

ROMANIAN WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN CLUJ DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.23740/TID220221>

ABSTRACT

In the post-1918 political context and in a city with a specific demographic landscape, women's activism was shaped by ethnic and religious criteria, as well as by other specific objectives. Applying this typology to Romanian women's societies, the study offers a view on some of the most prominent associations from Cluj, through a series of monographic notes that retain their most important defining elements: objectives, activity and significant accomplishments, also listing the individual particularities of each society. The short histories include micro-biographies of the leadership – some of the most important representatives of the Cluj women's movement. Going from description to analysis and by discerning the particular elements of each society, their leadership and also their discourse, the study emphasises the local particularities of interwar women's activism; originating in the pre-war era, Romanian women's interwar activism maintained the line of a national militancy, served through piety, charity and emancipation. This context left little interest for radical emancipation ideas; therefore, militancy for women's rights centred on the objective of feminine emancipation as the ultimate purpose is not witnessed. Considered on a regional and national scale of female interwar activism, Romanian women's activism from Cluj is part of a regional current of the feminist movement, with a traditionalist moderate tendency inside the larger Romanian feminist movement. The local Cluj branch of the Romanian Women's Group (Gruparea Femeilor Române), who followed the model of their mother-society, promoted a distorted interpretation of women's rights, in an anti-democratic authoritarian ideological construct marked by strong nationalist accents. On the other hand, after 1918, within new political and state realities, the activities of Cluj women established their objectives in tight connection to the main determining factors of the specific local realities of the era (demographic, economic, social, and cultural factors), and in the service of asserting and consolidating the newly found Romanian identity of the city.

Keywords: Romanian women's societies, interwar Cluj, nationalism, piety, charity, emancipation

Cite this article as: Cosma, G. (2022). Romanian Women's Activism in Cluj during the Interwar Years. *Territorial Identity and Development*, 7(2), 7-29. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.23740/TID220221>

INTRODUCTION

Using the term "female activism" in its acceptance of collective commitment to a cause (cultural, religious, charitable, etc.), therefore as a collective expression of behaviour, our study proposes to reconstruct its forms of expression within women's societies in interwar Cluj – particularly those of Romanian ethnicity. The purpose of this research is not to gather exhaustive monographies, which are impossible to reduce to the dimensions of a journal paper. Furthermore, some of the societies discussed in this article already benefit from such

reconstructions (Alexandrescu, 2002; Stan, 2010a; Buda, 2012), while the history of others still represents an open field for further extensive research. An element of novelty of our initiative is the attempt to offer a comprehensive picture of the Romanian women's societies in Cluj and their inclusion in a suggested typology. The succession of monographic notes aims to highlight the main objectives/accomplishments of each society, as well as their strategies of action, along with the description of their specificities. The short histories presented also include micro-biographies of the societies' leadership, relatively less known and less cultivated throughout historiography.

With few exceptions (see Stan, 2010b; Cosma, 2019), the Cluj promoters of the women's movement have not attracted so far researchers' attention and interest. We propose to associate the descriptive approach with an analytic approach applied both to micro-monographic and to micro-biographic evocations, which adds a discursive approach. These serve to achieve the final objective of our research: to discern the specific elements and to emphasise the local particularities of Romanian female interwar activism. Finally, within the limits of the current stage of the research, we propose to integrate the results of our analysis into a regional and national perspective on the women's activism of the era.

CONTEXT

Interwar Cluj was a place of intense women's activism, reflected in the large number of women's societies registered in diverse documentary sources of the time. It was marked by a series of particularities, some originating in the local specificities of the ethnic structure of the city's population and the re-definition of each ethnic community following the Greater Union. In the Cluj of the 1920s, the main ethnic communities according to their proportion in the demographic structure were: 33% Romanian, 50% Hungarian, 12% Jewish. Until 1938, Romanians reached 41% of the population of Cluj, while Hungarians 41%, and Jewish 14% (Buzea, 1939, p. 95). This demographic situation was correlated with a new political reality following the year 1918, which also affected women's activism.

The Hungarian community, who had become a minority in the new state, embraced the idea of a single-core ethnic community, considering the activity of the traditional institutions (the Church, schools, family) as a guarantee of its own identity (Lónhárt, 2002, p. 68). This resulted in the impropriation of a set of values embraced by the Hungarian women's community, which did not resonate with the radical ideas of female emancipation either. The Jewish community encompassed five tendencies: those who identified themselves with the Hungarians; the Zionists; the ultra-religious Jews; the supporters of Romanian-Jewish integration and the followers of transnational ideologies; these delimitations did not eliminate hybrid identities nor exclude permanent overlappings. The major tendency was, however, the assertion of Jewish identity (Gidó, 2014, p. 237, 239). Women activated in charity in collaboration with the religious institutions and, through the Association of Israelite Women, they activated within lay cultural organisations, such as the Yehudi women's association, and, with the spread of Zionism, they activated in the so-called WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation) (Gidó, 2014, p. 188).

The Romanian community was the majority within the new state, but locally, Romanians ranked second in the ethnic structure of Cluj until 1938. In this context, despite the accomplishment of the major objective (the Union) of the national movement, on a local scale, the consolidation and assertion of the Romanian community were still to be achieved. The Romanian women's movement remained, therefore, connected to the pre-war stance of national militancy; they

continued to cultivate a set of traditional values, adapting them to the new political and local context. Conclusively, the objectives of reuniting the women of Cluj might have been different, but their efforts were only oriented towards their ethnic community, consequently imprinting the women's movement with a traditionalist character.

Furthermore, ethnic isolationism combined with religious delimitations, among strong female groups patronised by the churches even from the pre-war period. After the Union, these groups became the primary model of association for the Hungarian women in Cluj, in an attempt to institutionalise the representation of the interests of the Hungarian community through the churches (Lőnhárt, 2002, p. 68). Hungarian women activated in the Catholic women's societies, as well as in the Reformed and Unitarian women's societies. Israelite women also developed their activity in close collaboration with their religious institutions. Women's organisations collaborated with the Hevra Kadisha. Furthermore, the charitable actions of the Sacred Confraternities were managed by women's organisations. They also managed kindergartens and cared for the religious and moral education of the young girls from their communities (Gidó, 2014, p. 188). Under the same patronage of the churches, some of the strongest societies of Romanian women were established as well: the St. Mary's Reunion of the Greek Catholic Women and the local subsidiary of the National Orthodox Society of the Romanian Women (SONFR).

SOCIETIES PATRONISED BY THE CHURCHES

Thus, the Reunion of Greek Catholic Women was the first society of Romanian women established in Cluj, on June 16, 1902, with the stated purpose of beautifying the Bob Church and named as such: *St. Mary's Reunion of the Greek Catholic Women for the Decoration of the Greek Catholic Church of Cluj*. The first chair of the reunion was Ana Popp, born Lemeni (Știgher, 1989, p. 447).

Niece of Bishops Lemeni and Bob, Ana Popp settled in Cluj in 1870, as the wife of lawyer Alexa Popp. She took part in all the actions of national affirmation, and her home was a focus of social and artistic life in support of the Romanians (Cronicar, 1937, p. 7). Under her leadership, the Reunion was a model of social commitment in both the religious and charitable fields. During the war, they were involved in assisting the wounded through the *Petran Ambulance*, the first Romanian hospital in Cluj during those years; after the war, it became the headquarters of an orphanage, thus defending the Society for the Protection of War Orphans in Cluj (Buda, 2012, pp. 8-10).

The early post-war years brought the affirmation of the exclusively Uniate character of the society, with its abandonment by the Orthodox ladies, who set up their society. Ana Popp retired from leadership but continued to hold the position of honorary president until she died in 1937 (Cronicar, 1937, p. 7). She was replaced by Eugenia Tripon.

