like a state*: 4.

with an emphasis on collectivism and duty towards the state, as well as on the construction of a household imbued with political consciousness.

In the context of a system that placed a high premium on the strength of its population and its sheer size, the proper education of children in line with the values of Stalinist high modernism became a central priority. In a development which was not unique to state socialist systems, the family in the Soviet Union (and as hinted at previously when discussing the case of Hungary, throughout the Eastern Block) became a site of state intervention¹³⁸. Women were encouraged to give birth, raise their children in accordance with the advice of doctors and medical professionals, maintain clean homes- decorated in line with the tastes of party elites, and both parents were expected to forge a close connection with their children's teachers. The Soviet state reserved the right to remove children from families deemed unfit or to insist on children being sent to summer colonies or camps in order to strengthen their health. Beginning with the 1930s, discipline in schools and deference towards teachers as well as other figures of authority was encouraged, with parents expected to uphold these values within the home¹³⁹.

As Viktor Buchli and David Hoffmann have pointed out, it was especially up to women and the organizations meant to mobilize them to instill these values¹⁴⁰. In the late 1930s, in fact, the celebrated faces of female mobilization were the *obshchestvennitsa*, the wife activists of Soviet industrial managers. They, like the upper-class housewives active in the "masaie rurali"

¹³⁸ Donzelot's *Policing the Family* highlights how the achievement of "government through the family", rather than "of the family" is a process specific to modern state-building in a liberal ideological framework. The apparently paradoxical process of strengthening the family by providing aid, for instance, and weakening it by creating ever-increasing spaces for intervention and regulation is therefore not simply an emanation Marxist ideology functioning in an authoritarian political system.

¹³⁹ Hoffmann, *Stalinist values*: 105-13.

¹⁴⁰ Victor Buchli, *An archaeology of socialism*, Materializing culture (Oxford [u.a.]: Berg, 2000), 81. Hoffmann, *Stalinist values*: 23.

organizations in fascist Italy, codified their domestic practices and sought to instill them upon women working on the state farms their husbands owned¹⁴¹. Although the “*obschestvennitsa movement*” was associated by historians such as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Susan Reid with the *Great Retreat* of the 1930s, Balmas-Neary argues that “*rather than indicating a retreat from the revolutionary, the (...) movement illustrated the attempt to formulate a new and uniquely Soviet culture of daily life (kul'tura byta) in the 1930s, and to devise a system of gender roles which would reinforce that culture*¹⁴².” The gender roles they sought to reproduce strongly linked women with motherhood and domesticity and men with formal labor. Nevertheless, their tireless work for not only hygienic, but also beautiful homes for workers on collective farms and in the dormitories of steel plants expanded the role of the “wife-activist” beyond her own home.

Importantly, as Joanna Goven has shown for the Hungarian DAHW, attempts of women’s organizations to change domestic practices were not only part of a project of transforming people by instilling new values for their own sake. Rather, through the campaigns led by the DAHW (such as the ones for encouraging domestic savings) the state attempted to make domesticity “legible” and thus more amenable to state intervention¹⁴³. A similar attempt at legibilization was at stake in the creation of certain types of spaces and spatial practices. According to Hoffmann, Soviet urban planners and architects, like modernist architects from Western Europe (such as LeCorbusier or Ernst May) aimed to restructure everyday life by designing cities which followed a grid street pattern or imagining communal housing and public

¹⁴¹ Neary, "Mothering socialist society." On *massaismo* see Victoria De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women : Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 102.

¹⁴² Neary, "Mothering socialist society," 397.

¹⁴³ Goven, "Gender and modernism in a Stalinist state," 13; 17.

facilities (such as cafeterias), all meant to instill a sense of order and collectivity¹⁴⁴. Of course, disproportionately large investments in heavy industry, rapid urbanization and overall bureaucratic failure meant that most of these plans did not become real in the Soviet Union, as they remained only an aspiration for the government of the Romanian Popular Republic between 1948 and 1956. As it becomes apparent from the archives of the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR, however, the organization did try to navigate these difficulties in order to fulfill a vision of progress in which, quite possibly, the activists actually believed.

4.3. Mothering discourses

One of the most important ways in which the UDWR sought to modernize motherhood was through discourses which linked mothering with a process of learning and its proper performance to seeking the counsel and accepting the advice of educational and medical professionals. As Seth Koven has shown, certain women in the 19th century politicized motherhood by appealing to the morality and specific knowledge the experience of giving birth and raising children bestowed upon them¹⁴⁵. Some feminist organizations in interwar Romania appealed to women as mothers and, in 1946, the *Drumul Femeii* (“Woman’s Road”) magazine published by the UAWR argued that women’s knowledge as housewives and mothers could be put to good use in understanding and participating in formal politics¹⁴⁶. In 1950, however, the brochure titled “*What the young mother should know*”, published by the UDWR’s publishing house, stated that “*Without guidance, without listening to the advice of the knowledgeable, it is*

¹⁴⁴ Hoffmann, *Stalinist values*: 49-50.

¹⁴⁵ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a new world : maternalist politics and the origins of welfare states* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

¹⁴⁶ “Rolul femeii in statul democrat (Woman’s role in the democratic state)”, *Drumul femeii*(*Woman’s Road*), September 1945, 14.

impossible [for the young mother] not to make the mistakes committed in the times before by her parents. No mother is born with the skills to raise a child. This is why the mother who wants to raise a child who is healthy both in body and in soul will listen to the advice we are giving here and the advice given in the kindergarten, Mother's School or the crèche¹⁴⁷." And, indeed, between 1948 and 1953 the *Woman* magazine and the activists of the UDWR focused on providing specific advice for caring for children and especially for defining the values to be instilled in children by women, who although considered to not have been born qualified for motherhood were still assumed to be those principally responsible for children's education and welfare.

At the height of the Cold War, the normative framework for educating children was given by pedagogical texts written in the Soviet Union and republished in *Woman* magazine. The excerpts from Makarenko's books¹⁴⁸ and reports on the education of children in the USSR stressed the crucial role of the mother in the education of children, the need for a gentle but firm attitude of both parents and the teaching of collectivist values and responsibility toward the state in a way that complemented the efforts of teachers¹⁴⁹. Thus, a 1950 article stressed by a Russian authors stated that although "*the enemies of the USSR make up lies on account of our Soviet family, claiming that in the USSR it is only the school that is in charge of the education of children, while the mother, who is their natural educator, does not have any effect on them¹⁵⁰*", in fact-the author pointed out- both mothers and fathers played an important part in furthering the

¹⁴⁷ Cartea Gospodinei-Ce trebuie sa stie tanara mama (The Housewife's book-What the young mother must know), (Bucharest : UDWR Publishing, 1950), 59.

¹⁴⁸ A.S. Macarenco, "Probleme pedagogice- Educatia prin munca (Pedagogical problems-Education through labor)", *Femeia(Woman)*, January 1950, 12.

¹⁴⁹N. Alexandrova,"Educatia in familie si in scoala in URSS (Education in the family and the school in the USSR)", *Femeia (Woman)*, November 1948, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Idem.

education children received in school. If the articles from Russia published by the magazine constructed an image of a fairly equal partnership between teachers and parents, articles written by Romanian writers were less careful to point out that the state's educational project would not encroach upon parents' roles as "natural educators". For instance, a 1948 article authored by General Inspector of the Ministry of Education, Coralia Calin, recounted the story of a mother who, in a meeting with her daughter's teacher, expressed her unwillingness to allow her child to be taken for the entire summer to one of the seaside colonies organized by the Ministry of Health for the recovery or the strengthening of sickly children's health. The child's teacher attempted to persuade her by reminding her of the health benefits for the daughter who had been sick. Furthermore, the teacher in the story mentioned "*how important it was for her [the daughter's] future, for the way she will see life later-this life that was opening up today free in front of the youth,-is the fact that she will have a responsibility towards the collective in the work of the colony and the impression of independence which she can barely feel at home.*"¹⁵¹ As a final argument before the mother conceded, the teachers stated that, upon the daughter's return, "*with renewed strength she will begin school again and we, both her mothers, will be pleased.*"¹⁵² At the local level, the Satu Mare chapter organized parents' committees and meetings. Rather than conveying the idea of a complimentary partnership between the parents and the school or even how the school lovingly replicated the environment of the family (as the teacher in the story had implied), the UDWR activists involved in making parents more aware of the need to grant increased attention to children heavy-handedly asserted the primacy of the knowledge and values imparted in school and the parents' correct attitude towards educational gains made in school.

