Available online
http://lumenpublishing.com/journals/index.php/lumenphs/index
e-ISSN: 2284–5976; ISSN–L: 2284–5976

Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty, Section: Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences
2017, Volume V, Issue 2, December, pp. 13-25

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs.2017.0502.02

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How to cite: Iringo, T. G. (2017). Propaganda, Emancipation and Stalinist Internationalism in Romanian Communist Magazines for Women. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty, Section: Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences*, V(2), 13-25. Doi: https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs.2017.0502.02

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Propaganda, Emancipation and Stalinist Internationalism in Romanian Communist Magazines for Women

Toth Godri IRINGO[1]

Abstract: My research concerns on *Dolgozó nő (Working Woman)* and *Femeia (Thee Woman)*, the most important monthly magazines for women from the socialist-communist Romania. I was studying the texts and the illustrations from these magazines in a special context, I concentrated on propaganda, female emancipation and Stalinist internationalism, on typical topics from the period and the given political system. These magazines influences millions, women who got information, studied from these periodical, socialized by them. These magazines are in a very close relationship with topics like the female emancipation, the female rights, the role of the female in the socialist society, the representation of the ideal socialist women. These topics have begun to be "fashionable" in Romania, but the expert mostly put an accent on the female emancipation, on the political references. Hardly ever there is focus on the simple women, on the every days. My research focuses on the history of these magazines, what is more, by analyzing the magazine we can notice that there exists a progress: in the first period we see the military woman, in the mild period we can see the intellectual, the mother in the center of her family, while in the late, very cruel years we can see only the dictator leader`s portraits, Ceauşescu appears most frequent then the working women. In this study I try to present the first period, the propagandistic messages of the era, the visual content, the specific style.

Keyword: *propaganda, socialism, communism, press, feminism.*

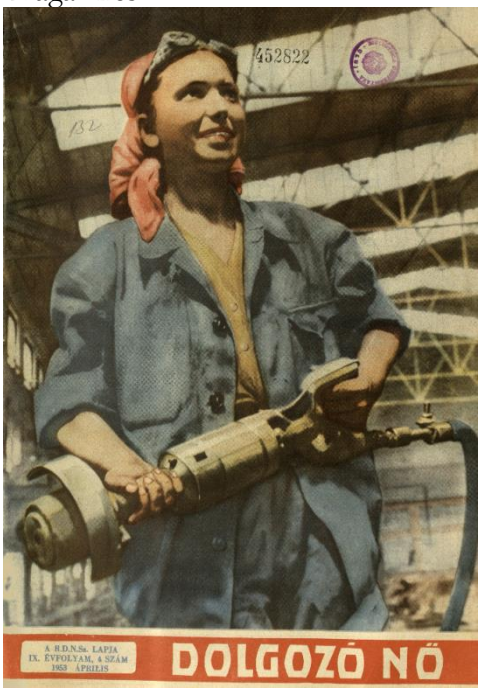
Introduction

My research concerns on *Dolgozó nő (Working Woman)* and *Femeia (Thee Woman)*, the most important monthly magazines for women from the socialist-communist Romania. The *Dolgozó nő* published in Cluj-Napoca between 1945 and 1989 was the only Hungarian magazine for women. The *Femeia* was the big "sister" from the capital, from Bucharest. Both of the magazines focuses on female rights, the women's condition in the modern society; moreover they also covers health, beauty, housework, literature and fashion topics. They follow typical Soviet models, if we analyze them in a

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larger, international context we can notice similarities with Hungarian, Bulgarian, Russian, etc. magazines.