Daughter of the archpriest of Iclod, Ion Parpiriu Pop, Eugenia was married to Gavril Tripon, a lawyer strongly involved in the Romanian social and cultural life of Cluj and Bistrița and in the national movement (Precup, 1940, pp. 7-25). Eugenia Tripon also supported the national cause, activating in the women's movement in Bistrița and in Cluj, where she arrived in 1920 with her husband. She held the presidency of the IX Cluj Regional of the Society for the Protection of War Orphans (Convocare, 1922, p. 4) and of the St. Mary's Reunion of Romanian Greek Catholic Women.

During her tenure, the beautification of the Bob Church continued, and the Reunion aimed to win the church of the Minorites, as the old church was no longer suitable for the large influx of

believers. Humanitarian actions were carried out for the people of Cluj, but also for the victims of the Lupeni catastrophe (Buda, 2012, p. 12).

On February 15, 1923, citing family reasons, Eugenia Tripon handed over the presidency to Livia Boilă, who began her longest term at the helm of the reunion, lasting until 1935. Livia Boilă was the eldest daughter of Elena Maniu, sister to Iuliu Maniu, who generously took care of the upbringing and education of his nephews and nieces after the untimely death of his sister's husband. Livia married Romul Boilă, a law professor at the University of Cluj and a politician, a prominent figure in the National Peasant Party. Wife and mother of five children, Livia Boilă was deeply involved in the social, cultural, and charitable activities of Cluj. Inspired by her mother, who led the Reunion of Romanian Women in Năsăud and Blaj and also held the vice presidency of the Union of the Romanian Women in Transylvania (Borz, 2012, pp. 227-228, pp. 242-243), she also engaged in the activity of several societies of women in Cluj; her remarkable activity in the St. Mary's Reunion of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Women was rewarded by His Holiness the Pope with the decoration *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* (Buda, 2012, p. 15).

Livia Boilă's term as head of the Greek Catholic Women's Reunion was a momentous one. Branches were established in Mănăştur, Cordoş and Dâmbul Rotund, reaching a number of 711 members by 1928. She continued to ensure financial support to the Bob Church, and also to the churches of the Transfiguration and "Calvaria" in Mănăştur. The Reunion's subsidiaries were supported with large sums for building places of worship. The charitable activity of the Reunion was also increasing. In addition to numerous philanthropic social evenings, the Reunion initiated a "poor man's meal" in the winter of 1933-1934; the programme was later extended to benefit students in need. Two significant social works were added: the Greek Catholic Students' Home, opened on October 1, 1927, and the St. Mary's Children's Day Home in Iris District, inaugurated in 1935 (Rus, 2011, pp. 31-32; Buda, 2012, p. 15), where 30 children from needy families were sheltered and fed during daytime (Deciu, 1936, pp. 7-10). In 1923, educational conferences for women were inaugurated. The anniversary of Mother's and Child's Day was introduced at Livia Boilă's initiative; it was celebrated along other national and religious holidays (Rus, 2011, pp. 31-32; Buda, 2012, pp. 12-16).

In 1933, with the federalisation of all Marian meetings and the establishment of the Marian Union of the Romanian Uniata Women, Livia Boilă became its president (Rus, 2011, p. 38). In the context of this regional organisational activity of Marian Reunions, in September 1934, the Union of the Diocesan Marian Reunions of Cluj-Gherla was also established, chaired by Elena Aciu (Buda, 2012, p. 16); the following year, Aciu took over the presidency of the Marian Reunion in Cluj, replacing Livia Boilă.

Elena Aciu, the daughter of schoolmaster Nicolae Fabian from Bârsana, studied in Sighetu Marmăţiei, then in Cluj and Budapest, at the Higher Pedagogical Institute, where she specialised in pedagogical sciences, foreign languages, history, and geography. She worked as a teacher in Beiuş and Şimleul Silvaniei (Bilţiu, 2000, pp. 190-191; Pop, 2010), where she lived for a while with her husband, lawyer, and politician Alexandru Aciu. In 1934, when Elena retired, the couple moved to Cluj, where Alexandru Aciu had been appointed public notary (Pop, 2017, pp. 12-13).

Elena Aciu took over the presidency of the Cluj Reunion of Greek Catholic women, contributing with her rich experience previously gained at the Reunion of Romanian Women of Beiuş, and at the Reunion of Romanian Women of Sălaj, whose president she was between 1924 and 1934. She was decorated by King Ferdinand with the *Queen Marie Cross Medal*, 2nd class, for tending to wounded soldiers during the Hungarian campaign; as a confirmation of her efforts, she was

also bestowed with the order of *Sanitary Merit grade I*, conferred in 1934, for her activity at the Romanian Women's Reunion in Sălaj. Elena Aciu was also one of the three winners of the competition organised on the occasion of the Second International Congress of Paris that focused on the issue of motherhood, *La mère au foyer, ouvrière de progrès humain*; the award was received for her monographic work dedicated to Clara Maniu, mother of Iuliu Maniu. This literary approach was not an exceptional one: Elena Aciu had previously expressed literary preoccupations, as an author of plays for schoolchildren (Bilțiu, 2000, pp. 193-198; Pop, 2010).

With the taking-over of the Cluj branch of the St. Mary's Reunion of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Women by Elena Aciu, who was at the same time holding the presidency of the Union of Marian Diocesan Reunions of Cluj-Gherla, the activity of the two bodies merged and the Marianists in Cluj tried to impose several of their locally successful initiatives throughout the entire diocese. This was also because, generally, the directing committees were chaired by the same people: besides Elena Aciu, the positions of vice-president were held by Maria Agârbiceanu and Ida Breban (Buda, 2012, p. 16). The latter would take over the management of the society in 1939.

Following the data related to the members of the reunion committee in 1928, the presence of the wives of some well-known university professors from Cluj can be noted. Also noteworthy are Olivia Deleu, president of *Caritatea* (The Charity) Society, and Ana A. Papp, president of the *Cununa* Society of the Sisters of the Cross.

Considering its evolution, St. Mary's Reunion of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Women was not a typical Marian Reunion. Without neglecting their spiritual duties and fulfilling all the devotions prescribed by the statutes, the society was rather an alternative to the classical Marian meetings, more pragmatic and anchored in everyday realities (Buda, 2012, p. 22).

The second-largest reunion of women from Cluj under the patronage of the Church was that of the Orthodox women. On April 14, 1920, a meeting took place in Cluj in the home of Rosetta N. Pettala, wife of General Nicolae Pettala, the commander of the VI Army Corps of Cluj, a meeting that raised the issue of establishing an association of Orthodox women in Cluj (Alexandrescu, 2002, p. 75). The idea came in the context of the arduous activity of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women (SONFR) in establishing branches in the new provinces of Greater Romania (Ivănescu, 2001, p. 180, p. 184); the SONFR had been founded in 1910 in Bucharest and was in 1920 under the presidency of Alexandrina Cantacuzino. The Society of the Orthodox Women in Cluj was established as a subsidiary of the SONFR and it adopted the objective and the statutes of its parent society: developing the culture and education of Romanian children from a religious and national point of view, as well as a support for the building of an Orthodox Cathedral in Cluj. Rosette N. Pettala was elected president and Elena Popescu-Voitești was secretary (Alexandrescu, 2002, p. 75).