¹⁵¹Coralia Calin, "Mame si educatoare (Mothers and teachers)", *Femeia (Woman)*, June 1950, 7.

¹⁵² Idem.

Thus, a 1950 report of the Assistance section of the Satu Mare UDWR stated that: “ *During this month we organized a parents’ committee having totally 8 parents committees with them we have weekly educational meetings as to how children must be educated in the new spirit by following the example of the Soviet mothers they [the women, “ele”] in their turn do persuasion work among the other mothers showing how children must be educated so that they don’t destroy what they [the children] have learned in school*”(sic)¹⁵³.

Furthermore, although the articles about the USSR did mention the involvement of fathers in the education of children through specific activities (such as taking them on trips), the materials distributed by the Central Committee of the UDWR to the Satu Mare chapter, constructed the image of a peasant father whose inability to relate with his children had to be tolerated by the family. Thus, in February 1952, “on the occasion of V.I. Stalin’s birthday”, the Central Committee of the UDWR sent a memo containing the summary of a short story written by the writer Claudia Milian¹⁵⁴. The story, titled “*Tuti, the troublemaker*”, presented the child’s parents as having had no opportunity to learn how to “*teach, respect and educate their child*”, since “*the father of the boy from the story had grown up beaten, humiliated and exploited*”, while “*the mother of the boy, a hard-working woman, loves her son but has no possibility of helping him*¹⁵⁵.” As can be inferred from the story, while the father of the boy is presented as having been somehow emotionally damaged, the loving mother, although willing to help lacks what could be

¹⁵³ UDWR Satu Mare-Assistance Section, “Raport pe interval de timp de la 30 Noembrie pana la 6 Ianuarie 1950 (Report for the interval between 30 November and 6 January),” 10 January 1949, UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1950, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁵⁴ Claudia Milian (1887-1961) is commemorated as symbolist poet, playwright and, especially, as the wife of much better known poet Ion Minulescu.

¹⁵⁵ Central Committee of the UDWR-Section for Protection and Health, “Circulara nr.58 (Memo no. 58”), 2 February 1950, UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1951:13, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

termed “the expertise” to do so. Further proof that the Soviet ideal of co-parenting was not the one promoted by the UDWR as a way of fostering the development of children, but rather that it addressed and charged only mothers with this task is given by the photograph accompanying the “Mothers and Teachers” article discussed above. In the photograph [Annex 1], a smiling girl is pictured with both parents on either side. Yet, the article which it accompanies portrays only the interaction between the mother and the teacher, with no mention of the father or any other man throughout the text. Also, the caption of the photograph reads “ *Grodiskay Iulia, worker at the Ilsa factory in Timisoara decorated with the Order of Labor 3rd class, good mother, good wife and elite worker.*¹⁵⁶” The entire set-up of the page seems to exemplify the way in which the UDWR developed an image of fathers as “absent presences”, one that was quite different from the portrayal of fathers in the texts discussing the Soviet Union.

The new ideas on mothering (rather than parenting) were meant to be imparted to women through so-called Mother’s Schools, at the meetings of the parents’ committees which the UDWR had also set up, in community meetings and through face-to-face, house-to-house conversations (representing so-called “munca de lamurire”-persuasion work). The mothers in Satu Mare county, as can be inferred from the reports, may have displayed a certain interest initially, but were not persuaded to keep on listening, perhaps because of the utter disregard of activists for the knowledge and practices of mothering the women already applied. Thus, the activist responsible for the Protection and Health section of the UDWR reported in 1949 that “*in what regards the mother’s school, women took part in very low numbers and in the end we even*

¹⁵⁶ Coralia Calin, “Mame si educatoare(Mothers and teachers)”, *Femeia (Woman)*, June 1950, 7.

*had to close as there was no point to keep it open with three or four women*¹⁵⁷”. In 1952, although the attendance seems to have improved at least in the initial stages, the same section reported about “sanitary conferences” that *“they were too long and bored the women, so that they did not come back, although we mentioned this and they [the doctor and the midwife] did not shorten and in the end did not come back to hold the conferences*¹⁵⁸.” As it becomes apparent from this incident, having failed to change the minimal terms of their interaction with the doctor and the midwife supposed to transform them, the women in Satu Mare began avoiding them, thus resisting the state’s strategies.

4.4. Improving “the people” through better food and eating

One of the most important areas in which the government of the Popular Republic of Romania was intervening in order to ensure a “higher living standard for the working masses” was food and eating. State planners engaged with this issue by regulating at the macro level the planting, harvesting, collection and redistribution of food staples. Between 1948 and 1953 UDWR activists were involved in remaking food consumption habits at the micro level through campaigns meant to alter household practices concerning eating and through the distribution of food rations to children and/or pregnant women in milk centers, diet kitchens or kindergartens. By constructing women as the ones who needed to continue to be in charge of the preparation of food and its procurement, the state and UDWR activists (who by 1948 were pledging “*to do their*

¹⁵⁷ UDWR Satu Mare, “Raport de activitate al sectiei de ocrotire si sanatate dela data de 1 Aprilie pana la 12 mai 1949(Activity report of the section for protection and health from 1 April to 12 May),” UFDR Satu Mare, 2/1949:33, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁵⁸ UDWR Satu Mare, “Raport general de activitate de pe lunile iulie, august, septembrie 1952(General activity report for the months of July, August, September 1952)” UFDR Raionul Satu Mare, 1/1952 :87, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

best to become part of the great work of the government") entrenched the gendered division of labor within the household and expanded women's "natural responsibilities" to include proper feeding of laboring men and the children, who were "the country's future".(Furthermore, as deVault has shown, the preparation and consumption of meals in a familial setting is an important way through which women's cooking work contributes to the emotional reproduction of the family¹⁵⁹. It could be said, then, that by trying to intervene on how women cook, obtain food and what they feed the nuclear families which-by and large- the state left unchallenged, UDWR activists modified the patterns of emotional attachment within the family.)

The only brief mention of any successes of the Satu Mare chapter of the UAWR in *Woman's Road* magazine in October 1947, when the "Women have achieved" section briefly mentioned that it had organized a successful activity for the preservation of vegetables¹⁶⁰. And, indeed, that women prepare preserves became a preoccupation for the UAWR in the summer of 1947. Nevertheless, it was the larger, more centralized UDWR that would continue this campaign at least until 1953. The magazine of the UDWR exhorted women to plan the preservation of vegetables and fruit for the winter. The "*conscious housewife*" was supposed to preserve around 150 kilograms of vegetables and about 75 kilograms of fruit, if the family had five members. The dried or boiled vegetables, the pickles, the jams were "*absolutely necessary for maintaining health*". Readers were warned, however, that separate quantities of fruit were to be set aside for the guests of the family. Although the housewife was supposed to be thrifty in planning for the winter, "scrimping and saving" was less a priority than the health of the family,

¹⁵⁹ Marjorie L. DeVault, *Feeding the family : the social organization of caring as gendered work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁶⁰ "Femeile au realizat (Women have achieved)," *Drumul Femeii (Woman's Road)*, October 1947, 16.

which could be maintained through a minimum consumption of 125 grams of fruit per day.¹⁶¹ By 1949 the drive for “popular preserves” (*conserve populare*) had become a campaign of the Ministry of Agriculture, as the State Plan for that year included “*the achievement of 4500 tons of preserves in individual homesteads*”¹⁶².