Dolgozó nő. April of 1963. *(source: Collection of Periodicals, BCU – Cluj Napoca)*

The topic of this thesis was inspired by one of my researches, in which I am dealing with the frontispieces, covers of the *Dolgozó nő,* analyzing the issues of art and propaganda. The *Dolgozó nő* was published throughout the whole socialist-communist period, from 1945 until 1989, so it can be considered as an imprint of this whole period, as an exciting source, which still needs source criticism, but it already offers a lot of information. In one of the issues published in 1948 a small poem can be read: "There is no separate way/ Romanian, Hungarian, / Worker, peasant/ Wants just one (thing)" (*Dolgozó nő*, 1948/03/election number, p 2.) This poem turned my attention to the fact that female emancipation efforts in Romania took place first of all at the beginning of the regime of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, primarily at the end of the '40s, in a period in which politics were dominated by the principles of Stalin. In that sense I tried to examine the issues of female emancipation and internationalism.

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Research Questions

The female emancipation is an interesting motif of the early years of the Eastern European Socialism, which, in contrast to the western countries, was not the sign of liberalism and democracy, but it was connected to economic and political interests. The rapid industrial development, the five-year plans, the modification of economy required a great number of workers, and this need required women workers as well. Due to the fact that Romania concentrated on heavy industry, women were hired by these industrial fields: from mine, through railways to forge or tractor. In the early period, the militant female was praised, the combative woman, who fights to build socialism. Texts, articles, speeches of this period advertise absolute equality between man and woman, both in physical and mental sense. This picture will only be nuanced in the course of time.

This topic is very complex and it is connected to many important topics from the period, like the internationalism, the political activities, etc. This is the reason why I have decided to analyze the presence of this topic in the most important press products. I have chosen the two most important magazines, one Romanian and the other, Hungarian. The main question of this study is if the two magazines present the emancipation in the same way or there is a difference between them, because of the contrary between the majority and minority nation, because of the different editing places, because of the different extern influences?

Methodology

In order to respond my research question I was studying the published magazines between 1945 and 1950, totally 72 numbers. On the one hand my research used quantitative method, so I counted the articles referring to the mentioned topics, referring to the female emancipation, referent two the Romanian-Hungarian relation, friendship, etc. On the other hand I was analyzing the articles using philological, text analyzing methods and also the illustration by using methods from the art history.

To analyze these periodicals in the historical context, I was using the method of oral-history, I interviewed the alive editors of the magazine. I was asking them about roles in the editing office, about written and non-written rules. Their detailed answers will be published in a voluminous article threating only the editing work from the period.

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Literature Review

It is worth mentioning something about the literature of the topic. The international literature has dealt much with the issues of the female equality, primarily with the female-male equality and female emancipation. The Hungarian and Romanian literature deals with this issue: the woman in the socialist period. It is important to mention the book entitled *Kádár leányai - Nők a szocialista időszakban (Daughters of Kádár - Women in the socialist period)*, written by Eszter Zsófia Tóth, which basically presents the situation of Hungary, though it discusses this topic profoundly and in detail, and it transmits facts referring to all countries of the Soviet area. It is worth mentioning the work of Luciana M. Jinga from the Romanian literature, which is entitled *Gen si reprezentare in Romania comunista 1944-1989 (Gene and representation in communist Romania 1944-1989)*. The volume discusses primarily the political representation, the importance and references of the National Woman Committee, and it also refers to the "situation of a woman" in neighbouring countries.

It is slightly surprising that although it discusses in detail different female organizations, plans, the Antifascist Women Association (Jinga, 2015, p. 66.), then the story of the Romanian Democratic Women Association (Jinga, 2015, p.81.), regarding the Hungarian side it only mentions the *Dolgozó nő* in addition to the *Femeia (The Woman)* and *Săteanca (The Countrywoman)* as a magazine, which comes under the supremacy of the Romanian Democratic Women Association (Jinga, 2015, p. 83.). It does not mention the facts: which role women had and on which scale they took part in events considering the issue of women. It does not mention, for instance that the Hungarian People's Association had similar efforts, steps. Other Romanian technical books, which discuss the history of socialism-communism, do not mention the efforts of the emancipation. *Stalinism pentru eternitate (Stalinism for eternity)* written by Vladimir Tismăneanu is a detailed work which discusses this period, and in which Ana Pauker, who appears in the *Femeia* and in the *Dolgozó nő* as the vanguard of female equality, as a model to follow, an active woman who politicises, here in this volume she appears only in other references.

