Introduction

In mid-November 1929, a social worker from Bucharest, the capital of Romania, visited the home of Marioara I. for the first time.[1] The social worker, a young woman named Natalia Raisky,[2] had been alerted to Marioara I.'s situation by the parish priest in the Tei neighborhood. The priest may have found the social worker by walking the short distance from his church to a small house on Tei's main thoroughfare. A Demonstration Center for the Assistance of the Family was being set up there by a group of social workers that included Raisky. The Center would officially open its doors several weeks later, in December 1929—with the help of a 375,000 Lei subsidy from the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection and encouragement from Princess Ileana of Romania.[3] The Center was meant to model US-inspired social work practices for trainee social workers and, ultimately, for managers of municipal institutions that provided social services for Bucharest's poorest inhabitants.

The 1929 cooperation between the neighborhood priest and the new neighborhood social workers offers a microhistorical glimpse into a broad historical process unevenly unfolding at the time across Europe: the partial reconfiguration of household social reproduction through the unequal expansion of state-supported social services and benefits.[4] This was a process that had effects on the lives of most people, not only on those of the poorest. In the broadest sense, by linking local and transnational interactions related to welfare, in this book I ana-

lyze how welfare provision changed after the First World War in the capital city of an East-Central European agrarian country. Drawing on feminist theory, gender, labor, and welfare history, I interpret this change as a generally inequitable reconfiguration of the gendered paid and unpaid work meant to foster the well-being of others. I focus on women welfare activists, and through the documents they produced, seek to understand the lives of other, more precarious, categories of women welfare workers as well. Throughout, I aim to support the claim that histories of welfare provision are histories of work and histories of work are histories of welfare provision.

"Mahalaua Teilor", the "Linden Tress" neighborhood, Tei for short, the place where this history of welfare provision begins, was an old, popular neighborhood. Nowadays considered close to the city center of Bucharest, its aspect transformed during the 1970s, in the late 1920s Tei was on the city's margins (Map 1). Reporters portrayed Tei not as the neighborhood of poor workers it was but as an area with "eight hundred houses and four hundred taverns",[5] inhabited by overworked young mothers, illegitimate children, slick petty criminals and large Roma families. After the 1929 opening, over the next decade, the Demonstration Center's social workers would turn Tei into the epicenter of data collection and research on gendered poverty and urban transformation in Bucharest. The social workers (known in Romanian as *asistente sociale*, that is "social assistants") were linked to the Superior School for Social Assistance [*Şcoala Superioară de Asistenţă Socială*, SSAS] and part of a local network of more or less socially progressive women welfare activists. In fact, the SSAS had initiated and managed the Demonstration Center.

Marioara I. had lived in the Tei neighborhood at one point. She was Romanian-speaking and of Orthodox religion. Her circumstances may have come to the attention of the priest of the Orthodox "Sfânta Treime" church in Tei while the woman resided in the area. By late 1929, Marioara I. was no longer living in Tei but in a different, similarly modest, peripheral neighborhood. In the one-room rented house, the visiting social worker met the 32-year-old consumptive single

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5 "Tei: Mahalaua cu 400 de cârciumi [Tei: The neighborhood with 400 taverns]," *Ilustraţiunea română* 7, no. 38 (September 11, 1935): 14. Sometimes referred to in English as "slums," interwar Bucharest's mahalale were peripheral and poor neighborhoods. Like historical English slums, by the 1930s, the mahalale had become crowded and were characterized by bad housing. Before the First World War, they could be modest but relatively comfortable and green areas. As this magazine article suggests, even in the 1930s, Tei inhabitants could enjoy a nearby large park and relatively clean lake. On slums and their representation, see Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 105–106.

mother, her two toddler children and a 13-year-old niece. Orphaned, the niece had traveled from the countryside to the capital city to join her aunt's household.

The social worker found the members of the household, especially Marioara I., to be in a very precarious situation indeed. The woman owed money to the doctor, the landlord and the greengrocer. Of great concern to Marioara I. were lapses in lease payments towards the local Singer subsidiary, covering the price of two sewing machines which were essential for the family's income. On the Singer machines, at home, Marioara I. and her niece sewed leather parts used by shoemakers in larger workshops to produce boots. The woman had learned the craft from her common-law husband, with whom she had worked side by side. The abusive man had left the family, establishing a new household at a known address in the same neighborhood. He refused to support his children. The social worker noted in her casework file [*cazier*] that when not too ill to accept orders, Marioara I. could earn 150 to 500 Lei weekly. Yet the woman would have needed at least 3,000 Lei each month to cover all the expenses of her modest household—that is, an income matching the typical monthly wages of a skilled male worker in the crisis year 1930.[6] Marioara I.'s failing health meant that in the previous year she had seldom earned enough for the family to even scrape by.

Although her situation was dire, Marioara I. was not entirely without help. Raisky, the social worker, noted that Marioara I.'s older sister, Georgeta G., married to a "good young man", lived in the same neighborhood and helped as often as possible. Georgeta had moved to Bucharest around 1918, from a village next to the town of Curtea de Argeș (or possibly from the town itself), 150 kilometers away from Bucharest. She brought Marioara to the capital city some years thereafter. The sisters came from a peasant family with many children and little land. They had a strong bond with each other. By contrast, their ties to the rest of their relatives, who "stayed in the countryside", were weak. Besides Georgeta, neighbors, mostly other poor women in similar situations, aided Marioara I. as well, as part of a practice of mutual support. For instance, in conversations with the social worker, they vouched for Marioara's hard-working character and love for her children.

Some institutions and private charities had been of some help already before Raisky's first visit. In the casework file about Marioara I., the social worker noted that before her first visit, the family had received money to pay for food and medicine from several organizations. Small amounts were donated by the Association of the Romanian Clergy and free medical assistance for the children was provided

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6 Veturia Manuilă, "Principii de organizarea ajutorării șomeourilor în sectorul I al Municipiului București [Principles in the organization of help for the unemployed in Sector I of the City of Bucharest]," *Buletinul muncii, cooperației și a siguărilor sociale* 12, no. 10–12 (December 1932): 444.

through the "Principele Mircea" (Prince Mircea) association. Bucharest City Hall, through one of its handful of neighborhood clinics, was helping Marioara I. with a monthly aid of 200 Lei towards her children's food. (In 1930, 200 Lei bought twenty to twenty-two loaves of bread.)[7]

Marioara I. had drawn on her social insurance as well but to little avail. The social worker noted that the woman was a "full rights" member of one of the old labor corporations in the city. (As chapter 1 explains, since 1912, these guilds played a role in the rudimentary insurance system that would exist in the Kingdom of Romania until 1933.)[8] In practice, "full rights" meant that Marioara I. occasionally received 100 to 200 Lei from the president of the corporation, because she was considered a "luckless laborer" (an operational category within that organization). In other words, even if she had done paid work consistently, even if she had contributed to some form of insurance, Marioara I. was only eligible for emergency relief pieced together from several sources.

After the first encounter in November 1929, over the course of the following five months, the social worker visited Marioara I. at least once a week, aiming to assist her on the path of medical and financial recovery and personal autonomy, according to "individualized assistance" methods and principles derived from state-of-the-art American social work practices.[9] This assistance consisted in the social worker helping Marioara I. use an array of local-level welfare-related institutions and initiatives dotted across the city. Moreover, Raisky intermediated with public institutions and businesses, and networked with several women-run charities on Marioara's behalf. The social worker facilitated discounted medicine and free medical treatments and obtained guarantees from the Singer firm that the sewing machines would not be confiscated. She spoke to the president of Marioara I's workers' corporation, secured more small sums from several public institutions and private associations, and provided help in-kind (food, clothing, blankets, firewood, occasional help with housework).

The account of welfare provision above comes from a rare kind of document in the relatively fragile "archive of social reform" concerning urban interwar

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7 See Appendix 4.