In its early years, the main concern of the society was to raise funds for the renovation of the Church on the Hill and the future Orthodox Cathedral. However, the society's initial leadership underwent many changes and faced misunderstandings among its committee members. After Rosetta Pettala's passing in 1921, the post of president was left vacant for a year in mourning, being occupied only in 1922 by Maria Florescu, also a general's wife. As Maria Florescu changed her residence and left Cluj in 1923, her place was taken by Silvia Comșa in October 1923. Contested by the members, Comșa resigned in 1924, and the presidency remained vacant for a year. In February 1925, Elena Popescu-Voitești was elected president (Alexandrescu, 2002, p. 76).

Elena Popescu-Voitești, born Tomescu, was the wife of university professor Ion Popescu-Voitești. The establishment of the couple in Cluj in 1919 was related to Ion Popescu-Voitești

joining the teaching staff of the Cluj University; Popescu-Voitești has been considered the organiser of the Romanian geological education in Transylvania (Maxim, 1945, pp. 59-67).

For three years, the presidency of the SONFR Cluj branch was held by Elena Popescu-Voitești, from 1925 to 1928; it was a period of consolidation and diversification of the society's activities. Her perspective on female activism transposed at the level of the society she was leading and emphasised its local specific, in the spirit of which she requested a separate regulation on behalf of the branch (Popescu-Voitești, (III), 1925, pp. 3-4). The main concern of the society remained related to the collection of funds for the Church on the Hill, the Orthodox Cathedral, and the printing of the Bible in the Braille alphabet. The educational, religious, and national propaganda activities included organising conferences for the intellectual youth, educational gatherings for workers, publishing conference texts, offering religious services for schoolchildren, as well as supporting the study of the Orthodox religion in schools by rewarding students with awards (Popescu-Voitești, (II), 1925, pp. 4-5; Popescu-Voitești, 1928, pp. 1-6). The society did not carry out charitable activities, refusing to take upon this endeavour; their only aids were offered for cultural purposes, for the erection of churches or monuments in other settlements (Popescu-Voitești, (III), 1925, pp. 3-4). Finally, the members of the society participated in commemorations, festivities, and in various actions sponsored by other women's societies in Cluj (Popescu-Voitești, 1928, pp. 1-6).

In 1925, the president was working with a committee of 23 women and 6 trusted men; the society was made of 186 members, a small number in the opinion of the leader, yet expressive for the confessional diversity characteristic of Transylvania (Popescu-Voitești, (I), 1925, pp. 1-2). Under these circumstances, an objective of Elena Popescu-Voitești's term was the rapprochement of the two Romanian denominations, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic (Popescu-Voitești, (III), 1925, pp. 3-4).

Among Elena Popescu-Voitești's close collaborators, it is worth mentioning the two vice-presidents of the society, Constanța Bogdan-Duică and Vera Bohățiel (Costea, 1926, p. 7). The first was the wife of the well-known literary critic and historian, university professor Gheorghe Bogdan-Duică and a representative figure of preschool education in Cluj (Cosma, 2019, pp. 76-79). As for Vera Bohățiel, she was the wife of Cluj architect Leo Bohățiel (Vaida-Voevod, 1994, p. 238). It is notable that during the term of Elena Popescu-Voitești, Zina Moroianu joined the company in May 1925, and in January 1926, so did Sofia Meteș; both would go on to be future presidents of the Reunion (Costea, 1926, p. 7).

In 1928, Elena Popescu-Voitești resigned, citing health reasons, but still held the position of honorary president and, in recognition of her merits, she was awarded the Reward of the *Work in Service of the Church* Class I medal. She lived in Cluj until 1936 when Professor Popescu-Voitești transferred to the University of Bucharest.

The presidency of the society was by that time held by Zina Moroianu, sister of historian Pavel Gore, a well-known activist for the Union of Bessarabia with Romania. She married economist and diplomat Gheorghe Moroianu, a university professor at the Academy of Advanced Commercial and Industrial Studies in Cluj (1921-1938), who had also been involved in the fight for the cause of the Union (Munteanu & Tănase, 2005, pp. 98-100). Thus, Zina Moroianu's participation in the actions for the Union in Bessarabia was not accidental. Olimpiu Boitoș would later write about the significant role played by Zina Moroianu and her salon in Odessa in propagating and supporting the idea of Bessarabia's union with Romania (Boitoș, 1944, p. 108).

In Cluj, Zina Moroianu became a somewhat natural addition to the local Society of the Orthodox Women, a society of moral-religious and national propaganda. She rose to the position of

president in 1928, and was the holder of one of the longest terms in the management of the society, concluded in 1938. Ideologically and discursively, she remained faithful to the direction established by her forerunners. In the publishing field, she was not preoccupied with feminist issues, preferring translations from Russian literature (Kuprin, 1927, pp. 42-43).

Despite not reconsidering the major objectives of the Society, an element of novelty during Zina Moroianu's term was the philanthropy towards the needy Orthodox in the city (Moroianu, (I), 1930, p. 4; Moroianu, (II), 1930, pp. 3-4; Moroianu (III), 1930, pp. 4-5). In 1930, during her term, the printing of the Bible in the Braille alphabet was also completed (Adunarea generală, 1931, pp. 5-6). Under Zina Moroianu's presidency, in addition to the efforts made for the erection and decoration of the Cathedral and the Church of St. Nicholas in Calea Regele Ferdinand (King Ferdinand Boulevard of Cluj), the Society was involved in 1934 in the establishment of the St. Elizabeth Monastery of sisters' charity nuns in Cluj (Naghiu, 1938, p. 16).

In 1929, the Society of the Orthodox Women in Cluj reached 356 members (Meteș, 1929, pp. 1-4). Among the followers were Lucreția Barbul, president of the *Prince Mircea* Society in Cluj (since 1930), Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdat, vice-president of the Cluj branch of the Romanian Women's Group (Adunarea generală, 1930, pp. 4-5). Other leaders of the female interwar activism from Cluj also joined the Society: Marcela Fabius, the successor of Lucreția Barbul to the presidency of the *Prince Mircea* Society, and Elena Bratu, the president of the Society of Christian Women from Cluj. Alongside Zina Moroianu, Sofia Meteș was particularly active during this period; in 1931, she rose in the hierarchy and became vice-president of the association (Adunarea generală, 1937, p. 2). On April 19, 1931, as a sign of recognition of their activity and merits, Zina Moroianu, Vera Bohățiel, and Sofia Meteș were decorated with the *Work in Service of the Church* Class I medal (Adunarea generală, 1931, pp. 5-6).

In 1938, after a very short-term presidency belonging to Elena Ștefănescu-Goangă, the position was occupied by Sofia Meteș, wife of Ștefan Meteș, priest and historian with an extensive editorial activity who, in 1920, was holding the position of director of the Cluj State Archives (Iancu, 2000, p. 202). Since joining the SONFR Cluj branch, Sofia Meteș proved to be an extremely active and influential member. Her relationship with Alexandrina Cantacuzino, the president of the national SONFR, impacted Sofia Meteș's efforts in the field of women's activism in Cluj, and their ideological and discursive affinities were also noted.

Ever since the presidency of Zina Moroianu, a crisis started within the SONFR, having local reverberations and two culminating moments: one in 1935 and another in 1939. The crisis began with the contestation of Alexandrina Cantacuzino's authority, who was accused that, despite being the president of a confessional society, she manifested in public feminist ideas and attitudes, taking part at the activity of international feminist organisations. As Alexandrina Cantacuzino did not yield, both the central organisation of SONFR and the branches became divided in supporting her: the Cluj branch was supportive of Cantacuzino. Practically, in 1935, two Central Committees functioned parallelly, and their conflict was taken to court; in 1939, justice found the acts of the committee led by Alexandrina Cantacuzino illegal. As a result, an Interim Commission was set up centrally, led by Aretia Gh. Tătăărăscu (Alexandrescu, 2002, pp. 77-80).