The work entitled *Personalitate politică în societatea noastră socialist (The political personality in our socialist society)* written by Ecaterina Deliman in the Ceauşescu-period is also important. This work offers a deep insight in the communist woman's world. The compilation written by Ştefania Mihălescu (2015), *Din istoria feminismului românesc – Studii şi antologie de texte (1929-1948)*

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(From the history of Romanian feminism – Studies and anthologies of texts) is also significant, which selects from the contemporary press, speeches told at congresses, etc. As we have already mentioned the press, several texts and articles from the *Dolgozó nő* and the *Femeia (The Woman)* are basic texts of the topic due to the introductory point of the thesis, because the literature, as it emerges from the few examples mentioned above, is quite scarce regarding this concrete aspect of the topic.

I. Two Magazines, One Common Target

As it comes to socialist press products, we should be aware of the propagandistic nature, so in that way we should handle the press as a source quite carefully. A law from 1944 has already restricted the printing and advertising of different periodical and not-periodical readings in Romania, and it delivered the verification of these readings to the soviet command-in-chief, moreover it enabled the initiation of different plans based on the soviet experience. From 1945 The Ministry of Propaganda has re-formed. It is an interesting fact, that from the two analysed magazines the Hungarian one has not suffered so much from censorship. It belonged to that few Hungarian magazines, which was compiled, edited in Kolozsvár (Cluj Napoca), but printed and censured in Scânteia House in Bucharest, where the Hungarian censors were more permissive as their fellows living in the countryside.

The two magazines focus not only on the Romanian-Hungarian "friendship" and cooperation, but it also suggests the essence of the Stalinist internationalism with its texts and pictures, because they offer a wider view, they report on women from all socialist countries, and sometimes they translate texts from magazines of other countries and publish pictures of Chinese, Mongolian or Russian women. (Regarding this aspect it is important that the work of Jinga (already mentioned) discusses the situation of neighbouring socialist countries referring to the fact that in the area similar processes took place at the same time.)

Regarding the topic, the year of 1946 is quite important, because women could vote in Romania according to the law Nr. 560 (15th July 1946). In 1946 the first general election took place, in which women could take part, and not so long after in 1948. The latter had a bigger echo in woman's magazines which were read by more than ten thousand women, moreover, there was a lot of encouragement to vote. The voting right appears as one of the significant steps of emancipation, but it is still only an

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introductory step. The reappearing motif of the end of the '40s is the role, the involvement of women in political life. We can read in one of the issues of *Femeia* (The Women) from 1950 that there are women ministers, 31 representatives in the parliament (Marea Adunare Naţională/The Great National Assembly),[2] 64 directors, 27 university professors, a dean and an academic member (Șerban, *Femeia comunistă: Mamă eroină, muncitoare, activistă* - internet). We can find out exacter data regarding this questions, issues from a record on the election published by Șteafania Mihălescu in the *Scânteia* magazine (Mihălescu, 2015, p.427.). The text is about the construction of the Democratic Women Association by listing names. Among the names, which are transcribed by the way with Romanian letters, we can find only 2-3 Hungarian, no one in leading position.

In the issue of January 1948 of the *Dolgozó nő* the New Year's leading article is entitled *The Power is in the Unit,* and it encourages women to politicise. (Here we should insert a parenthesis: naturally, there was not the 40's which implied the appearance of Romanian women in politics, since for example Ana Pauker or Elena Filipovici have already had important roles in political life. Ana Pauker, who was at the top of her career in the second half of the 40's, was already from the beginning a member of the PCdR (Partidul Comunist din România) (Romanian Communist Party) (Jinga, 2015, p. 28), which was formed in 1921, from 1947 she was the first foreign minister not only in Romania, but in the world (Șerban - internet). Elena Filipovici has already operated as an active member of the women's committee after the second PCdR congress in 1922 (Jinga, 2015, p. 28).