Diligently, Satu Mare activists made efforts each year to mobilize members of the organization or simply inhabitants of the villages they visited to this end. According to a memo from the Central Committee of the UDWR received in July 1949, members of the organization were to be members in the “*Commission for the creation and organization of conservation centers*” in organizing these centers¹⁶³. They were instructed to mobilize “the masses of women” and disseminate the campaign from the level of the County Bureau, “down to the last village and street committee, supporting it with persuasion work (“*munca de lamurire*”) from person to person”¹⁶⁴. According to the detailed instructions sent by the Ministry of Agriculture, the centers were to serve the education of the “*working peasantry, so that it (sic) can make its own preserves necessary for the entire family*”¹⁶⁵. Importantly, kulaks (“*chiaburi*”) were not to be assisted with their preserves. Although it is not clear just how well the canning activity from July 1949 was received by women, it was certainly not a success as far as the Agricultural Center from Seini (a town which was at the time part of the Satu Mare district) was concerned. One of the representatives of the organization wrote to request that the organization pay the perdiems of

¹⁶¹ “Pregatirile de iarna (Preparations for the winter),” *Femeia (Woman)*, Septmeber 1950, 32.

¹⁶² Ministry of Agriculture Memo, 1 July 1949, UFDR Satu Mare, 4/1949:16, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁶³ UDWR Central Committee, “*Circulara in legatura cu munca organizatiilor judetene UFDR in campania de conservare a legumelor si fructelor (Memo concerning the work of UDWR county organizations in the campaign for the preservation of vegetables and fruit)*,” 6 July 1949, UFDR Satu Mare, 4/1949:9, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁶⁴ *idem*

¹⁶⁵ Ministry of Agriculture Memo, 1 July 1949, UFDR Satu Mare, 4/1949:7, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

Marioara C., who had assisted the activists with the Conservation Center and “was even appreciated/became distinguished (‘s-a evidentiat in munca’) in her work”¹⁶⁶. A member of the organization scribbled “*this has already been passed on to Bucharest*”¹⁶⁷, and it is to be assumed that matters were left at that. What this shows, however, is that at least in the eyes of other institutions the organization which was de facto responsible for the campaign for the preservation of vegetables was the UDWR.

The action for vegetable preserves seems to have been among the priorities of the UDWR in 1950 as well. A 1950 *Femeia* article showed how UDWR members assisted the Provisional Committee of the Capital: besides help at the actual centers UDWR activists were present in the markets of the cities, advising the women who shopped for vegetables to take them to the canning center. The magazine portrayed the women benefitting from the Center’s expertise as particularly enthusiastic, as was to be expected. The Centers allowed working women, who had previously been excluded from this practice due to material lack, to become better housewives by ensuring the maintenance of their families’ health. For example, “Maria Militaru, who last year had no preserves, now prepared 50 kilograms of tomatoes.”¹⁶⁸ Not only were the Centers more inclusive of “working women” (while excluding kulaks), the places were more modern and hence could be trusted more. Thus, “they [the women] have become convinced that the methods

¹⁶⁶ Seini Agricultural Center, letter to UDWR Satu Mare county organization, 08 January 1949, UFDR Satu Mare, 3/1949:15, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁶⁷ Idem.

¹⁶⁸ Maria Galis, “Un centru de conservare a legumelor (A center for the preservation of vegetables),” *Femeia(Woman)*, October 1950, 30-31.

used here are much better, cheaper and easier than the dated procedure of preserving with salicilat, which is a substance that is harmful to health.¹⁶⁹”

In 1952 the Satu Mare UDWR reported that although they had insisted that the Popular Councils (which replaced Provisional Committees as effective city halls in 1951) organize Preservation Centers there was no willingness from town administrators and the scarcity of basic items made this initiative impossible. In the frank formulation of the report:

“ We called upon the Popular Council several times, but it (sic) always found different reasons , that they don’t have wood, that they don’t have tubs, and that there are more important problems than the preservation, the commission was called several times, but with our exception no other institution or organization was present and so we could not form the raion commission. We preserved for the kindergartens from the town a quantity of 800 kilograms, but we had difficulties at the kindergartens because we were not distributed small bottles, similarly we could not find any paper for tying and neither did [illegible] ensure in a timely manner fruit and vegetables suitable for preservation.¹⁷⁰”

By 1952 women in Satu Mare whom the conservation center was supposed to benefit were also less than enthusiastic. According to the report, “*with the preservation we also had difficulties among housewives who raised relentlessly the issue that the state shops Alimentara and the Cooperatives are not capable of supplying the town with tying paper, whereas when it comes to private merchants all is possible in large quantities, asking how do they have the possibility these private merchants to stock this merchandise.*”¹⁷¹”

Although one of the most sustained campaigns meant to alter domestic practices by, on the one hand, bringing them in the public sphere and on the other hand, aiming to transform

¹⁶⁹ Idem.

¹⁷⁰ Comitetul Raional UFDR, “*Raport general de activitate de pe lunile iulie, august, septembrie 1952 (Satu Mare, General activity report for the months of July, August, September 1952 Raport general de activitate de pe lunile iulie, august, septembrie 1952)*,” 27 September 1952, Comitetul Raional UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1952:85, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁷¹ Idem.

women's homemaking behavior in their own homes, the campaign for preserving vegetables and fruit was by no means the only major initiative meant to improve the population and transform people's diets that the government implemented through the UDWR. Beginning with 1948, the UDWR was involved in a number of other programs meant to promote the health of children and mothers (especially) through better eating. Among these were the creation of milk centers and vegetable gardens associated with educational institutions such as kindergartens and orphanages.

4.5. (Re)making spaces, redefining motherhood, constructing proper domesticity

The records and publications of the UDWR also testify to attempts at redefining motherhood and the relationship between mother and children through the creation and representation of spaces linked with modern motherhood and familial relationships. By providing certain representations of domestic spaces and encouraging new spatial practices in places associated with physical and emotional reproduction, the UDWR contributed to the ordering and rationalization of the physical and emotional reproduction of children and by extension, of the population. Thinking in terms of spaces in trying to untangle state interventionism in early Stalinist Romania in the domain of motherhood and caring practices is useful, considering that one of the main preoccupations of the central UDWR and, importantly, one taken up conscientiously by UDWR local chapters was the creation and maintenance of spaces connected to children and domesticity. These spaces could be those of the institutions of the fledgling welfare state, such as kindergartens, nurseries, diet kitchens or maternity houses. Or, they could be miniature representations of specialized domestic places, such as the child's room. How were these innovative spaces tied to the improvement of motherhood? What does an

analysis of instructions for organizing and decorating kindergartens, for caring for children's rooms say about assumptions and hopes for the remaking of gender? And what were the meanings of these new types of spaces at the local level, where their material existence was shaped by a number of unforeseen factors?

Social democratic and women's organizations in interwar Bucharest (at least) had organized nursery schools and creches¹⁷². The UAWR sought to do the same after the war, but it seems they were less successful. By 1948, however, the top tiers of the UDWR took the idea of kindergartens and sought to transform them into a well-organized reality across the country. Kindergartens and crèches were rather novel institutions, especially in villages or small towns. Interestingly, they were many times organized in nationalized former private mansions¹⁷³. Thus, perhaps also in order for these places to be appropriated and repurposed in a proper manner, the central organization sent very specific instructions as to how they should be organized. Creches were to be surrounded by trees to prevent pollution, they were to have a special room for consultations and, preferably a special room for mothers who wished to breastfeed¹⁷⁴. In 1948, the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR received a memo about how kindergartens were to be decorated. The instructions offered show quite clearly that although the institutions were meant to allow mothers to work, they were still considered as the only ones in charge of and responsible for caring for children. For instance, based on the assumption that it would be mothers picking up the children, the cloak room was to be decorated with "*sanitary and educational advice for*

¹⁷²The Union of Working Women of Romania, the women's organization associated with the Social-Democratic Party opened a kindergarten in the Parcul Veseliei area of Bucharest. See Elisabeta Ionita, "Uniunea Femeilor Muncitoare din Romania (U.F.M.R.)," *Revista de Istorie* 33, no. 10 (1980): 1917.