The relationship of the Cluj branch with the new management became tense, their steps such as supporting the endowment of the army, were deemed questionable by the Bucharest headquarters, who suggested that this was not the role of the SONFR. Nevertheless, the Cluj branch continued its activity and considered their support in the endowment of the army a primary objective. For this purpose, the branch donated from its funds 100,000 lei and raised

the necessary effects to organise their hospital for the care of wounded soldiers (Alexandrescu, 2002, pp. 80-81). At the same time, their nationalist discourse strengthened.

Concluding on the activity of this society, it can be stated that it was built and developed around the concepts of *piety* and *nationalism*, the second component becoming dominant towards the second half of the third decade.

CHARITABLE SOCIETIES

Romanian women's activism in Cluj also manifested in societies set up exclusively around charitable purposes, for the provision of social and health care. One of the strongest and most prestigious companies of this type was The Charity Society (*Caritatea*), led by Olivia Deleu.

Born into a family of intellectuals, Olivia studied at the Young Catholic Nuns' Institute in Mindelheim, Bavaria, where she also attended the Conservatory, graduating in 1898 with a degree in music teaching for normal and secondary schools, a pioneer of those times. She started her teaching career in Braşov, participating in various local artistic events (Sabou, 2017, pp. 235-236). She married Victor Deleu, a lawyer, leader of the national movement in Sălaj region, later an activist for the National Peasant Party. The couple had a son (Goron, Ciocian & Dărăban, 1999, pp. 41-46); they settled in Cluj in the autumn of 1919; Victor Deleu was the city mayor between 1932 and 1933. Olivia Deleu worked in several associations in Cluj: The Charity Society, the ASTRA society, the St. Mary Reunion of the Greek Catholic Women, and the Transylvanian Association *Circle Ronsard, for the Propagation of the French Language and Culture*.

Olivia Deleu's activity within The Charity Society was remarkable; a society which she initiated and whose presidency she held since 1922, had among its committee members the spouses of Cluj university professors: Maia Dragomir, Elena Puşcariu, Miţi Haţieganu, etc., as well as representatives of other women's societies, such as Marioara Şerban and Hilda Beşa, who also carried out charitable activities through the *HRH Princess Helen Charity Fund* (Adunarea generală, 1926, p. 207).

The Charity Society aimed to fight against tuberculosis and to help young people facing this pathology by supporting and developing the sanatorium in Colibiţa (Sanitarius, 1926, pp. 13-14). Olivia Deleu was personally involved in the establishment and activity of the sanatorium, which provided recovery treatments for students and pupils with lung problems. The building process began in 1923, having received funding from private donations, sums from the Ministry of Health and the National Anti-Tuberculosis League, and from fundraisings organised on the occasion of masked balls and charity events. In 1931, the University concluded an agreement with The Charity Society for the construction of a 40-bed pavilion for its students, the management of which fell to the Society (Haţieganu, 1931, p. 17; Haţieganu & Deleu, 1931, p. 305). The student pavilion was inaugurated with great pomp in the summer of 1932. The sanatorium functioned until World War II when the activity of The Charity Society was gradually diminished, and the buildings fell into ruin.

Another charitable society was the *HRH Princess Helen Charity Fund*, founded in 1924, at the initiative of Princess Helen; the society expanded through local branches in Transylvania. Its Cluj branch was run by Marioara Şerban.

Daughter of Professor Iosif Blaga from Lančrăm (a relative of Lucian Blaga), Marioara Șerban started her philosophy studies in Budapest, and also studied German philology and pedagogy at the Universities of Munich, Uppsala, Oslo and Paris, as her entire family was accompanying the father, instructed with various tasks by the Romanian government. She graduated from the Sorbonne and was engaged in Paris to Mihai Șerban, one of the Romanian delegates at the Paris Peace Conference. After the signing of the Peace Treaty, the family returned to Romania, settling in Cluj (Mihaiu, 2013). Mihai Șerban, who had studied commerce, agronomy, and law in Vienna, Halle, Zürich and held two doctoral degrees in agronomy and law, went on to be a university professor at the Academy of Higher Agronomic Studies until 1947, also exercising the position of rector for many years. Close to Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, he also held various government positions (Marco, 2020, pp. 80-83).

As for Marioara Șerban, despite being diplomaed, she did not practice, settling for the role of stylist, translator, and typist of her husband, with whom she worked almost permanently. Caring for her three children did not stop her from getting involved in local women's activism at *HRH Princess Helen Charity Fund*, and at the Association for the Protection of University Students, The Charity Society, the Society of the Orthodox Women, and the University Women's Association. Moreover, she was also elected to the City Committee of the local organisation of the National Peasant Party of which she was a supporter, like her husband (Mihaiu, 2013).

In May 1928, Marioara Șerban founded the Cluj branch of *HRH Princess Helen Charity Fund*. The honorary president position was held by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's wife. The society assisted children from needy families, sending them to Princess Helen's Summer Colony in Mangalia and making donations to children on various occasions or holidays throughout the year (Motogna, 1929, p. 73).

Another society for social protection was the Cluj branch of the *Prince Mircea Society for Child Protection in Romania*. The parent society was founded in Bucharest in 1919, at the initiative and under the protection of Queen Marie, who was grieving the loss of her four-year-old son, Mircea (1916), as well as the human dramas generated by the war. The vice president position was held by Lia Brătianu. The purpose of the society was to protect children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. In its Statutes, the society proposed the building of medical dispensaries, health education, prophylaxis and childcare, the establishment of nursery schools, canteens, homes for postpartum women and summer settlements; they opened branches in almost all Romanian cities (Radu, (I) 1925b, pp. 606-607; Mihăilescu, 2011, pp. 177-178). The Cluj branch was founded in 1920, its presidency being held by Lucreția Barbul (Orosz, 1933, p. 97). Later, the position was taken over by Marcella Fabius (the wife of the lawyer Ștefan Fabius?) (Vlad, 1935, pp. 122-124).

Lucreția Barbul was originally from Hălmagiu and she was the daughter of district notary Gheorghe Ionescu, who had been shot during the revolutionary events in Hungary, at Mezőtúr. Lucreția studied at the confessional school in Ciuci, where she had moved with her family, completing further studies in Timișoara and Sibiu. She married Eugen Pavel Barbul, a bibliologist and literary historian, who had been the director of the Cluj University Library between 1920 and 1935, until his retirement. They had four children, the best known of whom was Gheorghe Barbul, former secretary of Ion Antonescu (Câmpean & Cordea, 2013, pp. 249-267; Cordea, 2014, pp. 46-49). During her time in Cluj, Lucreția Barbul was involved for 15 years in local cultural, religious, and philanthropic activities, as a member of the Society of the Orthodox Women; since 1931, she functioned as a member of the Society's directing committee and was also president of the local branch of *Prince Mircea Society*.

The most important action for social and sanitary protection belonging to the Cluj branch of The National Society of the Orthodox Women (SONFR) was *Prince Mircea Dispensary*. It was inaugurated on June 10, 1923, in Mănăştur, a district with a Romanian majority, which, unlike other districts of Cluj, did not possess a medical clinic. The activity of *Prince Mircea Dispensary* focused on childcare; it started modestly, with a weekly day of medical consultations, eventually increasing to four days per week (Iancu, 1924, pp. 226-227). Mănăştur was a neighbourhood of workers and peasants, with a high birth rate that required concern for children, for their care and reducing infant mortality which stood at 21%; among the causes of infant mortality were: mothers working in factories, the early feeding of children with unsterilised cow's milk, the lack of education of the caregivers, overcrowding, alcoholism, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. One of the major issues was infant nourishment; the dispensary attempted to set up a milk kitchen to provide sterilised milk to infants, and also an infirmary where children with digestive or lung problems could be cared for. Another objective was to restrict the spread of venereal diseases and syphilis, requiring the treatment of both children and parents (Radu, 1925a, pp. 224-225; Radu (II), 1925c, p. 624).