8 Victor Rizescu, "Începuturile statului bunăstării pe filiera românească: Scurtă retrospectivă a etapelor unei reconceptualizări [The beginnings of the welfare state in the Romanian lineage: Brief retrospective of the stages of a reconceptualization]," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 18, no. 1 (2018): 35–56.

9 Veturia Manuilă, "Asistența individualizată și tehnica ei [Individualized assistance and its technique]," *Asistența socială–Buletinul Școalei Superioare de Asistență Socială "Principesa Ileana"* 1, no. 2 (1930): 9–13.

Romania.[10] It relies on information from a social work casework file with thirty-six entries published as an appendix to a 1930 issue of a journal called *Asistenţa socială*, the bulletin of the new Superior School for Social Assistance (*Şcoala Superioară de Asistenţă Socială*, SSAS) in Bucharest.[11] The casework file (re)constructs a story of careful, sustained assistance for a struggling family that in practice would have been exceedingly rare in Bucharest.

In the three decades since the fall of the Ceauşescu regime and its 1980s austerity politics, intellectuals and the broader public have painted the interwar period in Romania in rather bright colors, presumably as antidote to the grayness of state socialism and post-socialism. Accounts of a thriving or at least "picturesque" multiethnic Bucharest of the 1920s and 1930s continue to construct "an old–new mythology" about a gilded interwar past, in a seemingly prosperous but increasingly unequal EU-member country.[12] However, the frequent representation of Bucharest as a "Little Paris" has little to do with the interwar Bucharest of muddy suburbs and exploited workers described by state socialist historians.[13] New re-

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10 On archives of social reform as documents which ought to rivet historians' attention, not least because of their embedded flawed social utopianism, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

11 After some vacillation about the veracity of this appendix, I have decided to consider the set of documents included at the end of the *Asistenţa socială* journal's second issue as faithful copies of a *cazier*. More arguments and evidence were in favor of this evaluation rather than in favor of a more skeptical one, such as seeing the set as "embellished copies" of actual work documents (as I tended to, initially) or as entirely invented artefacts. The publishers titled the appendix "copy of"; other articles in the journal included specific examples and excerpts from social workers' case files; the doctors, medical, state and philanthropic institutions mentioned in the case file existed and were active at the addresses indicated; Marioara I.'s situation was serious, but as other SSAS studies in the Tei neighborhood show, not singular; concern for anonymity and ethics were not central to social work practice and research at the time. Still, this source's veracity was established through conjecture rather than based on corroborating documentary sources. The remaining uncertainty about the truthfulness of this uniquely valuable source should be kept in mind by readers.

12 Bogdan Murgescu, *România şi Europa: Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010) [Romania and Europe. The accumulation of economic differences]* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2010), 214.

13 Teodor Necşa, "Date privind situaţia clasei muncitoare în perioada crizei economice 1929–1933 [Data on the situation of the working class during the economic crisis 1929–1933]," *Studii–Revista de istorie* 9, no. 1 (1956): 107–23; Viorica Moisuc, "Unele date noi cu privire la situaţia maselor populare în perioada 1938–1940 [Some new data regarding the situation of the popular masses in the period 1938–1940]," *Studii–Revista de istorie* 17, no. 6 (1964): 1325–1340; Nicolae N. Constantinescu, ed., *Situaţia clasei muncitoare din România, 1914–1944 [The Situation of the working class in Romania, 1914–1944]* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966).

search in economic history supports interpretations in these older, highly critical, accounts.[14] The conclusions of such recent research call for a renewal of inquiry into the labor and social history of Bucharest, and of East-Central European cities like it, from different starting points than those of the Cold War.

In this book, I set up such new starting points in the fields of women's labor, activism and welfare history. I seek to answer questions raised by such "archives of social reform" as Marioara I.'s case file, to understand how women's social re-production work has historically impacted social transformation in a poorly funded state-building context. How did gender shape the work of managing in times of economic hardship? What did urban welfare policies mean, in practice, in Bucharest, especially for women? What kind of work did women do? How were public discussions about such work gendered? How was gendered welfare provision linked to historical transformations in women's status, including femi-nists' claims for political rights at the time? Most importantly, how does women's unpaid and badly paid work, and broadly shared assumptions about such work, shape societal responses to need and want? In pursuing such questions in local context, through this book I aim to contribute to gendering and more strongly connecting key themes in the global history of labor and welfare. I interpret and document the interwar period in East-Central European Romania as a peak mo-ment for local urban welfare initiatives built alongside or through low funding for public social services, with most well-being–related needs actually met through several kinds of "austerity welfare work" performed by women.

I conceive of welfare policymaking and social research as well as of domestic service and homemaking as forms of *austerity welfare work*. I argue that in the context of interwar Bucharest and the austerity economics that underfunded or cut public spending for welfare programs, forms of unpaid or badly paid social reproduction work became essential to keep things running, for governance by state and private actors. Throughout the book, I link the work of municipal coun-cilwomen, volunteers of welfare organizations, social workers trained to do re-search, servants and household workers who combined paid work with unpaid care work, into a history of how a modicum of well-being was ensured; in other words a history of welfare provision, in a city with few shareable resources.

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14 Murgescu, *România și Europa*, 205–274; Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia po-litică a capitalismului românesc [Dependency and development. The Political economy of Roma-nian capitalism]* (Bucharest: Tact, 2014), 33–35.

Welfare work: Unpaid and underpaid work to maintain others

By "welfare work" I mean the social reproduction work of "maintaining people on a daily basis and intergenerationally", shaped not only by markets but also by state policies.[15] As Jane Lewis points out, welfare provision is a "gendered mixed economy".[16] Historically, women have performed the bulk of the activities associated with "maintaining people", especially in the form of housework and care work for family members and within households. Caring for children, elderly relatives and partners, doing housework, managing family resources are all aspects of welfare work. At the same time, welfare work (also termed "welfare provision") can mean the work of making support available through welfare programs or activities organized the state or by voluntary organizations. Thus, occasional aid in cash or in food, helping someone else with securing a pension or free healthcare, constructing policy that affects people who benefit from welfare, as well as the labor of surviving in general, are all aspects of welfare work. Importantly, "welfare work" can be commodified, as Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas point out in speaking of "intimacy work".[17] In their definition, "intimacy work" is employment that fosters other people's well-being, in part by creating a sense of closeness to the person at the receiving end of such labor. Domestic work has been, historically, a key site of paid welfare work and a type of precarious intimacy labor.

In this monograph, "welfare work" encompasses most forms of welfare activism, most forms of unpaid work and the kinds of paid labor that are primarily meant to foster others' well-being. The welfare activism included in welfare work is defined similarly broadly, as advocacy and policymaking on social issues, as social knowledge production (reporting, collecting data) and as social work (casework). In the period of focus here, such activism was mainly done by educated or well-connected women who could not easily pursue careers in domains other than those associated with the historical practice of women's charity work. Welfare work includes unpaid care work for family members, as well as the badly paid care work of

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15 Evelyn Glenn Nakano, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs* 18, no. 1 (October 1992): 1–43 qtd. in Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "Introduction," in *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, eds. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 7.

16 Jane Lewis, "Gender and Welfare in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Gender, Health and Welfare*, eds. Anne Digby and John Stewart (London: Taylor & Francis, 1998), 208–211.

17 Boris and Salazar Parreñas, "Introduction."

servants in the homes of others. "Austerity welfare work" is the most suitable term I found to make visible shared preoccupations and interactions among women from interwar Bucharest who were otherwise separated by class, ideology, ethnicity, and political allegiances.