¹⁷³ "Grija statului pentru familie (*The state's care for the family*)," *Femeia (Woman)*, October 1950, 20-1.

¹⁷⁴ Ministry of Health-The Department for the Protection of Mother and Child, "*Normele de organizare a creșelor (Norms for the organization of crèches)*," date missing, UFDR Satu Mare, 3/1949:39-43, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

*the mothers*¹⁷⁵”. Although kindergartens (especially) were portrayed as new kinds of places, keeping children safe when mothers were working in factories or on the fields, fostering a love of collectivity in children and promoting their development by being well-lit and well-aired, between 1948 and 1953 the opposite seems to have been true. The Satu Mare UDWR reported that children got injured on one occasion, that some kindergartens needed to close due to lack of firewood or food or that sanitation conditions were appalling¹⁷⁶. Although formally kindergartens the UDWR had set up were taken over by state enterprises or the Ministry of Health in 1949, the organization still remained practically in charge of the endowment and functioning of many of these establishments.

Maternity houses and, interestingly, waiting rooms in train stations were two types of spaces created by the UDWR in order to displace or remake the mothering of new born babies and infants. In a country where infant mortality represented the European high of 20 deaths for every 100 children born¹⁷⁷, maternity houses and improved healthcare, especially in rural areas, were badly needed. However, the creation of maternity houses in rural areas was coupled with the insistence of abandoning traditional practices connected to giving birth to children, such as the assistance of female relatives¹⁷⁸. Their knowledge was dismissed as being based on superstition and their presence in the rational, sanitary space of the maternity house unwelcomed. By contrast, UDWR activists were present at the bedside of the new mother. For example, the activist responsible with the assistance section of the Satu Mare UDWR reported that “ *support*

¹⁷⁵Central Committee of the UDWR- Cultural Section,”*Circulara nr. 22-Indrumari pentru decorarea caminelor (Memo no 22- Guidelines for the decoration of kindergartens)*,” 10 October 1948, UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1948:12, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁷⁶ **Primary sources**

¹⁷⁷ “Problema mortalitatii infantile (The problem of infant mortality)”, *Drumul Femeii(Woman’s Road)*, July 1945, 7.

¹⁷⁸ “What the young mother should know”, 62.

committees [from the UDWR] offer great support in work and are intensely preoccupied with the women who give birth and their babies. They especially deal with the new mothers [lehuza], during the time they spend at the maternity, reading different brochures to them and explaining the *Woman (Femeia)* and *Working Woman (Dolgozo No)* magazines in order to raise the cultural level of the women.¹⁷⁹ In 1949, the Satu Mare chapter also planned to open a waiting room for mothers in the train station of the town¹⁸⁰. The waiting rooms, featured in a 1953 report in *Femeia* magazine, were special areas where mothers could breastfeed, change children or rest when travelling alone. Inspired perhaps by similar waiting rooms set up by the *Women's League* in Poland after the war¹⁸¹, they nevertheless served a different purpose: to protect infants and mothers, wards of the state, by segregating them in a different room¹⁸². Unfortunately, despite the best intentions of the local Transylvanian chapter, the waiting room could not be opened, because the support committee of the UDWR could not provide all the required furniture¹⁸³.

The UDWR and its publications also promoted the creation of spaces specifically-designed for children within the home. The magazine of the organization called upon mothers, “who, we repeat, have an important role in the education of children” to create the best conditions for children to do their school work. Thus, a 1950 article stated that “*the mother can*

¹⁷⁹ UDWR Satu Mare- Health and Protection Section, “*Raport de activitate de la data de 11 iulie la data de 5 august 1949 (Activity report from 11 July to 5 August 1949)*,” 4 August 1949, Comitetul Judetean UFDR Satu Mare, 2/1949:40, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁸⁰ UDWR Satu Mare, “*Raport de activitate al sectiei de ocrotire si sanatate dela data de 1 Aprilie pana in Mai 1949 (Activity report of the section for protection and health from 1 April to May 1949)*”, date missing, Comitetul Judetean UFDR Satu Mare, 2/1949:31, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

¹⁸¹ Nowak, “Serving women and the state: the League of Women in communist Poland,” 31.

¹⁸² “Camera de asteptare la gara (Waiting room at the train station)”, *Femeia(Woman)*, April 1953, 24

¹⁸³UDWR Satu Mare, “*Raport de activitate de la data de 28 martie pana la data de 1 mai 1949 (Activity report from 28 March to 1 May 1949)*,” 3 May 1949, Comitetul Judetean UFDR Satu Mare, 3/1949:57, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

help the child by creating the proper conditions for him to study in silence, in clean air (...). In every room a child's own corner can be found, with a table, an appropriate chair for his height, a small shelf on which to keep his books, notebooks, pencil case.” At the same time, if the mother spoke loudly “with her friends or neighbors” in the same room, she was hampering the child’s development¹⁸⁴. By attempting to standardize the set up of a child’s own space and codify mothers’ appropriate behavior in this area, the UDWR sought to order and rationalize the lives of children, and especially the lives of mothers, through practices relating to domestic spaces. Just how important it was that the proper set up for children’s rooms be internalized by mothers is highlighted by the very detailed instructions received by the UDWR in May 1950 for the organization of the “*How I raise my child*” exhibition in Satu Mare county, on the occasion of International Children’s Day. The exhibition included photographs of Romanian and WIDF officials, slogans and press cut-outs. The centerpieces, however, were the “the preschooler’s corner” and the “corner of the school-age child”. The organization was instructed that the space for the school-age child showcase the same table, shelves and pencils found in the description of the ideal room provided by the above-quoted article¹⁸⁵. The inscription of the exhibition instructions within high modernist processes of legibilization and ordering becomes even more salient when considering James Scott’s argument that when the mastering and remaking of urban space failed, high modernist urban planners sought refuge in miniaturization, scale models, which –like the child’s room in the exhibition space, were through their static, perfect order,

¹⁸⁴ Stela Radulescu, “Munca pentru cresterea copiilor o impletesc cu munca pentru UFDR (I intertwine the work of bringing up my children with the work for the UDWR)”, *Femeia (Woman)*, May 1950, 8.

¹⁸⁵ UDWR Central Committee-Section for Protection and Health, “Circulara nr.70- Instructiuni pentru amenajarea expozitiei (Memo no.70-Guidelines for organizing the exhibition)”, 22 May 1950, Comitetul Judetean UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1950:61, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

completely legible¹⁸⁶. Although it is not clear just how many families adopted this spatial organization, the Satu Mare UDWR was happy to report that the exhibition enjoyed tremendous success, having been visited by 800 people¹⁸⁷. The UDWR therefore did its best in appealing to mothers to change their homes and, it was hoped, the behavior of children, bringing them closer to the standard and, thus, the logic of the state.

4.6. Conclusions

In this chapter I have sought to show how the Union of Democratic Women of Romania was involved in furthering the state's high modernist goal of improving the population through the transformation of mothering and domesticity. I argued that although this type of interventionism was inspired by practices in the Soviet Union, it was inflected in specific ways in the Romanian context. The chapter has focused on the UDWR's attempts at rationalizing motherhood, changing eating habits within the family through the organization of food conservation centers and the creation of spaces that strongly linked women with their roles as mothers. In tracing how the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR sought to implement the central organizations' vision of state intervention and was hampered by women's disinterest of the unwillingness of local authorities to cooperate, I highlight how small tactics and contingencies hampered, at least temporarily, the state's capacity of intervening to transform women.

¹⁸⁶ Scott, *Seeing like a state*: 57.