Another society in which women were mostly active was the *Red Cross*. The Cluj branch of the Red Cross, one of the first branches opened in Transylvania, was established on May 22, 1919, under the presidency of Sidonia Docan (Apostol, 1939, p. 18), who also took the initiative of setting it up. Sidonia Docan was the daughter of Cluj lawyer Alexa Popp and Ana Popp de Lemeni, who had a major role in the Cluj women's movement. Sidonia graduated from the University of Vienna with a degree in medicine and was the wife of George I. Docan, landowner and lieutenant in the reserve cavalry forces. In the autumn of 1918, she witnessed the events leading up to the Union as Secretary of the Romanian National Council in Cluj and participated at the National Assembly in Alba Iulia as a delegate of the *St. Mary's Reunion of the Romanian Women in Cluj*. After 1918, she worked as an inspector for the Ministry of Social Welfare (Țucă, 2009, pp. 26-27, p. 30). Sidonia Docan worked with her mother, Ana Popp, in the *Petran Ambulance*, where she led the section for the wounded (Dronca, 1999, pp. 150-151; Popescu, 2018, p. 196). Ever since the war, her notes expressed her desire to set up a branch of the Romanian Red Cross in Cluj, an aspiration she fulfilled after the war.

The programme of the local Red Cross included the care for the wounded and sick soldiers, and setting up a canteen in the Cluj railway station, during the War in the East. The society also sent poor children and young people in need to school colonies at the Black Sea; steps were taken to inaugurate the medical students' dormitory (A., 1932, p. 11). Aid was given out to needy families during winter, Christmas gifts were distributed to children with disabilities. The Cluj branch of the Red Cross was also involved in national actions such as helping leprosy patients in Lărgeanca, and in 1928-1929 food aid was sent to Bessarabia. Finally, conferences and special courses were organised in collaboration with the army and all the civil and church institutions in Cluj. In 1939, the Cluj branch of the Red Cross had more than 30 volunteer nurses patented, distributed numerous health brochures, and organised various philanthropic celebrations. The number of members of the Cluj branch reached 632 (Apostol, 1939, p. 18).

OTHER GENDER SOLIDARITIES CENTRED AROUND SPECIFIC GOALS

A laic association of women with a traditionalist and nationalist character was the Reunion of the Christian Women in Cluj, founded in February 1925, under the leadership of Elena Bratu. The three directions of action of the reunion were: the establishment of gender, religious and national solidarity; the social assistance of Christian students (in fact, the main concern of this

organisation); supporting Christian industry and trade, especially cooperatives, towards the development of a Romanian economic and social elite in Cluj and Transylvania, where Hungarian and Jewish merchants and entrepreneurs dominated at the time. In addition to these three main directions of action, certain provisions in the company's statutes (generally valid for most women's societies at the time) included the protection of widows, war orphans, and poor families in Cluj. The Reunion also supported the completion of the Orthodox Cathedral in Cluj and the church at the Mausoleum in Mărășești, objectives shared with the local branch of SONFR (Stan, 2010a, pp. 134-136).

Furthermore, although the Reunion of the Christian Women did not advocate specifically for the political emancipation of women, they did address this issue, around which some propaganda activity took place as well. Like the Romanian Women's Group, the Reunion of the Christian Women spoke out against women's enrolment in political parties, advocating in favour of a women's bloc vote on various social or national issues (Cosma, 2002, pp. 71-87; Stan, 2010a, p. 142). Elena Bratu's article, *Appeal to the Romanian Women*, also called for participation in the local elections, capitalising on the experience gained by men in the administration, blaming politics and political parties, and drawing a line between administration and party politics (Bratu, 1930, p. 89). Also, women's rights or other issues of interest such as raising children, religion and its role in education, or the issue of alcoholism were discussed by the reunion members in public conferences. Through cultural events – celebrations, concerts, balls, etc. – the reunion ensured its public visibility, as well as gaining a large part of the funds used to achieve its main objectives (Stan, 2010a, p. 147).

Elena Bratu was the founder and executive president of the Reunion of the Christian Women; she was the wife of astronomer, mathematician, and university professor Gheorghe Bratu, director of the Astronomical Observatory (Iancu, 2000, p. 54). A graduate with a doctorate in law, she was one of the few women who practiced law in interwar Cluj; she worked at the same law firm with Amos Frâncu and supported the idea of the Romanianisation of the bars. Always dressed in a national costume, and wearing her briefcase full of files, lawyer Elena Bratu was a peculiar appearance on the streets of Cluj at that time (Cosma, 2019, p. 121, pp. 123-124). Her nationalist ideological affinities are also reflected in her social and editorial activity, marked by a radical, nationalist discourse. On the other hand, Elena Bratu's name does not appear exclusively in relation to the Reunion of Christian Women: she also activated within the Cluj branch of the Romanian Women's Group and the *Cununa* Society of the Sisters of the Cross in Cluj (Cosma, 2019, p. 123).

The position of honorary president of the reunion was conferred to Elena Pop Hossu-Longin, daughter of Gheorghe Pop de Băsești, and wife of Francisc Hossu-Longin, lawyer and politician engaged in the struggle for national emancipation (Iancu, 2000, p. 147). She founded the Reunion of the Romanian Women in Sălaj, was the co-founder and president of the Reunion of the Romanian Women in Hunedoara, and was elected vice-president of the Union of the Romanian Women in Transylvania and Hungary in 1913, when the Union was established. With her consistent activity in women's societies in Transylvania, she enjoyed real prestige that motivated her appointment as honorary president of the Reunion of the Christian Women. We can also consider the fact that, between Elena Bratu and Elena Pop Hossu-Longin, a close friendship developed (Glodariu, 1982, pp. 488-496; Pop, 2007).

Since 1929, the position of vice president was also created in the Reunion. Marietta Cătuneanu, wife of Professor Ion C. Cătuneanu, known for her anti-Semitic views, and Virginia Gh. Pamfil (wife of university professor Gh. Pamfil?) held the position. As for the members of the society, they were the spouses of university professors or intellectuals and senior Romanian officials in

Cluj. Among them were leaders of other women's societies in Cluj such as: Livia Boilă, Zina G. Moroianu, later Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdat, and Lucreția Barbul (Stan, 2010a, pp. 137-139). Organisationally, the Reunion aimed to develop itself, establishing other directly-subordinated societies, such as the *Strasbourg Company*; they also established subsidiaries, such as the one in Bistrița, in 1930 (Stan, 2010a, p. 148).

Regarding the activity of the Reunion, to achieve the envisioned *spiritual unity* of Christian women in Cluj, the reunion members consciously assumed their participation in several female societies in Cluj, and launched invitations to their general meetings to women's associations in the city, succeeding in adopting some common measures, such as the establishment in 1929 of an office for the coordination of the artistic-literary activity of all women's societies in Cluj. The main objective of the Reunion, to support the youth without means (students and pupils), was pursued through countless activities, such as raising funds for a dormitory and a canteen for students and especially through direct financial or material assistance to students and pupils. Since 1928, three special financial deposits had been set up to support poor and valuable students at the Cluj Conservatory. Many young people attending vocational schools also struggled to find work. As for the third major objective of the meeting, encouraging Christian industry and merchants, through the "Women's Calendar" (the association's publication), commercial advertisements of small businesses with Romanian patrons were printed and broadcast; also, the Reunion urged Romanian women in the city to only shop at Romanian stores. Efforts were made to open a household-industry workshop to help the poor learn and to offer work to women in need (Stan, 2010a, pp. 144-147).