The practices and relationships of welfare work are not spared the impact of social hierarchies and alienating experiences. Welfare work can mean overwork and exploitation for those focusing their energy on maintaining others. It is easily made invisible: welfare work for the sake of family members can be seen as a mere act of love and not as tiring labor.[18] The strain of such labor is greater if not recognized and alleviated by communities or institutions. In interwar Bucharest, social work could bring support for individuals and families struggling with poverty, but it could also be exclusionary, favoring only the "virtuous poor". Quite possibly, Marioara I., Romanian-speaking, Orthodox, (most likely) non-Roma, a mother who could no longer work due to a serious illness, received close attention (but also saw her case file published in a journal as an example) because she fit SSAS constructions of the "virtuous poor". Social work could even be repressive through surveillance and punishment. For women welfare activists, welfare activism linked to public institutions could bring recognition and the power to shape policy long term. But it could also mean the power to legitimize low spending and eventually, during the Second World War, the power to enforce racist policies.

The concept of "welfare work" allows for an account of welfare not merely as a set of institutions, rules and practices facilitating redistribution, but as an assemblage of collectively constructed ways of dealing with need and vulnerability. This broad definition is especially important for understanding settings where state intervention to alleviate a crisis is absent or minimal. The concept brings to the forefront the significance of gender and gendered divisions of work for social reproduction and can encompass at once paid and unpaid work. It can make visible love and self-sacrifice, as well as surveillance, exclusion and repression of those who may not fit specific constructs of need and vulnerability. It can keep within the same narrative: the process of policymaking through institutions, activism, research, and care work in one's own home or in the homes of others for pay.

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18 Emma Dowling, "Love's Labour's Cost: The Political Economy of Intimacy," Verso Books, February 13, 2016, http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2499-love-s-labour-s-cost-the-political-economy-of-intimacy.

Austerity and overexploitation: On the political economy of interwar Romania

Throughout the 1918 to 1937 period analyzed in depth here, the Kingdom of Romania was an export-dependent agrarian economy, disadvantageously integrated in the world economy—an industrially "backward" country when teleologically compared to the Western European "core" of industrially developed countries.[19] It had more than doubled in size and population after major territorial gains at the Paris Peace Conference. Yet like many countries in East-Central Europe, including neighboring Hungary and Bulgaria (political rivals and export-market competitors),[20] in the 1920s, Romania borrowed heavily for reconstruction and to combat famine.[21] A desired industrialization process in this overwhelmingly agrarian country was paid for with revenues obtained from wheat and oil exports, and from unequitable taxation policies that burdened peasant households.[22]

After the First World War, several (but by no means all) influential economists in Romania, like those in other countries in the region, argued that industrialization needed to be prioritized as a development strategy in predominantly agrarian East-Central Europe.[23] By the 1920s, global prices for manufactured goods tended to increase while the prices of agricultural commodities declined. For agrarian countries, these "price scissors" created balance-of-payments problems and placed the region's small-plot-owning peasantry in the position of not being able to afford basic manufactured goods, not to mention the game-changing machinery transforming agriculture in the Americas.[24] With more or less foresight and method, most Romanian governments of the interwar period thus promoted industrialization. Implicitly, urbanization was welcomed. Cities could absorb what was portrayed as a surplus of labor force in rural areas.[25] A greater

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19 Derek H. Aldcroft, *Europe's Third World: The European Periphery in the Interwar Years* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 3.

20 Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle, WA and London: University of Washington Press, 1974), 10–11.

21 On post-First World War American famine-relief lending conditioned by oil field concessions and Romanian leading politicians' resistance to the proposition, coming from Hoover, see Doina Anca Crețu, *Foreign Aid and State Building in Interwar Romania: In Quest of an Ideal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024), 46–49.

22 Aldcroft, *Europe's Third World*, 66, 90.

23 Joseph R. Love, *Crafting the Third World: Theorizing Underdevelopment in Rumania and Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 61, 79.

24 Love, 79, 116.

25 Love, 65–66.

proportion of "ethnic Romanians" in "Greater Romania"'s multiethnic cities was seen as desirable by political thinkers of various ideological stripes.[26]

Yet accelerated urbanization and industrialization did not, in fact, solve the problems of overwhelmingly rural and agrarian Romania at the time. No doubt, cities in Romania, especially Bucharest, attracted workers running from rural poverty. Yet as I show at various points in this book, migration to cities and proletarianization there did little to improve the situation in the countryside. In fact, the countryside was the fallback solution when there was unemployment in the industry or the service sector in cities.

In an article on primitive accumulation in the history of Romania in a long-term perspective, Alina Sandra Cucu concludes that the extraction of resources and flexible labor from "the rural Other" subsidized the creation of value that enabled capital accumulation in the nineteenth century and the interwar period, as well as postwar socialist industrialization.[27] In a related but different vein, shaped by the work of women's labor historians and social reproduction feminists,[28] in this book I trace mechanisms of labor extraction to urban settings where women and men who were economically displaced from the countryside migrated and where they encountered a social policy setup that had little to offer them. I place the kinds of precarious, unpaid and badly paid work historically performed by women at the core of my account.

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26 On pro-urban stances among Romanian nationalists, see Ştefan C. Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to 'Romanianization', 1940–1944* (London: Springer, 2015), 8–9. On ethno-nationalism in interwar Romania, see Vladimir Solonari, *Purificarea naţiunii: Dislocări forţate de populaţie şi epurări etnice în România lui Ion Antonescu, 1940–1944 [Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Ion Antonescu's Romania, 1940–1944]* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2015), 35; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Cornell University Press, 2000).

27 Alina Sandra Cucu, "Socialist Accumulation and Its 'Primitives' in Romania," *International Review of Social History* 67, no. 2 (2022): 274.

28 Socialist and feminist thinkers in a Marxist vein have deepened the discussion on overexploitation and primitive accumulation, by underscoring how the subjugation of most women's work and capacity to bear children were, historically, integral to the operation of these primitive accumulation processes. Key works for this approach are Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998), and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004). Heterodox feminist political economy makes similar points concerning the significant contribution of women's unpaid work for well-being. See for example, Alessandra Mezzadri, Susan Newman and Sara Stevano, "Feminist Global Political Economies of Work and Social Reproduction," *Review of International Political Economy* 29, no. 6 (2022): 1783–1803. These arguments are now slowly being taken up, in specific variants, into mainstream economics, most visibly in the recognition given in 2023 through the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel to the work of economist Claudia Goldin.

Feminist scholars have pointed out that in times of need and crisis women work more, especially to sustain families.[29] In Romania, as in many other agrarian countries, peasants tended to overexploit the unpaid work of family members. In 1918 peasant men were enfranchised and in 1921, through a much-awaited agrarian reform, some 1.4 million peasants became owners of dwarf holdings, that is of plots under five hectares (so-called "minifundia").[30] In the 1920s, both German social democrat Karl Kautsky (discussing small farmers' self-exploitation, including through underconsumption), and especially Soviet unorthodox-communist Alexander V. Chayanov (discussing farmers' overexploitation of their own families' work),[31] suggested that this tendency towards overwork among small-holding farmers could be ascribed to patriarchal peasant men, overwhelmingly the heads of rural households, not seeing the labor of family members as an implicit cost in their farming activity.[32] After the First World War, legal setups which allowed for the continuation of coerced labor and the growing problem of household debt impoverished peasant households. However, in a country of small landowners such as Romania, the difficulties of a life spent farming were compounded by (male) heads of households' tendency to overexploit the labor of family members or of non-relatives integrated into households. In other words, patriarchal authority in peasant households, strengthened to a certain extent by male-centered land redistribution and enfranchisement, likely contributed to the self-destructive but seemingly endless resilience, and thus continued exploitability, of peasant communities in Romania noted by Cucu.[33] Even so, by the mid-1930s, many peasants in Romania were seeking non-farm employment in growing numbers, "because their minifundia were incapable of sustaining their families anywhere near the level of income of domestic servants in Bucharest".[34] As we will see, domestic work was overwhelmingly women's work and could be as overexploitative as work in the fields.