"A lot of women […] say, that they do nothing else than arranging meetings, but we do not need politics. However, we do need politics, because the past regime has suggested the catchword that women should not politicise [..]" (*Dolgozó nő,* 1948/01, p. 4.) — the letter of Józsefné Bitai mirrors the spirit of the era. Zsófia Tóth says that women who politicise, concretely representatives of the parliament, "as women they symbolise equality, as workers they symbolise social equality in the parliament" (Tóth, 2010, p.126). An article published in the *Femeia* in June is entitled *For the protection of peace* (*Pentru apărarea Păcii*) and it summarises women of the world and so as an illustration we can see Anna Pauker, Dolores Ibarrusit and Eugenie Cotton beside each other. In the corner of the two-pages long

[2] The total number of the parliamentarian was 414. (http://www.memoria.ro/studii/bucuresti_-_irir/studii_irir/obsesia_unanimitatii_-_primii_pasi:_quote_alegerile_quote_din_martie_1948/2063/.

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article appears an article written in smaller letters, which informs about the establishment of the Hungarian Democratic Women Association, and about the international congress organised in Budapest, in which also the members of the Romanian Democratic Women Association took part (*Femeia,* 1948/10 – election number, pp. 4-5).

The year of 1948, among others the election and the connection of the Romanian Democratic Women Association to the international network was the reason, due to that I examined its press-material. The first, very striking difference regarding the *Femeia* and *Dolgozó nő* in 1948, that although they were like twins, they follow totally different constructions, policies, emphases are different, and while the former concentrates on local events, political life, and has a separate series for the presentation of women of socialist countries, the Hungarian magazine publishes articles with the topics of literature and history as well.



Dolgozó nő. August of 1961. *(source: Collection of Periodicals, BCU – Cluj Napoca)*

Political Questions

It is really exciting, that positive attitude toward minorities, the kind of Gheorghiu Dej, made it possible for example that the article (consisting of two parts) by Mária Berde, the editor-in-chief of the magazine, having the title *About women from '48* (*Negyvennyolc asszonyairól)* could be published in the issue of January-February 1948 of the *Working woman*, in which besides Júlia

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Szendrey, Antónia Böhm and Blanka Teleki, Károlyné Maderspach, "the leader miner woman" also appears in a socialist, industrializing spirit. The article focuses on Hungarian women and significant characters of Hungarian history (*Dolgozó nő,* 1948/01, p. 5.). In the previous year the portrait of Petőfi and an extract from one of his poems entitled *To the Freedom* (*Szabadsághoz)* were published at the front page of the issue form March-April. The editors could include the ideal of the Romanian-Hungarian friendship regarding almost all topics such as theatre, for instance in the *Working woman* (October): ("the Popular Theatre of Budapest was hosted by the People's Republic, which was a proof of deepening of the Romanian-Hungarian friendship" in *Dolgozó nő,* 1948/10, 21.) or sports. Considering the article *A basketball match (Un match de basket-ball* in *Femeia,* 1948/07, p. 8*)* from the *Femeia* (July), which is a report on a Romanian-Hungarian basketball match, but the article focuses on the presentation of a Hungarian player, Mária Nagy and on what it tells us about the situation of sport in Hungary and the sportswomen from there. (The illustrations show her and the Hungarian team in *Dolgozó nő.* 1948/10, p. 21.)

One article from the *Femeia* (August) is strikingly exciting, which is entitled *Pentru o prietenie mai strânsă* (For a stronger friendship) and which has the concrete topic of the Hungarian-Romanian collaboration. Its writer is Francsiszka Székely, who was also a member of the executive committee of the Romanian Democratic Women Association (Mihălescu, 2015, p. 427.). This text is one of the most propagandistic examining the issues of the two magazines. Its essence is that workers, independently of nationality, work together for the realisation of people's democracy (*„prin efortul tuturor oamenilor mincii indiferent de naţionalitate, desăvârşeşte democraţia populară"*) (through the effort of all working people indifferent from nationality, improves people's democracy). The opponents of this fight are the Romanian farmers and the Hungarian counts, who try to use the rests of chauvinism in this fight, and try to picture the friendship of wolf and sheep when they speak about the fraternal bond between lords who are exploiting others and peasantry belonging to the same nation. The article deals with those problematic themes (which are problematic nowadays as well) such as the use of the Hungarian flag, which is respected by Romanian people as well according to the editor, but both nations have to use the flag of "our republic" that symbolises the equal rights of the nation's living together (*Femeia*, 1948/08, p.12).