A distinct society in the landscape of interwar female activism was the Romanian University Women's Association, founded and led by Alice Grințescu. Alice Jeanne Pierrette Grințescu, born Rodrigue, was originally from Geneva, of French parents. She attended the Faculty of Science at the University of Geneva, also pursuing a doctorate; she was the first woman to obtain a doctorate in science at this university. Until 1912, she worked in pre-university education and research, publishing studies in the field of natural sciences (Actes, 1961, pp. 209-210). She married Ion Grințescu, with whom she had two daughters. They settled in Romania, initially in Bucharest, then for a few years in Cluj. The arrival of the family in Cluj in 1919 was determined by Ion Grințescu's entry into the academic body of the University, as a professor of plant anatomy and physiology and, since 1923, in that of the Academy of Higher Agronomic Studies. In 1936, following the transfer of Ion Grințescu to Bucharest, the family left Cluj (Ciupea & Târău, 2007, p. 166).

In Romania, Alice Grințescu developed several initiatives in the field of social assistance. During the war, while living in Bucharest, she opened a day-care in her own home to take care of the children of working women (whose husbands were at war), during their work hours. Grințescu continued this type of social activism in Cluj, this time focusing on students. In 1920, she formed under her presidency the Association for the Protection of University Students in Cluj, aiming to open a dormitory for female students. Along with a couple of female teachers and university professors' wives, she started raising funds through subscriptions, quickly improvising a dormitory in a place provided for a limited time by the Regional Education Resort for Transylvania. They purchased a space afterwards, which they furnished and later managed to add a second floor to. The dormitory was primarily home to students in their final year of study and those whose parents were burdened with many children. The dormitory fulfilled its purpose until 1925 when the administration of the University of Cluj managed to obtain the necessary funds for the opening and commissioning of an official dormitory. Alice Grințescu also set up an information office at the train station in Cluj, to meet and guide the young girls who arrived in

Cluj for medical consultations or to find a job. The office functioned for about ten years after the war, from 1922 until 1932 (Necrologul, 1960).

On April 7, 1921, Alice Grințescu founded a feminist association, which addressed women with university degrees, the Romanian University Women's Association. Based in Cluj, it was to operate throughout Romania. Its purpose was to facilitate collaboration and friendship between university women *of all nations and especially between Romanian university women*, to support *their moral interests*, to support them in their initiatives of contributing to *useful women's works*. The association could include all women graduates who expressed a desire to become active members, the only condition to being accepted consisting of two recommendations from members of the association. Three sections were created: one dealing with the principles of education and schooling, one dedicated to intellectual cooperation, destined to the international exchange of students and teachers (with the responsibility of supporting its members with scholarships abroad) and a third section, social assistance, with concerns in the field of organising canteens and dormitories, study spaces for female students and university women (Dimitriu, 2011, pp. 148-149).

In its beginnings, the association's president was Alice Grințescu from Cluj; vice-presidents were Alexandrina Șandru from Cernăuți and Silvia Slăvescu from Ploiești; Elena Drăgoșescu and Theodora Naneș from Bucharest were also included. Nora Lemeny was secretary of the association (Văcărescu, 2014, p. 107); having studied letters in Cluj and Geneva, she was the first woman to receive a doctorate in letters at the University of Cluj. Known for her involvement in the socialist movement and her involvement in the events of the 1918 Union (the only woman elected to the Grand National Council), a convinced feminist, a supporter of gender equality and political and civil rights for women (Vaida, 2018, p. 12). The association was joined by graduates from different parts of the country, building cohesion between women with higher education, a unity that sought to contribute to enhancing the capacity of women in all areas of public life. It was a significant aspect, even if the percentage of graduates in Romania did not exceed 0.6%, according to statistics from 1930 (Dimitriu, 2011, p. 149).

A particular expression of the Cluj feminist movement during that period was the Cluj branch of the Romanian Women's Group, founded by Sofia Meteș. The parent organisation was established in 1929 in Bucharest, at the initiative of Alexandrina Cantacuzino, amid confrontations of opinion among women's organisations on the tactics to be followed after granting the right to vote and the eligibility of women in local government bodies. Accusing political parties of politicking and corruption, the group projected the idea of an independent women's party, which could have provided strength and freedom of action to achieve the goals of the feminist movement and sanitisation of public life. In this context, they forbid its members to join political parties. Furthermore, according to the Statute, the purpose of the group was *to prepare* women for political rights, to collaborate in leading the country on equal terms with men. The main means of action provided was propaganda to raise public awareness of the urgent need to improve the condition of women.

Alexandrina Cantacuzino laid the ideological foundations of the new association but developed it in a direction that reflected the attraction exerted by authoritarianism. In 1933, she proposed rebuilding the country based on corporatism, as well as a constitutional reform in this spirit; in 1936, she supported the regulation of women's activity for the defence of the country to double the number of active combatants. Alexandrina Cantacuzino's speeches became more and more nationalist, culminating in 1937 with demands for ethnic preservation through restrictive laws on citizenship, a ban on mixed marriages for state employees, financial support for eugenic marriages between Romanians, awards for large families (Petrescu, 2006, pp. 95-96). The

discourse claiming women's rights acquired a particular note, the need for women's empowerment being argued in terms of the debt they had to fulfil towards their homeland (Cosma, 2002, p. 87).

The new organisation established itself in the 1930s as one of the most influential women's associations, with branches in all provinces of the country (Mihăilescu, 2006, pp. 25-26). Undoubtedly, the close relationship between Alexandrina Cantacuzino and Sofia Meteş contributed to the establishment of the Cluj branch. When founding the Romanian Women's Group and for its expansion in the territory, Alexandrina Cantacuzino gathered around her collaborators from the National Council of Romanian Women, but also from the SONFR. Following the model of Bucharest leader Alexandrina Cantacuzino, Sofia Meteş first attracted in the Cluj Group some members of the Cluj branch of the SONFR, and the vice-president position was given to Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdat.

Originally from Buzău, Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdat studied in Bucharest and at the Sorbonne; she received a doctorate from the University of Fribourg, specialising in modern and classical philology. Returning to Romania in 1925, she worked in pre-university education in Bucharest and then Buftea; in 1927 she settled in Cluj, where she held a teaching position at the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies. A member of the Paris World Peace Society as an active pacifist, she had also shown social commitment in other women's societies in Cluj, such as the Reunion of the Christian Women, or the Society of the Orthodox Women (Stan, 2010b, pp. 245-257). Her editorial work includes *La Querela Pacis d'Erasmus* (1924) and her doctoral dissertation, *De Vauban á Voltaire* (1925), as well as two feminist relevant lectures given under the auspices of the Romanian Women's Group, published in brochures: *The Role of Women in Family and Society* and *The Benefits of Women's Association*.

In 1934, the Romanian Women's Group committee included Raluca Ripan (who held a doctorate in chemistry and was a university professor), future vice president Olimpia Bârsan (wife of the director of the National Theatre in Cluj, Zaharia Bârsan), Letiția Ghidionescu (teacher, wife of the university professor Vladimir Ghidionescu), etc. (Lechințan, 2020, p. 30).