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29 Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Family, Welfare, and the State* (New York: Common Notions, 2015); Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).
30 Keith Hitchins, *Romania, 1866–1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 341–342, 351. Up to 3 million more men were entitled to land but had not been distributed any by the mid-1930s.
31 Love, *Crafting the Third World*, 63.
32 On Chayanov's echoes in current research on (gendered) global food regimes, see Diana Mincyte, "Rethinking Food Regime as Gender Regime: Agrarian Change and the Politics of Social Reproduction," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 51, no. 1 (2024): 23–24, especially.
33 Cucu, "Socialist Accumulation and Its 'Primitives,'" 261.
34 Love, *Crafting the Third World*, 65.

Across the twentieth century, welfare activists named and sought to provide solutions for the over-burdening of women, especially of those women who did waged work and continued to have to do housework and care work at the same time. Starting in the interwar period but especially after the Second World War, women's activism in the fields of welfare and labor shaped social policy arrangements towards an alleviation of the burden of social reproduction. Cash aid for mothers and publicly provided social services such as childcare were among the key policy aims of activists across Europe.[35] In the process, the social policies women activists helped shape became tied up in the double, seemingly paradoxical, process of reproducing exploitative economic arrangements while ensuring a modicum of well-being characteristic of postwar welfare states.[36] However, the family (more specifically, women as family workers) remained an important pillar of social reproduction.[37] This is because, as Silvia Federici points out, in times of economic crisis and welfare spending retrenchment, the weight of social reproduction work reverts to families, that is, historically, overwhelmingly, to women's care and provisioning work.[38] Women's social reproduction work was integral to the political economy of modern states not only in connection to the high-spending and then reduced postwar welfare states in Western Europe (the implicit case studies of most theoretical work on the topic) but also, and perhaps especially, in connection to the less wealthy contexts of weakly-industrialized states (as in most East-Central Europe) during the first major wave of policymaking related to state-supported welfare provision, occurring before the Second World War.

The period between the two World Wars has often been linked to the expansion of the state and state-backed interventionism. For Charles Maier, the interwar period was defined, across Europe, by the maintenance of social order, especially against a communist threat, through centralized and bureaucratized bargaining between competing interest groups, in a new configuration he called a "corporatist political economy".[39] For Stephen Kotkin, the "interwar conjuncture" (characterizing not only capitalist states but also the Soviet Union) merged the rise of mass politics, new labor management techniques, faster communication,

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35 See contributions in Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s* (New York: Routledge, 1991), and Selin Çağatay et al., eds., *Through the Prism of Gender and Work: Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th to 20th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

36 Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 11, 45.

37 Gøsta Esping Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 21–26.

38 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 86–87.

39 Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany and Italy in the Decade after World War I*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 9–10.

continued tensions between imperial and national politics with, significantly, the "turn toward social welfare as worldview and mode of governing".[40]

More recent research in economic history acts as a partial corrective to the notion that the interwar period was one of significant growth in state power. The interwar may have been a period of state expansion over many domains, but it was just as much one of (self)restraint, a golden age of "austerity" as economic doctrine.[41] Marc Blyth argues that classical liberal thinkers' austere sensibility (wary of debt, fond of frugality) translated by the 1920s into policymakers' widely-shared belief that "purging the system [through bankruptcies] and cutting spending" would bring recovery from crisis.[42] By contrast, high public spending solutions to recover from the global economic crisis were tried in Europe from the mid-1930s onwards, mostly reluctantly. For much of the period between the two World Wars, austerity was the dominant solution in case of economic troubles, in part because of commitment to safeguarding an international monetary system reliant on the gold standard.[43]

In this book, I grant due importance to reluctance and inability to spend on welfare for most of the period before the Second World War. Romania's politicians were largely faithful architects of the austerity blueprint, with most of them sharing the sensibility of nineteenth-century liberal thinkers when it came to social issues. The Romanian National Liberal Party (PNL) that dominated the interwar period was famously in favor of protectionism, not *laissez-faire*.[44] Yet, as noted by Victoria Brown, it was classically liberal in its austere approach to need and want.[45] This Liberal ideological tendency towards austerity in social matters in Romania was compounded by the policy choices of the period's main opposition party, the National Peasantist Party (PNȚ). While in government, just as the Great Depression began, the PNȚ embraced an "open door" free trade policy. In exchange for loans, the Peasantist-dominated government was forced by its main creditor, the Banque de France—champion of the austerity doctrine at the time in

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40 Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 1 (2008): 113.

41 Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 121.

42 Blyth, 121, 104–121.

43 Blyth, 126, 180.

44 Victoria Brown, "The Adaptation of a Western Political Theory in a Peripheral State: The Case of Romanian Liberalism," in *Romania Between East and West. Historical Essays in Memory of Constantin Giurescu*, ed. Stephen Fischer-Galati, Radu R. Florescu, and George B. Ursul (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 281, 286.

45 Brown, "The Adaptation of a Western Political Theory."

Europe[46]—to commit to a program of spending cuts.[47] Arguably, the economic nationalism with which Romanian governments experimented after 1932 translated into a major expansion of social policy only after 1938, once King Carol II resorted to a personal dictatorship linked to a corporatist "royal parliament" he could convoke as wanted.[48]

Significantly, these ideological and geopolitical developments unfolded in a country in which old "poverty politics" practices, that categorized those in need especially in moral terms, were entrenched in welfare provision, especially in public assistance (also referred to here as "social assistance"). In addition, throughout the period discussed here, economic upheaval made the paid and unpaid work of women from most social categories more strenuous, with the situation becoming acute in the 1930s. At the start of the Great Depression, in cities, more women than before the First World War worked in factories, small workshops or shops.[49] These growing numbers of women working "outside the home" joined a much larger number of women working "from home", generating income from various kinds of "casual work", or "in homes", working in other people's homes as servants. Most working women earned less than men but still had heavy familial responsibilities, especially once unemployment increased in the late 1920s, when systematic relief for unemployed men did not materialize and men contributed less to the upkeep of families.[50] In this monograph, I reconstruct and analyze forms of women's work focused on the maintenance of others in urban context, at the point of encounter with an economic and political situation where need was great and aid from the state minimal and sporadic, due to a politics of low social service spending and limited administrative capacity.

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46 Blyth, *Austerity*, 202.

47 Alexandra Ghiț, "Romania: Serving Fewer by Design: Austerity Welfare Politics during the Great Depression," in *The Great Depression in Eastern Europe*, ed. Klaus Richter, Anca Mândru, and Jasmin Nithammer (Budapest and Vienna: CEU Press, 2025).

48 On the features of economic nationalism after 1932, see Murgescu, *România și Europa*, 256–257; on the "development dictatorship" attempted by King Carol II, see the brief discussion in Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare*, 18, 39.

49 Ana Gluvacov, *Afirmarea femeii în viața societății: dimensiuni și semnificații în România [Woman's affirmation in the life of the society: Dimensions and meanings in Romania]* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975), 86.

50 Calypso Botez, "Réponse au questionnaire du BIT sur les conditions de travail des femmes (1937)," in *Din istoria feminismului românesc 1929–1948*, ed. Ștefania Mihăilescu, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Polirom, 2006), 297–302.