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The article transmits almost programmatically, that "under the control of the Romanian Labour Party Romanian and Hungarian people should collaborate and fight together in the spirit of proletarian internationalism against exploitation and chauvinism (*Femeia*, 1948/08, p.12). According to the article, the two nations have fought together under the aegis of the party so that Hungarian language could be used in institutions and Hungarian schools and universities could remain. They fight furthermore together, Romanian and Hungarian women go to congresses together, they organize opening nurseries, creameries, etc. together. The article discusses common realizations and goals in detail.

We can support some ideas of the article if we draw the two magazines in parallel, because it often occurs that both magazines have published reports about an international women congress, and the articles by the Hungarian and Romanian editors suggest that they took part together in the events, or if it is not the editor who took part, than it is obvious according to the listed names that there were women from both nations in the delegation. The *Dolgozó nő* often mentions competitions between factories, in which case it can also be observed that a factory full with Hungarian workers located in a Hungarian region has challenged factories where Romanian women workers were and vice versa.

To conclude this chain of ideas, it is important to highlight that the analysis of the press-material does not show a picture involving "so strong friendship". The *Femeia*, which had altering page number, but it usually contained 24-28 pages, in 1948, during a whole year it publishes, apart from the quoted and mentioned articles, only 2-3 articles with Hungarian references and these have also a general aspect (for instance, in the issue of June the article by Tini Dumitrescu illustrates the figure of "Catarina Varga").

In contrary, on the Hungarian side the opening is more "spectacular", louder, since there is no issues, in which the idea of the collaboration and friendship between Hungarian-Romanian women does not appear. Naturally, this "inequality" has its own rational reasons. For the Romanian reading public there was no need to propagate good relationships, since as they were the major nation, they could not feel that their rights were offended and had no fear of it. On the other hand, in Hungarian context, the good relationship between Romanian and Hungarian women was a good "hype" for the Workers Party. For example, it is not a miracle that there was a separate page for the praise of the good relation in the issue of the

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election, since in that way they could draw the conclusion that they have to vote for the Workers Party, because we can thank them that we can vote and so national inequalities can vanish. Magda József, who was the editor of the *Dolgozó nő* in the 80's, but she has known the co-workers of the initial magazine, said that in the beginning of the 50's editors believed in what they have written, and in the background of the texts, reports was in fact reality, maximum presentation was a little more elevated (Interview with Magda József – 15 of April 2016, Cluj Napoca).

It is an interesting fact that although we speak about a country in which more nations live, only the situation of the Hungarian minority is in the focus, there is no remark of Saxons, Armenians, Tatars, etc. in the material which I examined.

Our Place in the Communist World

We have discussed internationalism in local connotations regarding only two nations so far. Naturally, as I have already mentioned, the collaboration of women refers actually to women of all socialist countries or even to women of the whole world, and international congresses, general meetings arranged every year suggest how general this idea was in the socialist countries. The issue of women was closely connected with the ideal of internationalism, more correctly with the ideal of standing above nations. The reports about the international congresses of women published regularly in both magazines and the column *entitled The world sends word* (*Üzen a nagyvilág)* published in the *Dolgozó nő* were written in order to support this idea. The column *The world sends word* (*Üzen a nagyvilág)* transmits messages from women organizations of other countries, it depicts the lives of women living in soviet, socialist countries. A similar series was published in the *Femeia* as well, but it was not arranged in a separate column.