CHAPTER 5- HARDSHIPS AND MODERATE SUCCESS: UDWR REPORTS ON COLLECTIVIZATION IN SATU MARE COUNTY (1949- 1952)

5.1. Introduction

In February 1949, a meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the RWP which discussed the activity of the UDWR, set new priorities for the organization. From then on the organization was meant to support the process of creating cooperatives in villages and ensure that harvest quotas were handed in by peasants¹⁸⁸. Thus, this discussion involved the UDWR from 1949, until its disbandment in 1953, in the process of “socialist transformation of agriculture”. As Iordachi and Dobrinu have argued, this transformation (whose main component was not the instituting of harvest requisitioning but the full-out “collectivization” of land and other means of agrarian production) “*led to the restructuring of social, political and economic relations in the rural world. With the goal of building a socialist economy, the party-state penetrated the lives of rural communities and institutionalized its control over production and revenues*”¹⁸⁹. In carrying out the “persuasion work” for collectivization among peasants, UDWR activists joined other party cadres, members of the Militia, local notables and students mobilized from the city for these purposes¹⁹⁰. UDWR activists, of course, were expected to reach out primarily to women. In the case of Satu Mare county, specifically, the work of drawing women on the side of the state’s project of transforming agriculture was occurring, as it were, under the

¹⁸⁸Jinga, "Forms of Organization of Work with Women," 69.

¹⁸⁹Iordachi, *Transforming peasants, property and power : the collectivization of agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962*, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land," *East European Politics & Societies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 368.

eyes of the rest of the country, since Maria Zidaru- the first woman president of a Collective Agricultural Farm and the female face of propaganda for collectivization- lived and worked in the Satu Mare village of Paulesti. In this context, how did Satu Mare UDWR activists become involved in collectivization? And how did they make themselves appear successful to a Central Committee of the UDWR which had turned Satu Mare county, through the image of Maria Zidaru, into an example of women's participation in this social engineering project? Did it matter at all for activists on the ground that central propaganda had pushed the relative *hinterland* that was Satu Mare county to the forefront of the "debate" on collectivization or did they define their success not in relation to the image and story of Maria Zidaru, but rather in connection to other definitions of achievement?

In seeking to answer these questions, this subchapter focuses on the role of the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR in the process of collectivization between 1949 and 1952, the type of reactions and obstacles their "persuasion work" encountered on the ground and rhetorical strategies used by members of the Satu Mare UDWR in order to portray their problems and make themselves look successful in the work reports to be sent to the Central Committee of the organization, an organism that was heavily promoting a specific type of successful involvement of women in collectivization through the image of Maria Zidaru. It argues, drawing on the work of Iordachi et al, that because of the extent of the envisioned transformation, activists met in their work with overt opposition from peasants (especially women) but also with attempts of negotiating the terms on which the peasants eventually joined¹⁹¹. Furthermore, because of the tenuous position of the UDWR and criticism received from members of the Central Committee,

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

local activists engaged in attempts of portraying the less than ideal results achieved on the ground as instances of successful activism. Because this representation of successful activism as well as details of the obstacles encountered in their work revolved around portraying the capacity to negotiate situations ad hoc, on the ground, the story of Maria Zidaru did not serve as a resource to draw on for the activists. In fact, the narratives of “work obstacles” and portrayals of moderate success in the work reports of activists underscore the way in which local activists sought to negotiate (like the peasants) what the state expected of them and what they could deliver. I proceed by sketching the contours of the process of socialist transformation of agriculture in Romania between 1948 and 1953 (the so-called “first wave of collectivization”) and of the interactions between peasants and activists in the process. I then analyze the biography of Maria Zidaru, as published in the propaganda booklet titled “Why Maria Zidaru joined the collective farm” with a focus on the terms in which her story was constructed to portray her as an exemplary woman. The last analytical section of this chapter focuses on the reports issued for the Central Committee by the Satu Mare UDWR during this period. I flesh out the obstacles activists had to confront in their work, how these were negotiated and the way they attempted to represent these intermediary results as instances of successful “persuasion work”. I conclude by restating the main arguments made throughout the chapter.

5.2. Intense, uneven dialogues: Activists and peasants negotiating the “first wave” of collectivization

The process of collectivizing land in Romania occurred in two major waves, the first spanning the years 1949-1953 and the other occurring between 1957 and 1962. Both waves knew periods of increased coercion of middle peasants and so-called *chiaburi* (the Romanian

equivalent for *kulaks*), but by and large, during the first wave (in whose promotion the UDWR was involved) the top-level emphasis seems to have been on gradual changes, persuading peasants to join “of their own free will” (a formulation later changed to the more ambiguous “of their own initiative”) and avoiding coercion, deportations and land confiscations¹⁹². In fact, although Soviet “advisors” were pushing for speeding up the pace of collectivization, RWP leaders (especially Ana Pauker) hoped to get peasants to sign their land away as peacefully as possible¹⁹³. In fact, this “right deviation” (the gradualist approach to collectivization and opposition to coercion) would be one of the accusations brought against Pauker following her arrest in 1953¹⁹⁴.

The techniques used in order to create an “inner state of belief” in the benefits of joining *Gospodarii Agricole Colective* (“Collective Agricultural Farms”-GAC) included propaganda through films and written materials, socialist contests, denunciations, letter- and petition-writing and instigations to class war¹⁹⁵. Nevertheless, the technique that was employed most prominently in Romanian villages was that of face-to-face *munca de lamurire* (“persuasion work”). As Verdery and Kligman have shown, this type of work was carried out by very different categories of individuals, from party cadres brought from outside the villages or members of the Militia to village notables or workers and students brought in from cities¹⁹⁶. Importantly, as it emerged from the archival research and oral history interviews conducted by Verdery, Kligman and their

¹⁹² Iordachi, *Transforming peasants, property and power : the collectivization of agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962*, 27;33-34.

¹⁹³ Verdery and Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land," 362.

¹⁹⁴ Levy, *Ana Pauker*.

¹⁹⁵ Verdery and Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land," 362.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 368.

collaborators, the activists were ill-prepared (because of little ideological and practical training) for the task of enabling peasants to imagine their future, bright lives on the collective farms¹⁹⁷. This lack of confidence and their (often) outsider status made them more prone to appealing to coercion when all else failed and also of accepting and even encouraging peasants' mere performance of persuasion. Furthermore, the incompetence of cadres transformed their attempts at manipulating kinship ties and (of greater relevance for the discussion here) gender, as well as space and time into what Kligman and Verdery term an "intensely dialogic", interactive process in which the peasants targeted sought to negotiate, stall and avoid their joining Collectives¹⁹⁸. Thus, if activists sought to persuade peasants to join by lying that other relatives had already signed up for GACs, peasants manipulated kinship ties by splitting up multi-generational households in order to reduce food requisitioning quotas¹⁹⁹. When teams of persuaders went against village customs by visiting households at odd hours or not waiting to be invited within homes, peasants would counter by subverting the formality of the encounter (through offering alcohol or food)²⁰⁰.

Gender hierarchies and gender relations were manipulated on both sides. On the one hand, activists sometimes resorted to making women sign for both themselves and their husbands. Interestingly, though, the party's policy that all adult members of the family sign the "requests" to join collective farms provided the motivation for some men not to sign. Specifically, men would argue that their wives did not allow them to join the farms or that some

197 Verdery and Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land," 382.

198 Ibid., 368-73.

199 Ibid, 373.

200 Verdery and Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land," 374.

of the land belonged exclusively to a woman in their family, who was reluctant to join²⁰¹. On the other hand, women would invoke their powerlessness within the family when asked to sign for joining in the absence of their husbands. And, beyond strategies of stalling and negotiation, it seems that women genuinely mounted quite staunch opposition to collectivization, arguing in the names of their children's futures, their daughter's dowries and blaming their irresponsible husbands when claiming back their land²⁰².

The Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR became involved ever since 1949 in the work of persuading villagers (and especially women) to support the policies of the government which would transform agriculture. As their work reports show (and as I will detail later on), they employed similar tactics and faced like reactions to the ones discussed by Kligman and Verdery. In fact, the reports of the UDWR on the topic read to a certain extent like “narratives of work hardships”, in which the opposition mounted by women from villages, logistical issues and their own lack of preparation were some of the ways in which they justified the less than stellar results of their work. What is surprising in the presence of consistent reports of “work hardships” is that they were being sent by a county (and later, raion) chapter which was associated in propaganda brochures and articles from *Femeia* (“Woman”) magazine with women's enthusiasm for and decisive role in the GACs. Yet although Maria Zidaru, president of the model GAC named “Lenin's Flag”, lived in the Satu Mare county village of Paulesti, UDWR activists never mentioned her (albeit mentioning the name of the farm she led) and Zidaru's presence in the

²⁰¹ Idem.