Social reform and "visions of welfare" in interwar Bucharest

In the chapters that follow I provide a historical account of women's contributions to welfare in Bucharest between the two World Wars. I focus on, but occasionally go beyond, the period between 1920 and 1937, during which Romania's "original [interwar] democracy",[51] with its many irregularities and restrictions on political freedoms, was strongly shaped by competing visions on social issues and welfare ("vision of welfare", in Linda Gordon's term)[52] adjusted to a liberal bourgeois setting or critical of such a system. I do not focus on the welfare visions of the royal and military dictatorships that dominated the 1938 to 1944 period, shaped as they were by antisemitic laws, the war economy, the specific civilian and military needs created by mobilization for combat, and the exceptional measures taken in the name of wartime welfare provision. I mention the impact of European fascism on the Romanian context before 1938, without focusing on members of extreme right-wing movements as welfare providers. While active in urban and rural settings from the mid-1930s, the heyday of the extreme right-wing influence was from late 1937 to January 1941.[53]

This spotlight on 1920 to 1937 enables an analysis of the interwar period as marked by key developments that preceded the rise of right-wing politics, such as feminist women's greater involvement in local politics, the intense internationalism of the 1920s and the effects of a prolonged Great Depression on women's paid work in households and in industrial establishments. Focusing on the period before the zenith of authoritarian rule in the Kingdom of Romania does not push aside the question of some experts' and activists' eventual involvement in dispossession and genocide during the Second World War. Rather, emphasizing the array of political visions and practices available before the triumph of fascism in Europe in the late 1930s reveals the actual strength of earlier ideological allegiances and the choices available to most historical actors when faced with political crossroads. It can contribute to a historiography of Romania's twentieth century in which previously submerged, complicated continuities across political regimes and systems become visible.

A women's and gender history of interwar Romania is not a history of swift progress or inclusion, especially when classed experiences are considered. It

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51 Simion Cutișteanu and Gheorghe I. Ioniță, *Electoratul din Romania în anii interbelici [The Electorate in Romania during the interwar years]* (Cluj Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1981), 75.

52 Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890–1945," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (1991): 559–590.

53 Roland Clark, *Sfântă tinerețe legionară—Activismul fascist în România interbelică [Holy legionary youth—Fascist activism in interwar Romania]* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2015), 238.

should not be an uncritical celebration of feminist foremothers. In the 1920s, middle-class women in the Kingdom of Romania had more power and visibility than in previous decades but continued to suffer from professional marginalization and political discrimination.[54] Because they did not have the electoral rights they wanted in national level politics, some of these well-connected women intensified the municipal level welfare activism in which many had been involved since the 1910s. The preferred (and most-easily constructible) vehicles for such greater involvement were voluntary associations dealing with urban social assistance, particularly in Bucharest. Romania's capital city was growing and industrializing in bad conditions, and established welfare activists could enhance their existing cooperation with public institutions for handling social problems, especially if such problems affected women and girls. Other women from the same network, usually a generation younger than the welfare activists who were involved in philanthropy before the First World War, sought to turn such activism into formally credentialed professions, especially that of social worker.

The urban "social question" in the first decade after the First World War was the domain of moderates and pragmatists. Communist women and men were feared and prosecuted as Communist International (Comintern) agitators and social democrats had relatively little say in local and national politics.[55] Therefore, as I shall show, in the 1920s, the aspirations of women involved in social reform in Romania were primarily shaped by the left-liberal "reform" current of thought; transnational feminist organizing and politics; the American Charity Organization Society's social assistance practices; and the politics of expertise fostered by the International Labor Organization and the League of Nations.

Women social reformers and researchers forged a specific forum for research and discussion related to women's welfare: the Section for Feminine Studies [*Secția de Studii Feminine*, SSF] of the Romanian Social Institute [*Institutul Social Român*, ISR]; the SSF was led by feminist social reformer Calypso Botez.[56] I reconstruct in this book how members of the Section for Feminine Studies re-

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54 Paraschiva Cîncea, *Mișcarea pentru emanciparea femeii în România, 1848–1948 [The Movement for woman's emancipation in Romania, 1848–1948]* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1976); Alin Ciupală, *Bătălia lor—Femeile din România în Primul Război Mondial [Their Battle—Women in Romania in the First World War]* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2017); Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, *Birth of Democratic Citizenship: Women and Power in Modern Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 18–40.

55 Brigitte Studer, *Travellers of the World Revolution: A Global History of the Communist International*, Kindle edition (London and New York: Verso, 2023); Elisabeta Ioniță, "Uniunea Femeilor Muncitoare din România UFMR [The Union of Women Workers of Romania]," *Revista de istorie* 33 (October 1980): 1905–1926.

56 See short biography in Appendix 3.

searched and discussed working women's lives in the city. The ISR was founded by sociologist Dimitrie Gusti shortly after the end of the First World War. As a rich historiography has shown, Gusti and the so-called "Gusti school" of social research in interwar Romania focused on researching (and reforming) peasants and rural environments.[57] This preoccupation for rural issues left urban social assistance policy and reform in the hands of other social reform actors, including the women involved in religiously inflected philanthropy before the First World War. Women researchers were part of Gusti's "monographic campaigns" in rural areas and promoted conservative gender roles in those settings.[58] However, I suggest that many of them were more strongly linked to the SSF, a framework for meetings, research, conferences and lectures through which women interested in social reform sought to understand how women's lives were transforming.

Despite the impression created by the scholarly visibility of pioneering English-language scholarship on eugenics in interwar Romania,[59] "negative eugenics"—the (explicitly) exclusionary or marginalizing variant of a very broad and fundamentally problematic current—was not the dominant framework or approach in public policy for most of the period discussed here. Eugenics did, however, become an influential part of the rhetoric of social reform by the late

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57 Among many titles I could have included, emerging especially from the research of Zoltán Rostás and his collaborators, see Zoltán Rostás, "The Bucharest School of Sociology," *East Central Europe* 27, no. 2 (2000): 1–19; Zoltán Rostás, *O istorie orală a Școlii Sociologice de la București [An Oral history of the Bucharest Sociological School]* (Bucharest: Printech, 2001); Zoltán Rostás, *Sala luminoasă. Primii monografiști ai școlii gustiene [The bright hall. The First monographists of the Gustian school]* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2003); Antonio Momoc, *Capcanele politice ale sociologiei interbelice: Școala gustiană între carlism și legionarism [The political traps of interwar sociology: the Gustian school between carlism and legionarism]* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012); Emilia Plosceanu, "Les débuts cosmopolites de la sociologie : réseaux, textes, discours, terrains en Roumanie," in *Circulations savantes entre l'Europe et le monde : XVIIe-XXe siècle*, ed. Thomas Preveraud, Enquêtes et documents (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018), 81–120. See also the early Joseph S Roucek, "Sociology in Roumania," *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 1 (1938): 54–62.

58 Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu, "Suave făpturi, cerbere, blânde mume, diletante agreabile, vivandiere . . . Femeile în publicațiile periodice ale Serviciului Social, România 1935–1939 [Suave beings, amazons, tender mothers, agreeable dabblers, bonnes vivantes . . . Women in Rural Interventionism: Romania, 1935–1939]," *Revista Transilvania*, no. 1–2 (2022): 65–79; Raluca Mușat, "Sociologists and the Transformation of the Peasantry in Romania, 1925–1940" (PhD Thesis, London, University College London, 2011), 258–260.

59 Especially Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Marius Turda and Paul Weindling, eds., *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006).

1930s.[60] Doubtlessly, from the late nineteenth century, in Romania as in many other parts of the world, eugenics as a broad, protean vision of promoting population health and vigor was an influential view on welfare and public health.[61] Both "positive" (linked especially to maternal and infant health) and "negative eugenics" (including support for sterilization of those considered disgenic, and eventually euthanasia) ideas were part of an emerging global science policy, disseminated by, among others, the Rockefeller Foundation and its globally influential philanthropy after the First World War.[62] Yet, as Doina Anca Crețu has argued, the Rockefeller Foundation supported eugenicists in Romania not primarily because they were eugenicists but because Foundation staff perceived the doctors and demographers interested in eugenics as a group of modernizing public health professionals.[63] These physicians, demographers and to a smaller extent, nurses and social workers were seen as broadly aligned with the Foundation's preventative healthcare (and anticommunist) agenda in East-Central Europe.[64]

Even as social reform and policymaking were internationalizing after the First World War through the work of wealthy foundations and the operation of international organizations, local dynamics and local influence weighed heavily. Bucharest had a distinctive field of local welfare activism and social reform, in which women social reformers were prominent. In this context, transnational social reform initiatives could be transformed according to these influential women's locally devised priorities. Crețu reconstructs how in 1919, Queen Marie of Romania insisted that an organization she had founded, the "Principele Mircea" Society, should be the main beneficiary of funds for a program for food and healthcare that the American Relief Administration–European Children's Fund (ARA–ECF) had devised. Initially, children were the only intended beneficiaries of the ARA–ECF program. In the process of "nationalizing" this scheme at the Queen's (and her local collaborators') insistence, mothers became eligible too.[65]

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60 Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization*; Marius Turda, "The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 3 (October 1, 2007): 413.