Sofia Meteş, the leader of the Cluj Group, was a vocal lecturer and evolved on the way paved by Alexandrina Cantacuzino, a fact illustrated by the titles of some of her lectures: *The mission of Romanianism for Romanianism, Romanian Imperatives; Women and Public Rights; The Romanian Woman and the Great National Duties*, etc. (Ivănescu, 2001, p. 188). In terms of journalism, most of Sofia Meteş's articles were printed in the *Annual Calendars of the Anti-Revisionist League*, including *The Debt of Romanian Women to the Nation and the Country* (1937) or *About the Past Struggles of Romanian Women in Transylvania for National Unity* (1938) (Lazăr, 2003, pp. 327-328).

Anti-revisionism became a prominent component of the group's speech and actions in Cluj. In November 1936, Sofia Meteş launched a call for anti-revisionist action and invited members of the Regional Committee of the Anti-Revisionist League to cooperate. A fruitful connection was built in the organisation of conferences, demonstrations, and commemorations, and the publication of articles with anti-revisionist content was supported with funds. The group and Sofia Meteş herself supported the Regional Committee of the Anti-Revisionist League in organising and conducting in 1937 the visit to Cluj of the members of the British Parliament: The Duchess of Atholl, Lady Layton and Miss Ratherborne, supporters of Romanian anti-revisionism abroad (Lazăr, 2003, pp. 327-328).

DEFINING ELEMENTS OF WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN INTERWAR CLUJ

As a whole, the activism of Romanian women took place in Cluj within three categories of societies: those sponsored by the churches (Orthodox and Greek Catholic), charities with social and health assistance, and societies formed as expressions of gender solidarity, associated with: the quality of being *Christian* in the case of the Christian Women's Reunion (which erased the confessional differences between Romanian women, the phrase indirectly stating, in this case, anti-Semitic and anti-Hungarian feelings) (Stan, 2010a, pp. 134-135); the *educational level*, in the case of the Romanian University Women's Association; *the purpose of women's emancipation*, such as the Romanian Women's Group. This classification does not entirely exclude the interference of their objectives, which can be observed in secondary situations.

The members of the societies were the representatives of the Romanian elite from Cluj at the time; an important place was occupied by the Cluj academic body (and the Romanian teaching staff in general), the representatives of the administrative apparatus and the army.

Among the leaders, there were remarkable figures of the women's movement in Transylvania from the pre-war period (Ana Popp de Lemeni, Elena Pop Hossu-Longin, Eugenia Tripon, etc.), who maintained the character of local female activism under the sign of a certain continuity. Many were wives of militants in the national movement of Romanians before 1918, with a previous experience in the activity of women's associations in Transylvania, one of the most active components of national militancy in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Ștîger, 1989, pp. 439-440). The specific forms in which the activity of women in these associations was sublimated by the national struggle influenced the evolution of the women's movement in the Cluj area during the interwar years. Regarding the profile of the leaders of these associations, we also find that we are dealing with many women with degrees, doctorates (among those who taught), as many were working in the educational field. However, the vast majority were not professionally active: they were educated women who, according to the bourgeois custom of the time, dedicated themselves to their families and their homes after marriage. The practiced social commitment was a defining aspect of their lifestyle.

If in the case of church-patronised societies, religion was the one that brought women together, in the case of others, so did the close relations between the association members or the initiatives mediated by spouses. For example, in the University Women's Association, the rule that members needed two recommendations from members of society implied previous acquaintances and interactions. Moreover, in the Christian Women's Reunion, most of the members were spouses of university professors from the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Sciences (where Gheorghe Bratu, the husband of the respective society's initiator, was active). Another phenomenon was mentioned by Lucreția Barbul in her memoirs:

usually, "each society gathered the wives of different politicians, for example, at Prince Mircea the liberals, at the Charity and Reunion of St. Mary the National-Peasants, at the Red Cross the wives of the military", etc. (Barbul, 2004, p. 86).

On the other hand, women did not feel exclusively connected to the activity of one society, practicing multiple commitments in support of specific or diverse goals, or simply another level of local female solidarity.

Ideologically and discursively, some definitory aspects can also be detected. If during the pre-war period the activity of Romanian women was concentrated in a single society, between the wars, despite witnessing a spectacular multiplication (eleven societies of Romanian women by 1929), there were no reversals compared to the previous period regarding the accepted female model; built on an ideological or discursive level, this model was only readapted to new political

realities and local specificities. In interwar Cluj, the pre-war militant position was not abandoned. If national emancipation and the Union used to be the goals that polarised national forces beyond gender differences, after the war, this path continued, women now supporting the consolidation of the nation and the assertion of national identity.

Not by chance, the solidarity around the two Romanian churches was particularly strong. Orthodox women identified the church with a fortress of resistance during the struggle for national emancipation and a symbol of victory, a shield of national becoming.

“The Church”, Elena Popescu-Voitești and Sofia Meteș pointed out in an appeal, “was in the past of our subjugated pains, the citadel of resistance where the God-loving soul of our nation prepared in silence for the holy day of freedom, [...] and today, it is a sign of victory and the shield of our future” (Popescu-Voitești & Meteș, 1927, pp. 3-4).

Expressing the beliefs of Greek Catholic women, Livia Boilă argued:

“Only on faith embodied in a certain church can one build the whole man and a better society” (Boilă, 1924, pp. 5-6).

Romanian women were committed to strengthening and raising everything that was Romanian in Cluj at that time. By dedicating themselves to the task of building the Orthodox Cathedral, they aimed to erect a symbol of Romanianism and to strengthen the Romanian spirit in the city of Cluj. Elena Popescu-Voitești emphasised:

“I believe that after the monument of Mărășești, the cathedral in Cluj is the most significant monument of entire Greater Romania. Where the high towers of the churches of different rites rise, where the bells of all denominations ring out, the towers of the old church are too small, too modest, and the sound of its bells is too dark, too muffled. We need an imposing, silent monument, with large dominant cupolas, with bells whose voices pierce the sky, repeating our victory throughout the ages and that will be to our descendants a symbol and confirmation of fulfilling our centuries-long dream” (Popescu-Voitești (II), 1925, pp. 4-5).

The women put the charitable activity at the service of their fellow compatriots with a precarious financial situation. Not by chance, the main target group was that of Romanian students. Despite the functioning of the Romanian university in Cluj having returned to normal, the living conditions of the students progressed slowly. Many Romanian students from poor backgrounds faced accommodation and financial difficulties (Stan, 2010a, p. 134). Helping Romanian students by providing dormitories, canteens, and caring for the suffering, even if it was not the main goal of all women's societies, was indeed considered by most of them. This commitment was conceived as part of the contribution of women to the work of national restoration, as shown by Olivia Deleu, who motivated the efforts made within the Charity by:

“the desire of a group of intellectual women to contribute to the great work of regeneration of national forces, under the form of a Charity Society” (Sanitarius, 1926, p. 14).

The fight against tuberculosis present in various social environments at that time, but especially in the poor ones, aimed to:

“save the youth affected by the disease [...] that haunts all layers of society, weakening the vitality of our Nation” (Sanitarius, 1926, p. 13).

Then, helping widows, orphans, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds was constantly pursued by the Romanian women's movement in Cluj. The actions focused primarily on the neighbourhoods inhabited by many compatriots, where remarkable social works were carried out (Children's Day Care in Iris neighbourhood, and Prince Mircea Dispensary in Mănăștur neighbourhood).

Thus, along with religiosity, charity and pedagogical vocation outlined the accepted female model. First of all, in the family:

“through her entire life, the woman must be a symbol of the virtues of the faith, because in the child’s soul remains what the true mother imprints” Sofia Meteş emphasised, because: “educating our youth in a religious-moral spirit is superior to any other education system” (*Importanța educației*, 1937, pp. 7-8).

Outside her family, the woman had to fight as an educator for the regeneration of the Romanian nation, threatened by moral dangers and emotional crises, considered:

“even more dangerous than the enemies of our material goods, more so than the enemies of the country’s borders” (Boilă, 1924, pp. 5-6).