²⁰² Idem.

county does not seem to have been perceived as a factor complicating the relationship between the county chapter of the UDWR and the organizations' Central Committee²⁰³.

5.3. The Center's rhetorics of triumphing over hardships: The Story of Maria Zidaru

But who was Maria Zidaru from the Satu Mare village of Paulesti and what kind of link between women and collectivization did she represent? Charged with aiding in the process of transforming agriculture, the central propaganda of the UDWR promoted a specific type of discourse on gender and collectivization through the story and the image of Maria Zidaru in special brochures and in magazine articles. A 1950 booklet distributed by the UDWR and titled “*Why Maria Zidaru joined the collective farm*” described her as a “small, dark woman with bright eyes, with her head wrapped in a blue scarf”, whose 1950 speech at the UDWR Congress in Bucharest caused great enthusiasm among the women present²⁰⁴. Maria Zidaru was celebrated by the UDWR and RWP because she was the first woman president of a GAC, running one of the model farms created early on, in 1949. While the title of the brochure would seem to indicate that it dwelled on the reasons for Maria joining, it is in fact a presentation of her life story in which the only concrete motivation for becoming involved in collectivization is her desire to escape from and move beyond the hardships which had marked the childhood she spent as a servant in the houses of different landowners and merchants.

²⁰³ A report from June 1950 states that “Wheat harvesting was made with great celebration in some places it even finished as for example at the Lenin’s Flag Collective Agricultural Farm from the village of Paulesti where they finished the harvesting with a celebration.” Maria Zidaru’s name is conspicuously absent in this and other reports dealing with collectivization. UDWR Satu Mare, “*Raport General pe luna Iunie 1950 (General report for the month of June 1950)*”, 3 July 1950, 1/1950:264, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²⁰⁴ *De ce a intrat Maria Zidaru in Gospodaria Agricola Colectiva* (“Why Maria Zidaru joined the Collective Agricultural Farm”)(Bucharest: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Roman, 1950), 6.

Maria Zidaru is presented as stating that she felt unworthy of the role of president when she was nominated, but that she remembered “*the words of Comrade Stalin-which I know by rote-that women in the collective farm are a great power.*”²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the brochure also mentions the support her husband had offered and the fact that he was a war invalid and factory worker. So, rather than merely promoting the image of a woman for whom the GAC was an opportunity to go beyond traditional gender norms regardless of familial obligation, this propaganda tract underscored reasons why the husband was not very much present in her work in a way that de-emphasized the fact that a negotiation of gender roles may have had to occur within the Zidaru family.

The relationship between this exemplary woman and RWP cadres as represented in the brochure is one of subordination. Zidaru is presented as mentioning repeatedly the priceless advice and support of the party and the government. For instance, she is quoted as saying : “*The party and the government helped us, oh they helped us so much. That is when we saw just how much the help of the party means. Ceaseless organizational support, endowments with land and other auxiliaries (acareturi).*”²⁰⁶ Not only was Maria Zidaru grateful for the support of the party, she was also shown as having an unquestioning belief in the advice and instructions received from activists and of being capable of instilling this belief into other, initially reluctant villagers. For example, Ana Costan, a woman working on the GAC under the leadership of Maria Zidaru, is presented as saying that :

“About the collective I did not think many good thoughts, because that’s what the rumors were back then. Maria and other comrades from the party came to me to entreat me to join. I told them I cannot take the step before I discuss this with my son, because he

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 19.

²⁰⁶ Ibid,26.

is more knowledgeable than we are. When I asked him, he said it was a must that we join, since there is no other way towards happiness.²⁰⁷”

The president of the “Lenin’s Flag” model GAC is also presented as taking over certain rituals and also introducing new forms of celebration into the village. For example, she is presented as becoming involved in the matchmaking process and the weddings of young men and women. Thus, the brochure narrates how:

“Maria Zidaru likes to tell how it was with her own marriage and how it is now with the marriage of women from the collective agricultural farm.’Well, when we married three girls this spring, we made them great, big weddings (*‘le-am facut o nunta pana in pod’*). Because it is a great honor in the village to be married after the boys in the collective!...Otherwise, I don’t marry our girls after bad boys, or drunkards or lazies...No! Only after the dedicated, who like to work. Otherwise, no!²⁰⁸”

But not only did Maria Zidaru act (at least in the propaganda depictions of this GAC president) to transform village marriage rituals towards their compliance with the policies and values promoted by the state, under her leadership the farm was to be a site for the “food of the mind of our comrades.²⁰⁹” This transformation was being achieved, according to the brochure, through cultural teams which organized a choir, a dance team and a theatre troupe. Also, the model farm had a cinema which showed Soviet films and a small library, frequented in increasing numbers by the villagers²¹⁰. Thus, what the Central Committee of the UDWR and the Party wanted to show about collectivization and what it was indirectly showing about collectivization in the Satu Mare area was that it was a resounding success, politically, economically and culturally.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 11.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 33.

²¹⁰ Idem.

5.4. Languages of hardship and mentions of success: Reporting on UDWR attempts to draw women on the side of collectivization in Satu Mare county

Yet, could some of the party “foot soldiers”-the UDWR activists- involved in the process of transforming agriculture draw on these very localized representations of success? And was this sudden presence of the rather remote area of Satu Mare into the national press an incentive to be more diligent or at least try to appear as such for UDWR activists? The answer seems to be negative. In fact, if the narrative of Maria Zidaru’s presidency over the Paulesti GAC is one of triumph over hardships (as well as devoid in its turn of references to the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR) the work reports on the “persuasion work” carried out by UDWR activists are marked by accounts of insuccesses and obstacles. In this context, UDWR members authoring the reports sought to redefine ”success” in their work not in connection to the achievement of the tasks or surpassing of their targets, but in relation to their ability to negotiate complicated situations and achieve intermediary results. Based on this, the process of the “socialist transformation of agriculture” and women’s inclusion in it could be seen as unfolding in between central requirements and discourses and local attempts to reinterpret them based on the multiple reactions among the villagers to be persuaded.

One of the most telling examples of the ways in which realities on the ground contradicted the discourses put forward by the Central Committee of the UDWR and were manipulated in activists’ reports concerns the organization’s attempt to have another woman elected as president of a collective farm in a different village than Paulesti. In July 1950, the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR reported briefly on the number of women involved in the leadership of collective farms by stating that: *“In our county 2 new Collective Agricultural Farms were*

*created and we have 7 women in the leadership.*²¹¹” The brief mention, followed by reporting on an unrelated topic, would seem to indicate that in including it in the report the local UDWR was merely fulfilling a demand for information from the central organization, rather than mentioning an activity to which it was actually committed²¹². Nevertheless, another report from July mentioned that the organization did try to get a woman elected to be president of a new collective farm. The report mentioned that:

“During this month a collective farm was created in the village of Lazuri, Someș district. In this village we have a good comrade who is the secretary of the UDWR village committee. This comrade was nominated to be the president of the collective farm, but we had difficulties because of the men who did not want to accept because they were not persuaded/clarified (“*nu erau lamuriti*”) with regard to women’s work and did not have confidence. Other reasons they did not have.-But the comrade was elected in the Leadership Committee.²¹³”

As it becomes clear from the report, in contrast with the support enjoyed by Maria Zidaru from the men in her village (which the propaganda brochure mentions), UDWR activists had to deal with men’s reluctance to allow women in leadership positions. Interestingly, the author of the report discreetly showed her annoyance at the situation by mentioning that “other reasons they did not have”. Yet, lest the activists appear as completely incompetent, the mention that the next best result- election in the Leadership Committee- was achieved, was added to the document.