61 Marius Turda, "Romania: Overview," in *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900–1945: Sources and Commentaries*, ed. Marius Turda (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 274.

62 On Rockefeller Foundation support for institutes specifically researching eugenics in Germany, from the mid-1920s, see Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 20–21.

63 Crețu, *Foreign Aid and State Building in Interwar Romania*, 155.

64 On the goals of the Rockefeller Foundation in East-Central Europe, see Paul Weindling, "Public Health and Political Stabilisation: The Rockefeller Foundation in Central and Eastern Europe between the Two World Wars," *Minerva* 31, no. 3 (1993): 253–267.

65 Crețu, *Foreign Aid and State Building in Interwar Romania*, 69.

In my interpretation, the expansion of eligibility to mothers Crețu mentions in relation to this specific program was not circumstantial but was instead owed to a deeply embedded feature and priority of women's welfare activism in Bucharest, welfare provision for poor, deserving, mothers.

It is telling of a social reform eclecticism in which eugenics was but one locally-available discourse that social worker and researcher Veturia Manuilă, although married to prominent statistician Sabin Manuilă, who from 1935 would lead one of the three eugenicist associations in Romania,[66] and while working closely with feminists elected to the municipal council, wrote in 1931 that both eugenics and feminism were "extreme movements" that prevented a full understanding of the family in its "biology and pathology", the former current placing too much emphasis on individualization, the latter seeing the family only "as a means for the perpetuation of the human race, and thus neglecting the individualization process, as individualization is disadvantageous for eugenics".[67]

From the mid-1930s, in an international context rapidly shifting to the right, the language of eugenics became more strident.[68] By the early 1940s, eugenicists in Romania began referring frequently to disgenic heredity and racial hierarchies. In 1941, the above-mentioned Sabin Manuilă, head of the Central Statistical Institute,[69] wrote for publication in such terms,[70] while devising a plan for ethnic cleansing at the behest of Marshall Ion Antonescu, the leader of Nazi-allied Romania.[71] That plan would be partially implemented, through deportations to Romanian-occupied Transdniestria and killings of Jews and Roma from Romania, from 1941 to 1944. Veturia Manuilă herself would be closely involved with the Patronage Council of Social Works [*Consiliul de Patronaj al Operelor Sociale*, CPOS], the main welfare body in the Antonescu military dictatorship, as this book's epilogue outlines.

Before the late 1930s, both welfare relief and violence could be as often enacted in the name of productivity, or of combatting crime, as in the name of the health and welfare of Romanians. This does not mean eugenics-inflected racism was not present, even prominent before that point. For instance, in 1934, while expressing doubts that a "pure race" could exist, Sabin Manuilă argued that the Roma were of non-European origin, making them predisposed to wanting the

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66 Turda, "Romania: Overview," 321.

67 Veturia Manuilă, "Desorganizarea familiei [The Disorganization of the family]," *Asistența Socială* 3, no. 1 (1931): 48.

68 Solonari, *Purificarea națiunii*, 85, 98–99.

69 Solonari, *Purificarea națiunii*, 86.

70 Turda, "Romania: Overview," 292.

71 Solonari, *Purificarea națiunii*, 27.

goods of others, that is to theft.[72] Such prejudices very likely permeated social assistance practices and require detailed future research and tailored reading strategies for sources that (seemingly) do not discuss the Roma but may in fact have been produced through punitive state practices which disproportionately affected them.

Without welfare: Poverty politics before the Second World War

In Romania, welfare work performed primarily by women essentially subsidized an interwar welfare state for which welfare laws existed but for which the public funding was missing. In this, Romania was a typical East-Central European country for much of the interwar period. In the 1920s, a feeling of threat from the Russian revolution, labor militancy, and the promotion of social policy convergence through the International Labor Organization (ILO) led to the creation of a broad range of social policies in the region. In 1933, Romania unified (or, rather, centralized) the distinct social insurance frameworks which had applied on the one hand, in the territory of the pre-1918 Kingdom of Romania and on the other hand, in each of the regions that were acquired through the Versailles Treaties. The categories of risk covered by mandatory insurance under these frameworks were disease, death, invalidity due to illness or accident, maternity, and old age.[73]

Adaptation to international circumstances was often merely discursive, with few actual funds available. Even though, in the 1930s, certain East-Central European states created social security systems, funded from wage workers' contribu-

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72 Solonari, *Purificarea naţiunii*, 97. This argument was partly a translation in the language of science of long-standing local prejudice and partly, possibly, the local uptake of an emerging association between Blackness and criminality produced via social science discourses in the USA. On the "the mismeasure of crime," see *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1–14.
73 Johannes Jäger, Gerhard Melinz, and Susan Zimmermann, *Sozialpolitik in der Peripherie: Entwicklungsmuster und Wandel in Lateinamerika, Afrika, Asien und Osteuropa* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2001), 17–18; Sandrine Kott, "Constructing a European Social Model: The Fight for Social Insurance in the Interwar Period," in *ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century*, eds. Jasmin Van Daele, Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, and Geert van Goethem (Bern and Berlin: Peter Lang, 2011), 173–195. On the evolution of the insurance and pension system in Romania, an accurate overview (up to 1934) in I. Argeşeanu, "Date cu privire la sarcinile financiare ale asigurării de pensii, potrivit legii de unificare [Data concerning the financial burden of pension insurance, according to the unification law]," *Buletinul muncii şi asigurărilor sociale* 15, no. 1–4 (April 1935): 161–210.

tions, the scope of benefits was limited. Often, they covered well-positioned or skilled employees from industries considered strategic.[74] During the Great Depression, most East-Central European countries eventually provided forms of insurance against unemployment and created New Deal-style public works to combat it, covering primarily steadily employed men. Yet as I have shown elsewhere, this kind of systematic help for the unemployed never materialized in interwar Romania. In fact, Romania was outstanding in its opposition to ILO proposals for combatting unemployment through both social insurance and relief programs.[75]

Between 1933 and 1934, in a country of 15,000,000 only 600,000 people were insured against risks the state recognized[76]— one in five of the three million inhabitants who lived in the cities of this overwhelmingly rural country in which agricultural workers were not insured. Most urban women were not covered by the existing contributory schemes, because they did precarious and informal jobs and because the insurance system did not cover family members of insured men until the late 1930s.[77] Marioara I., in other words, was quite unusual in having had some insurance, already before 1933.

Rather than through a publicly funded institutional infrastructure for insurance and social assistance, welfare was thus provided through an ill-funded mix of statutory (that is, enshrined in law) and non-statutory (that is, only minimally formalized) programs. Such programs inherited the eclecticism of the "poverty policy" originating in eighteenth-century England in reaction to the urban poverty created by industrialization and spreading globally. "Poverty policy" included policies of expulsion and incarceration of the neediest, obliging extended families to take care of poorest members, or the granting aid only to those who could prove destitution and a kind of respectability deserving of praise.[78] Such harsh approaches to need were condoned by classical liberal thinkers as conducive to virtuous austerity, with economist David Ricardo arguing in 1817 that the government should not provide relief to struggling workers, even if laborers' condition was "most wretched".[79]

74 Jäger, Melinz, and Zimmermann, *Sozialpolitik in der Peripherie*, 17–18.

75 Ghiț, "Romania: Serving Fewer by Design", 213.

76 MMSOS, *Dare de seama asupra activității Casei Centrale a Asigurărilor Sociale pe anii 1912–1934 [Report on the activity of the Central House of Social Insurance for 1912–1934]* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1935), 59.