Children, young people, and workers were targeted. Referring to the latter, Sofia Meteş pointed out:

“This world of workers, threatened and haunted at every crossroads by the enemies of our country, who try to poison their souls with the destructive ideas of communism; should we not stay awake and save them, all of us who must do so, tomorrow will become a permanent danger for the integrity and the future of our beloved country” (Meteş, 1929, pp. 1-4).

The role of educator, this commitment of women within family and society, was considered, through the voice of Elena Popescu-Voitești:

“a great social endeavour, an important means of national defence” (Popescu-Voitești, 1928, pp. 1-6).

It was a significant task undertaken in the effort of post-war reconstruction and national construction:

“We, women, also have our share of activity [...] As always, the woman is the guide of souls, the protector of ancestral customs, the keeper of language and faith; on her rests the moral power of the nation” (Popescu-Voitești, (I) 1925, pp. 1-2).

Regarding the issue of women’s rights, we find it explicit especially in the approaches of the members of the Cluj branch of the Romanian Women’s Group, acting as a society for emancipation. Without recounting the Group’s particularities within the framework of the Romanian feminist orientations of the time, we will only highlight a few local manifestations which emphasise various aspects of the ideational panoply of this society.

Deploring the fact that women were only granted partial electoral rights, Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdat recommended her fellow citizens not to join political parties, considering the gesture a potential complicity in the disintegration of the country. With the participation of women, the administration

“should be torn away from the tyranny of the political leaders and from the clutches of the agents holding the highest administrative positions” (Constantinescu-Bagdat, 1930, p. 33).

Politics had to disappear from the administration:

“the intervention of women in administrative positions”, she stressed, “can in no way worsen the current state of affairs. Women [...] would contribute a great deal of work in whatever branch of the economy opened to them; they would naturally contribute to clearing up the chaos in which we are struggling, by fulfilling the mission of civic educator” (Constantinescu-Bagdat, 1930, p. 18).

Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdat related women’s emancipation to the degree of civilisation of different nations and considered it a confirmation of their development level (Constantinescu-Bagdat, 1930, p. 19). Highlighting the role played by women in various moments of Romanian history, Sofia Meteş concluded in one of her conferences that their historical contributions

sufficiently illustrate that women's mission should not be regarded only within the limited space of one's family and that granting full political rights to Romanian women was imminent (*Femeia română*, 1935, pp. 22-23). It was an issue of national interest because:

"Romanian women, fighting for the realisation of their aspirations, pursue, as their supreme goal, the superior interests of the country and the nation" (*Femeia și drepturile*, 1934, p. 22).

Sofia Meteș stressed the imperative need to organise the Romanian feminine energies, to put them in the service of the great national causes, considering that:

"today, women everywhere are propagators of currents and creators of public opinions. Through the priceless gift of love, they have the noble mission of being the preparers of peace and justice on earth" (*Femeia și drepturile*, 1934, p. 22).

These considerations on the emancipation of women were not limited to a series of rights granted for the sole purpose of gender equality, but rather it was emphasised how these rights enhanced the ability of women to serve national interests, therefore emancipation was claimed for national benefits.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be stated that women's societies in Cluj during the interwar years primarily ensured the setting for the religious, charitable, cultural, and educational actions of Romanian women from the elite of their time. Some Cluj societies were set up locally, in some cases aspiring to regional expansion (such as The Reunion of the Christian Women) or guaranteeing the establishment of federal structures (St. Mary's Reunion of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Women). Others were local subsidiaries of associations with a national audience, such as The Society of the Orthodox Women among church-patronised societies, The Charity Fund of HRH Princess Helen or Prince Mircea Society for the Protection of Children in Romania (among charitable societies), and also The Romanian Women's Group as a society dedicated to the emancipation of women.

The model of the leader was that of the educated, titled woman, belonging to the intellectuals and to the Cluj bourgeoisie of the time, for whom social activism was a component of her way of living, a norm of social conduct unanimously accepted and assumed at the time. The causes in the support of which women were engaged did not exclude multiple mobilisations, nor their activity in several associations with different profiles. Women's relationships and circles were based on friendship, as they belonged to common interest groups, to groups built on common professions, or based on the political affinities of their husbands, which transferred to the relational sphere of their female life partners.

Not only women's initiatives within their societies but also the ideological and discursive constructions on which they were based were part of the construction and assertion of local Romanian identity. Regardless of the particularities of the various women's societies presented, their activity was subsumed under the regeneration, consolidation, and defence of the nation. The Romanian women's movement from Cluj put itself at the service of the nation in all aspects, serving this supreme objective assumed through piety, charity, education and even raising the claim for women's emancipation.

Undoubtedly, the profile of Romanian female activism in Cluj was also under the influence of a strong moulding tradition. Some of the leaders came with the previous experience of the social,

cultural and educational activity from pre-1918 women's associations, back when the women's movement was part of the movement for the national emancipation and union of Romanians. In the post-Union political context, there had been no discontinuity from past practices; the historical context that shaped local post-war realities favoured continuity and consequent readjustment, but without producing dramatic upheavals nor a revolutionary rethinking of women's emancipation movement. In this context, there had been no receptiveness towards radical emancipatory ideas such as militancy for women's rights that would ultimately focus on feminine emancipation.

Regarded in a regional and national context, this evolution also allows some findings. The specific of the Romanian women's movement in Cluj adjusted to the particularities of a regional current of the women's movement. In Transylvania, the flag bearer was The Union of the Romanian Women, a federation of women's societies in Transylvania, established in 1913, which was joined, as showed in this study, by women's societies in Cluj, and which represented a traditionalist, moderate current within the larger Romanian feminist movement. The ideas of radical feminism militating for maximal rights claims for women did not win supporters in Transylvania, nor in Cluj. Proof of this is also the unsuccessful initiative of The Association for the Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women to establish local branches in Transylvania; the association had a maximalist programme in the field of women's rights, yet they were not popular in Transylvania, where women had obtained civil rights before the war. Therefore, the claim for political rights, as well as the strategy professed by the radical feminist orientation embodied by The Association for the Civil and Political Emancipation of the Romanian Woman, were viewed with some reservations. By the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, a new feminist orientation had taken shape within the Romanian women's movement: The Romanian Women's Group. Promoting a distorted interpretation of women's rights within an ideological construct of anti-democratic and authoritarian origin with strong nationalist accents, the association opened several branches in Transylvania and, as already shown, it found a considerable audience in Cluj (Cosma, 2002, pp. 26-27, pp. 71-87; Dimitriu, 2011, pp. 126-138, pp. 242-248).

A correct understanding of the evolution and particularities of the Cluj women's movement implies the knowledge and understanding of the local realities of the time, shaped by the combined action of a multitude of factors, varying from demographics (the ethnic structure), to economic factors, social, cultural, all considered within a new political state of affairs after 1918. The activity of the people of Cluj focused on these factors, aiming to generate new realities that would enhance the assertion of the Romanian identity. Strengthening the religious feeling in the spirit of the two Romanian Churches, concentrating the educational activity on young people (pupils, students), of some population segments delimited on economic-social criteria (workers) or gender (women), helping compatriots in need, concerns for reducing infant mortality, combat against social diseases that marked urban areas predominantly inhabited by Romanians, supporting Romanian entrepreneurs in economics and trade, bringing Romanian cultural events to the public stage, contributing to the building of Romanian architectural and monumental symbols in the Cluj urban public space – there were as many ways in which women's activism took upon itself to contribute and did contribute to the construction and assertion of the Romanian local identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The translation was done by Ioana Ursu.

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