²¹¹ UDWR Satu Mare-Cadre Section, “Raport de activitate de la data de 1 Iunie la data de 1 Iulie (*Activity report from the 1st of June to the 1st of July*)”, 1 July 1950, UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1949:62, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania). NB: although the report is from 1950, it was misfiled in the folder numbered 1/1949.

²¹² This brief type of mentions stands in contrast with the sometimes extensive, detailed reports on activities involving celebrations organized for children or fundraisers for the kindergartens.

²¹³ UDWR Satu Mare-Organizational Section, “Raport de activitate de la data de 1 Iulie la data de 1 August (*Activity report from the 1st of July to the 1st of August*)”, 29 July 1950 (sic), UFDR Satu Mare, 3/1950:62, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

The promotion of women in the leadership of collective farms was nevertheless not a major priority for the Satu Mare UDWR in connection with collectivization. Far greater importance was given to conducting “persuasion work” in villages, by using similar techniques to the ones mentioned by Kligman and Verdery. Thus a Work plan from 1950 set as its target to deploy activists into 35 villages where collective farms were scheduled for opening. The activists were supposed to organize meetings in which to discuss the content of brochures, reading groups on kolhozez in the USSR, create wall gazettes and encourage letter-writing for women in cities. Also, activists from the county-level bureau of the UDWR were supposed to train the wives of men who had already joined the farms to carry out persuasion work²¹⁴. Furthermore, a meeting of the Central Committee of the UDWR with representatives of local chapters from each county gave more detailed instructions on how the work promoting collectivization was to be carried out and described what the failings of the organization had been, across the country, up to that point. Specifically, the UDWR was to grant more attention to the collection of food quotas and avoid the generation of riots similar to the ones which had occurred in Ialomita county (in Southern Romania). Also, activists were barred from using “pompous words” in their face-to-face persuasion work with women and were expected to tailor their work methods based on whether the farm in a specific village was older or had just been created. (Unfortunately, the instructions

²¹⁴ UDWR Satu Mare, “ *Plan de munca de felul cum va duce organizatia noastra munca de lamurire in acele comuni care au inaintat cereri pentru a lua fiinta noi Gospodarii Agricole Colective.(Work plan on the way our organization will lead persuasion work in those villages which have submitted requests for the creation of new Collective Agricultural Farms)*”, 23 January 1950, UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1950:9-10, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

did not mention just what was meant by this kind of adaptation). And, the County Bureau was to make sure that women who were UDWR members also joined collective farms.²¹⁵

The way in which an activist put down the minutes of the meeting from Satu Mare in which the instructions of the Central Committee were imparted to the County Bureau members provide important clues to the rapport local activists established with the Central Committee. Thus, the entire *Proces Verbal* (“meeting minutes”) is formulated in the imperative mode, with phrases structured around the syntagm “we must”, a lengthy list which was not followed by any kind of debate on the contents of the guidelines. Instead, members present simply nominated members charged with supervising the fulfillment of the guidelines²¹⁶. It can be concluded therefore that whatever negotiation of requirements and guidelines occurred was carried out not in an overt, formalized manner but very much took the form of local improvisation which was later justified in reports. Based on the reports of the Satu Mare chapter, the obstacles the activists had to respond to on the ground more often were direct challenges from women and other peasants, the unwillingness of their own activists to join the GAC and lack of resources to carry out the work. These difficulties were dealt with concretely, on the ground, by appealing to different kinds of ready-made arguments and strategies(such as blaming the kulaks, performing so called un-maskings) but were also recounted and justified to different degrees in work reports.

Thus, in 1949 UDWR activists dispatched to encourage peasants to sow their land (in order to ensure the production of enough harvests the state could redistribute) gave the following

²¹⁵ UDWR Satu Mare, “Proces Verbal dresat in ziua de 23 Iulie 1950, in sedinta de birou, unde s-a preluat instructiunile primite la Conferinta CC-ului in conferinta cu secretarele judetene (Meeting minutes created on the 23rd of July 1950, in the bureau meeting, in which the instructions received at the CC Conference with county secretaries was presented)”, 23 July 1950, UFDR Satu Mare, 1/1950:66-69, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²¹⁶ Ibid, 69.

account of an incident in the village of Batarci: “A *poor woman but influenced by the chiaburi charged towards our activists using very serious words, driving them away that the peasants know when to sow their land and do not need their advice. Going closer to the woman, the activists realized that she was drunk.*”²¹⁷“Although the report’s author’s sense of outrage about the incident is evident from the vivid description she provides, she moves on to transform the situation from one in which the legitimacy of the activists’ intervention was perhaps rightfully challenged to finding an excuse for the “poor woman” by appealing to the argument connected to “class war”. The report therefore continues with the mention that:”*The attitude of this woman as discussed in the plenary meeting of the entire Village Committee [of the UDWR], where a number of other women spoke reaching the conclusion that she was given liquor by some chiabur of the village.*”²¹⁸ Of course, there seems to have been no basis for stating that it was the class enemy intoxicating the peasant, yet by mentioning this as well as the formal steps taken to deal with the conflict (the organization of a Village Committee meeting), the activist authoring the report found a way to make “the persuaders” appear competent. This was described in this way even though they were obviously aiming towards appeasement in the village (i.e. rather than insisting on combating the drunk woman, they seem to have accepted the conciliatory conclusion of the other speakers that it wasn’t, really, the woman’s fault).

If in 1949 the UDWR activists aimed towards downplaying tensions, in recounting in 1950 a similar incident to the one in the village of Batarci, the author of the report did not attempt to define successful accomplishment of tasks in relation to how peacefully the situation

²¹⁷ UDWR Satu Mare, “*Raport de activitate pe luna Oct. 1949 (Activity report for the month of Oct. 1949)*”, 31 October 1949, UFDR Satu Mare, 2/1949:11, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²¹⁸ Idem

was handled. On the contrary, in this instance-marked by the escalation of tension, the organization was made to appear successful specifically because it had managed to garner the kind of commitment from village women which would generate a violent response against dissenters. The report from February 1950 narrated the incident in the following way:

“On the occasion of the conference where we imparted (“s-a prelucrat”) the decisions of the WIDF councils from Moscow and Peking in the great meeting where about 400 women attended in the village of Negresti the district of Oas we unmasked a *chiabur* [kulak] T. Irina who interrupted the conference held by the delegates from the County saying that not to blame the *chiaburi* so much because they are honest people and there in their district there are no *chiaburs* not even poor people because all the people are the same and in that moment the women began an agitation against her saying that even she is a *chiabura* and she was the one who did not pay the salary of the farm help. The women almost beat her, her member’s booklet was taken away.²¹⁹”

In this instance, the report author seems to remark proudly on how it was the simple members (not the “County delegates”) who rose against the woman who, essentially, challenged the UDWR’s definition for *chiaburi*. The activists “from the County” simply followed what is to be assumed was the procedure which signified exclusion from the UDWR, the withdrawal of the membership booklet. Also although it was the victim herself who spontaneously challenged the UDWR activists, in the report the incident was portrayed as the fulfillment of the ritual of “unmasking enemies of the people”. Of course, the UDWR also appealed to the Securitate when situations became too complicated to handle, thus switching from negotiation tactics to coercion. For instance, also in 1950, a UDWR report mentions that in the villages of Mediesul Aurit and Tarsolt, “*where we are facing great hardships*”, “*we were forced to call the Securitate for a few days because the chiaburi there were making bad agitation*”

²¹⁹ UDWR Satu Mare- Cadre Section, “*Raport de activitate sectiei cadre dela 1 Ianuarie la 1 Februarie 1950 (Activity report of the cadre section from January 1st to February 1st 1950)*”, 2 February 1950, UDWR Satu Mare, 1/1950: 26, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

so that the people ran in the forests²²⁰.” Faced with peasants’ strategy of fleeing, the UDWR thus abandoned persuasion work. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the organization appealed to the police not in dealing with women, but most likely in dealing with the men who were leaving their homes²²¹.