77 Ghiț, "Romania: Serving Fewer by Design", 227–229.

78 James Midgley, "Poor Law Principles and Social Assistance in the Third World: A Study of the Perpetuation of Colonial Welfare," *International Social Work* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 21.

79 Quoted in Blyth, *Austerity*, 116.

By 1942, the International Labor Office was defining social assistance as "a service or scheme which provides benefits to persons of small means, *granted as of rights*, in amounts sufficient to meet minimum standards of need and *financed from taxation*".[80] However, in the half century before the definition was produced, in Romania, social assistance was not solely "financed from taxation" but from a strong mix of money from tax and from donations. Or, frequently, from public money subsidizing private organizations. Such forms of social assistance (in cash, in kind, free access to health services) were not "granted as of rights" but based on morality and need criteria assessed on a case-by-case basis.

As I shall show throughout this monograph, assistance programs for women, children, and the disabled were especially eclectic. Philanthropic, charitable, mutual assistance or social reform associations were the kinds of organizations involved in both religious and secular assistance, be it in institutions or through direct aid, usually in the home of the assisted. In Bucharest, because insurance-related programs (such as public healthcare) had limited coverage, social assistance programs (free medical care but also small aids in cash and in kind, mostly firewood) were a large part of a very limited public welfare provision set-up. At the center of such social assistance programs were women welfare activists, seeking to secure a space of social involvement for themselves after the First World War and the dashed hopes for women's suffrage in the years that followed.[81]

Transnational feminist welfare history as gendered labor history

The history of welfare provision is a history of gendered work. In seeking to substantiate this claim, this book aims to contribute to a tighter integration of welfare history, gender and women's history and labor history as fields shaped by the transnational turn and aiming towards global-scale awareness and interpretations.

In the first place, this volume contributes to expanding the notion of the "mixed economy of welfare". Authors of several recent histories of the "mixed economy of welfare" across Europe emphasize that the interwar period was one of social policy experimentation, shaped by frequently transnational entangle-

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80 International Labor Organization, *Approaches to Social Security: An International Survey* (Montreal: International Labor Office, 1942), 84, https://ilo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/ 41ILO_INST/1jaulmn/alma993201113402676, emphasis mine.

81 Ghizela Cosma, *Femeile și politica în România: Evoluția dreptului de vot în perioada interbelică [Women and politics in Romania: The Evolution of the franchise in the interwar]* (Cluj Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002).

ments between public actors and voluntary associations.[82] They point out that the interwar period displays significant continuities with nineteenth century approaches and local practices in public welfare, including the emphasis on reform through work.[83] Like these authors, I find that experiments co-existed with very old practices, unearth transnational connections between social reformers and underline the preoccupation for productivity. However, differently from recent works, I portray this "mixed economy" as including the historically gendered unpaid and paid work occurring in familial settings as well as knowledge production and activism concerning such work. This conceptual shift makes visible women's care work, among others as mothers and as servants, in a "mixed economy of welfare" so far described with little mention of family-related work, rather only as involving public institutions and private associations and groups. I suggest in this book that many of those who were socially marginalized and in need of assistance through private-public "welfare mixes" were themselves ensuring the well-being of others in their communities and especially in the households in which they worked, often in bad conditions. Recent work that centers on the experiences and "experiential expertise" of socially marginalized actors within welfare provision supports this perspective.[84]

In revealing the "austerity welfare work" at the core of the "mixed economy of welfare", this volume builds on a valuable historiography of welfare activism which has developed in the field of gender and women's history in the past forty years. This body of work has documented the link between women's struggles for political and civil rights and the emergence of social research, social policy visions and welfare practices that dealt with women's work (and overwork), especially in the aftermath of the First World War.[85] Such research has revised as-

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82 Fabio Giomi, Célia Keren, and Morgane Labbé, eds., *Public and Private Welfare in Modern Europe: Productive Entanglements* (London: Routledge, 2022).

83 Michele Mioni and Stefano Petrungaro, "Assistance and Vulnerability in Interwar Europe: An Overview," in *Caring for the Socially Marginalised in Interwar Europe, 1919–1939*, eds. Michele Mioni and Stefano Petrungaro (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 1–17.

84 Caitríona Beaumont, Eve Colpus, and Ruth Davidson, "Introduction," in *Everyday Welfare in Modern British History: Experience, Expertise and Activism*, eds. Caitríona Beaumont, Eve Colpus, and Ruth Davidson (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), 13.

85 I highlight here several titles dealing with the US context that have shaped the global historiography on this topic. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885–1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage. Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry, *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women's Movements* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

sumptions about the development of "universal provision" welfare states and the effectiveness of social policies, revealing the gendered, classed and racist biases of public and private welfare practices.[86] Early on, these histories (many using the "maternalism" label for the activism they described) directed my attention towards the political history of feminism and feminists' activities for social reform in urban settings as integral to the history of welfare,[87] as well as to the operation of institutions and policies on an everyday basis. In the archival record, this is where women's activism and its significant, concrete influence most often becomes visible. To this body of work, this volume contributes an East-Central European case study which incorporates approaches and conclusions from recent research on the role of international institutions such as the International Labor Organization for the production of expert knowledge on women's experiences.[88] It uncovers similarities and links with earlier and contemporaneous developments in Western Europe, North America and South America.

In equal measure to histories of welfare, this book was molded by the historiography of women's work. An established (sub)field in the English-speaking academic space since the 1980s, women's labor history was for a long time a sidenote to historical research in East-Central Europe, before 1989 and certainly after.[89] This monograph aims to reflect and add to the unfolding encounter between women labor his-

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86 Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare"; Lynne A. Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); S. J. Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: The Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880–1939* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880–1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Susan Zimmermann, *Divide, Provide and Rule: An Integrative, History of Poverty Policy, Social Policy, and Social Reform in Hungary under the Habsburg Monarchy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011); Marisa Chappell, "Protecting Soldiers and Mothers Twenty-Five Years Later: Theda Skocpol's Legacy and American Welfare State Historiography, 1992–2017," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17, no. 3 (2018): 546–573.
87 For an overview of this literature, see Marian van der Klein and Rebecca Jo Plant, "Introduction: A New Generation of Scholars on Maternalism," in *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Marian van der Klein et al. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 1–21.
88 Véronique Plata-Stenger, *Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy: The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946)* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020); Kirsten Scheiwe and Lucia Artner, "International Networking in the Interwar Years: Gertrud Hanna, Alice Salomon and Erna Magnus," in *Women's ILO: Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards, and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present*, eds. Eileen Boris, Dorothea Hoehtker, and Susan Zimmermann (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 75–96.
89 Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1987); Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

tory's and "new global labor history".[90] It sheds light on the unpaid and badly-paid home-based work in an urban center of an agrarian country, on the regional aspect of the global twentieth-century trend of women's entry into paid employment outside the home and its effects on social reproduction arrangements, on the gender history of domestic service in Romania, and, obliquely, on educated women's access to the professions and the history of intellectual workers in this region. Feminist historians have underscored that histories of women's social reproduction work, especially within households, are indispensable for understanding the development of global capitalism.[91] Heeding them, this book insists that histories of welfare and lack of welfare are histories of work and are thus essential for understanding politics, policy and the choices women and men made and could make.