The front page graphics of the issue of the *Dolgozó nő* from December 1948 is quite suggestive in this reference, we can see different women around a globe, probably dark-skinned, white-skinned and African, who do something together for women. In this early period of the socialist-communist era there was a greater openness towards the world. Presentations, reports and letters written by women of foreigner countries were also included in the magazines. Naturally, this occurred with a concrete purpose, it mostly emphasized the importance of women association, the significance of the organization or the positive aspect of the system, and these presentations were rarely ideology-free. In the Hungarian magazine we

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can find articles taken from the American Daily Mail. For example, an article by Anna Strong gives information about the situation of women in the communist China in February 1948, and in fact it tries to prove that the realization of socialism goes hand in hand with the freedom of women, and where this system is already implemented, women can live, love and marry free. "The girl chooses who she loves and may she be happy with him. […] relations change in that way in the emancipated and democratic North-China."

An article of the *Femeia* from May is about the presentation of the International Woman and it is entitled "The fight and work of women", and which is about to be organized in Paris. This event suggests well how important socialist women's movements were on a world scale.

The way the Romanian and the Hungarian magazine show the Soviet Woman as a role model is also exciting. An article from the *Femeia (The Woman)* published in March 1948 (Femeia, 1948/03, p. 4.) deals with this theme, here the soviet woman appears as an active politician, who collaborates with the nations of other countries in order to achieve her goals. The *Dolgozó nő* concentrates on totally different aspects, it shows every role from the housekeeper to the beautiful wife in its article from June 1948. The soviet woman, according to the article, lives in a country in which she can enjoy all advantages of the implemented socialism. We can see an idealist society where divorces are rare, because everyone marries with love, there is no prostitution, etc. – but according to the author of the article this is an insight in the "soviet reality" (*Dolgozó nő*, 1948/06, p. 6.).

In connection with a lot of themes we can have an insight in the lives of women in other countries. For instance, beside the articles encouraging to vote in March 1948, such pictures appear in which a Bulgarian, a Spanish or an Algerian woman puts her vote in the urn. The international women's day, also in March, is also a similar occasion. The *Dolgozó nő* depicts the figure of Dolores Ibaruri in the article published on women's day, it reports on the Prague-session of the international congress, etc.

Conclusion

In summary, we can say that the "international" aspect is present almost throughout the whole Stalinist-period, but from the mid 50's the issue of women is no more so empathetic, so the echo of this theme becomes silent in the press and in the public life. The ideal of women also

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becomes nuanced, the tractor driver, the soldier and the miner are replaced by the workers of the weaving mill and other light industries and "intellectual" occupations such as teacher or typewriter appear. In the second half of the socialist-communist era the situation totally changes, since Ceaușescu, ignoring superior commands, uses a totally different minority policy, which is far more unfavourable for the Hungarian people.

These two magazines have got a very similar way but with very different nuances. The *Dolgozó nő* as it is suggested in the articles in its whole history remained an important source of information, an encouragement for the Hungarians (not only for thee women), a part of their identity. It was a cultural magazine with a huge accent on the female emancipation. It was balancing between Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca, thus it found always the compromise.

The *Femeia* originally was a complex magazine, but with time it became "only" a female magazine, since there was a huge variety of Romanian cultural and political magazines. For this periodical neither the Hungarian-Romanian friendship, nor the Stalinist internationalism wasn't so important thus its mission was purely to serve the Romanian women. These magazines are important sources for historians, art-historians and sociologist, normally they have to been treated with a critical attitude. These periodicals give us information about events from the era, about lifestyle, mentality, etc.

These magazines cannot be threatened as isolated examples, they represent a Soviet "type". Recently only in Eastern Germany and Russia there have been some researches referring to similar periodicals, in the other country this can be a future task. This article is part of a huge research, a large work which can give a complex image of the Romanian female emancipation and the Romanian press from the Socialist and Communist era.

Acknowledgment

This research was founded by the Babes-Bolyai University (Cluj Napoca, RO) – Research Grant 2016/2017

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