If peasants misrepresented gender relations in avoiding the activists (such as through women sometimes overemphasizing their lack of power within the family while the husband had fled), the activists also appealed to gender stereotyping when trying to account in their reports for not fulfilling their objectives concerning collectivization. For instance, one report on “*the great hardships we had with women in the village of Dara*” assigns these difficulties to the political unreliability of women, manifest in “*the launching of rumours, because they [‘our women’] are the first ones to believe them.*”²²² The rumours the women believed were spread by a “reactionary”, who-like the activists, went from home to home-telling women that if they joined the collective farm “*their children will be taken away and not even the house or the pots will remain in their property.*”²²³ The political backwardness of women, the report noted, was to be countered by the “persuasion work” of UDWR activists; yet the political level of the persuaders was deficient as well, a situation for which the County Commission assumed some of the guilt and committed to changing.

²²⁰ UDWR Satu Mare- Organizational Section, “*Raport de activitate dela 1 Iulie la 1 August 1950 (Activity report of July 1st to August 1st 1950)*”, 29 July 1950 (sic), UDWR Satu Mare, 3/1950: 19, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²²¹ As Verdery and Kligman have noted, it was most often the men who fled in order to avoid being pressured to join the collective farms, leaving the women to deal with the activists and invoke patriarchal norms in refusing to sign. Verdery and Kligman, “How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land,” 374.

²²² UDWR Satu Mare- Cultural Section, “*Raport de activitate de la data de 31 Decembrie 1949 pana la 31 Ianuarie 1950 (Activity report from December 31st 1949 to January 31st 1950)*”, 2 February 1950, UDWR Satu Mare, 3/1950: 38, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²²³ Ibid, f. 39.

Besides the peasants' opposition, the UDWR reported "hardships" connected to its own institutional weakness and the indiscipline of members. Thus, similarly to the situation in other regions, the Satu Mare UDWR's own activists were not fully persuaded themselves by the benefits brought by collectivization²²⁴. In connection to this the County Committee of the UDWR reported that two members of the Ratesti village committee and the secretary of the Mediesul Aurit village committee "*are not persuaded and are giving us hardships*"²²⁵. The solution found was to bring a UDWR activist from outside the villages, a tactic which was not reported to have fully changed the state of affairs, but rather to have "*somewhat improved the situation*"²²⁶. The result was deemed good enough however for the author to mention that they were waiting for the approval of the Central Committee of the RWP for the opening of the collective farm. On the other hand, the organization justified failings in their work by mentioning the numerical weakness of the organization and the strains placed on it by the multitude of tasks received from the Central Committee of the UDWR. For instance, a report which mentioned the "unhealthy atmosphere" in the village of Belciug (owing to the presence of nuns combating collectivization) recognized the need for more "persuasion work" among the villagers there, something which could not be achieved because the activist assigned to the area was needed back at the County Committee. Following short-notice instructions from Bucharest, the UDWR

²²⁴ Verdery and Kligman, "How Communist Cadres Persuaded Romanian Peasants to Give Up Their Land," 364.

²²⁵ UDWR Satu Mare- Organizational Section, "*Raport de activitate dela 1 Iulie la 1 August 1950 (Activity report of July 1st to August 1st 1950)*", 29 July 1950 (sic), UDWR Satu Mare, 3/1950: 22, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²²⁶ Idem.

was to focus on popularizing the 1950 Congress of the UDWR; because of limited resources, this entailed neglecting other tasks²²⁷.

Nevertheless, in some instances, the UDWR reports do discuss situations of unqualified success in their “persuasion work”. These mentions point to the way activists understood for themselves and portrayed for others the creation of “an inner state of belief” in collectivization. In May 1949, for instance, the work report for the month of March stated that: “*In the work the women have put in around state farms we can see that their love for the good of the state, the common good of everyone, was roused.*”²²⁸ In December 1949, one report described the positive change in women’s beliefs after the activists’ intervention. After mentioning that in the village of Negresti, “*the women are restless about the problem of the kolhoz*”, since they had been told that in the collective farm they would have to eat meals served “*from a cauldron, and everyone would have to comply*”²²⁹. Yet, after they discussed with the UDWR activists and were told about the lives of people in kolhozez, “*we could notice peace setting in women’s souls.*” As can be inferred from these reports, activists’ were looking not merely for the performance of the belief, but for visible changes in women’s emotions, from uncertainty towards love and inner peace. Yet, because of the scale of the upheaval wrought by collectivization, the Satu Mare activists had very few opportunities to observe the genuine effects of persuasion among peasant women. Instead, it seems they were trying point out in their reports how their own competence,

²²⁷ UDWR Satu Mare, “Raport de activitate pe langa comunile unde s-au infiintat GAC-uri (Activity report on the villages where GACs were created)”, 5 May 1950, UDWR Satu Mare, 3/1950:19, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²²⁸ UDWR Satu Mare, “Raport de la 28 martie la 1 mai 1949 (Activity report from the 28th of March to the 1st of May 1949)”, 3 May 1949, UDWR Satu Mare, 3/1949:27, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania).

²²⁹ UDWR Satu Mare, “Raport de activitate de la 1 Decembrie la 31 Decembrie 1949 (Activity report from December 1st to December 31st 1948)”, 1/1949:88, County Direction of the National Archives of Romania-Satu Mare direction (Satu Mare, Romania)

unlike Maria Zidaru's, was not defined by unquestionable triumph over difficulties but by their constant partial negotiation.

5.5. Conclusions

Beginning with 1949, the Satu Mare chapter of the UDWR (like others across the country) became involved in the massive project of social engineering that was the “socialist transformation of agriculture”. In order to persuade peasants to give up their land, the state organized a massive campaign of persuasion. UDWR activists from Satu Mare county became involved in this campaign and were expected to elicit an “inner state of belief” among women, who were generally skeptical of the project. In other words, UDWR activists were expected to act upon their subjectivities (as was fitting for the agents of a modernist state). What occurred instead was a thwarting of the “grand strategies of the state” through peasants’ tactics of stalling their joining GACs, for instance, and due to activists’ own incompetence. Faced with the opposition mounted by women, UDWR activists’ employed their own tactics through a “rearticulation of rules”. If the definition of success concerning the participation of women in GACs created by the Central Committee of the UDWR revolved around Maria Zidaru’s story of triumph over hardships, in the narratives created through their work reports activists disregarded the President of the GAC (to the point of never mentioning her in their reports) and the ideal she represented and sought to redefine the meaning of being successful. Beyond peasant revolts, coercion and (later) deportations, the grand strategy of social engineering that was (ultimately) collectivization was marked, therefore, by unequal struggles (between peasants and local activists, between local UDWR activists and the Central Committee of the UDWR) mounted through discourses and acting over the meanings of gender in a Stalinist state.

CHAPTER 6- CONCLUSIONS

My thesis focuses on the activities of two communist women's organizations active in Romania between 1945 and 1953. It argues that through the discourses and practices they promoted, they reconstructed gender in connection with the projects of social engineering characteristic of a high modernist state. Thus, I show how the Union of Antifascist Women of Romania worked to include women in the post-war political community not by conceptualizing citizenship primarily in terms of formal voting rights, but rather in terms of social activism. Secondly, I look at how the Union of Democratic Women of Romania was not merely part of a chain of dissemination of Stalinist values in Romania, but as part of a modernist vision of social intervention meant to "improve the population". Their intervention for remaking mothering practices, dietary habits and the relationship between parents and schools relied implied constructing women as the ones in charge of household work. Finally, I examine how the UAWR conducted "persuasion work" for collectivization.

Drawing on the "post-revisionist paradigm" in Soviet history, I conceptualize the Stalinist Romanian state as not governing primarily through coercion, but through subtle mechanisms of social control made possible through bureaucratic procedures of legibilization and simplification. Through the work of the UAWR and the UDWR, women were meant to become the objects of such control. At the same time, they resisted through "little tactics" such as avoidance or disengagement.

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