As argued above, this is a book about women's unpaid and badly paid work in Romania's capital city, especially as reflected in knowledge produced by women welfare activists. It relates, distantly, to a state-socialist historiography on women's work and activism and is part of a steadily growing post-socialist historiography on women's activism and experiences in interwar but especially postwar East-Central Europe.[92] Yet not least, this volume is meant to contribute to thinking differently about state-building in Romania in the interwar period, by looking more closely at how transnationally connected local actors linked to the state contributed to managing social change. Post-socialist historiography underscores that the interwar Romanian state focused on nationalizing state-building.[93] But what kind of state was being built in this economically struggling country, especially in areas that were not recently acquired and thus in need of urgent "nationalization"? Did a (theoretically) growing bureaucracy and an expanding welfare state, for instance,[94] mark

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90 Dorothy Sue Cobble, "The Promise and Peril of the New Global Labor History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82, no. 10 (2012): 103.

91 Eileen Boris and Kirsten Swinth, "Household Matters".

92 Selin Çağatay et al., "Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond: Toward a Long-Term, Transregional, Integrative, and Critical Approach," in *Through the Prism of Gender and Work: Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th to 20th Centuries*, eds. Selin Çağatay et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 5–25.

93 Roland Clark, "The Shape of Interwar Romanian History," *Journal of Romanian Studies* 3, no. 1 (April 2021): 11–42.

94 Silviu Hariton, "Asumarea politicilor sociale de către stat în România. Cazul invalizilor, orfanilor și văduvelor de război (IOVR) după Primul Război Mondial [The creation of social policies by the state in Romania. The case of invalids, orphans and war widows (IOVR) after the First World War]," *Archiva Moldaviae*, no. Supplement 1 (2014): 115–40; Sergiu Delcea, "A Nation of Bureaucrats or a Nation of Workers? Welfare Benefits as Nation-Building Modernization Tools in Interwar Romania," *Journal of European Social Policy* 32, no. 1 (2022): 75–90.

the "turn to welfare" which Stephen Kotkin discusses?[95] New work in the resurgent field of labor history argues that new labor laws and collective bargaining mechanisms helped keep the price of (urban) labor low, a tendency that would extend into postwar industrialization.[96] This supports the notion that this may have been state-building towards the (self)restraint of state power. Research on international aid and the cross-border circulation of social reformers who supported state-building processes (whether directly or indirectly) underscores not only transnational interaction but also the significance of locally embedded actors for shaping these circulations.[97] However, we still know relatively little about the local effects of these circulations. New work on interwar policies for war veterans, orphans and widows underscores the dysfunctionality and male bias of cherished welfare programs for a large category of beneficiaries, nation-wide.[98] Yet the history of welfare provision, let alone the gender history of welfare provision during the interwar period, have so far not received detailed treatment. In this volume, I put such topics at the core of inquiry.[99]

Sources and approach

To investigate austerity welfare work I focused on archives and publications related to public welfare programs, especially social assistance, pursued in both governmental and non-governmental institutions in Romania. To reconstruct

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95 Kotkin, "Modern Times."

96 Adrian Grama, "The Cost of Juridification: Lineages of Cheap Labor in Twentieth-Century Romania," *Labor* 17, no. 3 (2020): 30–52; Adrian Grama, *Laboring Along: Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar Romania* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

97 Emilia Plosceanu, "L'Internationalisation des sciences et techniques réformatrices. Les Savants roumains et la fondation Rockefeller (1918–1940)," *New Europe College Yearbook*, 2007–2008, 319–343; Călin Cotoi, *Inventing the Social in Romania, 1848–1914: Networks and Laboratories of Knowledge* (Schöningh: Brill, 2020); Crețu, *Foreign Aid and State Building in Interwar Romania*.

98 Maria Bucur, *The Nation's Gratitude: World War I and Citizenship Rights in Interwar Romania* (New York: 2022).

99 Valuable article-length studies touching on urban women's labor history are Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu, "Coopter et écarter. Les Femmes dans la recherche sociologique et l'intervention sociale dans la Roumanie de l'entre-deux-guerres," *Les Etudes Sociales*, no. 1 (2011): 109–142; Emilia Plosceanu, "L'Internationalisation des sciences et techniques réformatrices. Les Savants roumains et la fondation Rockefeller (1918–1940)," *New Europe College Yearbook*, 2008 2007, 319–343; Emilia Plosceanu, "Coopération en milieu rural, économie nationale et sciences sociales en Roumanie," *Les Études Sociales*, no. 2 (2016): 179–207. The source collection Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc: Studiu și antologie de text [From the history of Romanian feminism: Study and text anthology]* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2006), building on its coordinators research from before as well as after 1989, is a precious first stop for researching these topics.

transnational connections and influences, I included publications by international feminist and labor organizations.

I read these sources both "along the grain" and "against the grain". I read "along the grain" by paying attention to "the competing logics of those who ruled and the fissures and frictions within their ranks."[100] I employed this analysis and interpretation strategy especially when looking into the social research and municipal policymaking aspects of austerity welfare work in Bucharest. I interpret "against the grain" by assessing and critically re-reading social reformers' knowledge production, especially in the case of documents that made a claim to objectivity and social scientific authority when they were produced, such as survey data and social work investigations. I used this strategy to better understand those forms of austerity welfare work performed by low-income women, including domestic work and mixes of paid and unpaid work in their homes.

Despite my best efforts to go "against the grain" and to excavate details about the work and living conditions of working-class women, their voices are faint in this book. Several letters, a few transcribed poems, and a published oral history interview are the sources that capture low-income women's experiences in their own words. Otherwise, information about low-income women's welfare work in Bucharest, for their families or for others' families, comes from documents produced by various kinds of welfare activists. In her masterful analysis of Black and White working-class women's survival strategies during the Great Depression, Lois Rita Helmbold warns that welfare casework files contain what Karen Tice has called "tales of detection [of fraud]" and "tales of protection" about the women being investigated by social workers.[101] Sociologists of expertise underscore that social knowledge-making is shaped by experts' allegiances and by field-specific "dynamics of competition and recognition".[102] "Material devices, accounting tools, [. . .] formulas" involved in creating knowledge about the social have a strong influence on results.[103] Social reformers wanted to be seen as experts and to influence social

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100 Ann Laura Stoler, "Matters of Intimacy as Matters of State: A Response," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 895.

101 Lois Rita Helmbold, *Making Choices, Making Do: Survival Strategies of Black and White Working-Class Women during the Great Depression* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 5; Karen Whitney Tice, *Tales of Wayward Girls and Immoral Women: Case Records and the Professionalization of Social Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

102 Gil Eyal and Larissa Buchholz, "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 124.

103 Charles Camic, Neil Gross, and Michèle Lamont, "The Study of Social Knowledge-Making," in *Social Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3; Eyal and Buchholz, "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions," 130.

policy. Even if read "against the grain", these documents bear deep traces of the power asymmetries that created them.

To understand social policies and capture the competing social reform visions which shaped national and municipal responses to need and crisis, while keeping women's welfare work at the center of the investigation, I began with the archives of key women's organizations and key women welfare activists. Among these are the archives of the large Orthodox National Society of Romanian Women (SONFR), the personal papers of the SONFR president Alexandrina Cantacuzino, as well as the microfilmed archives of several social democratic and communist-leaning women's organizations involved in welfare activism, all hosted by the Service of the Central National Historical Archives (SANIC) Bucharest. (While I consulted several files from the Sabin Manuilă personal papers collection at SANIC, I do not draw on archival documents from that collection here.) At the Center for the Study of the History of Jews in Romania "Wilhelm Filderman" (CSIER), I looked into the archives of the Cultural Association of Jewish Women (ACFE) and records related to welfare provision by the Bucharest Jewish Community (CEB). I explored the interesting archives of better- or lesser-known women welfare activists held in the "Saint Georges" collection of documents at the Romanian National Library. Online databases dedicated to the history of women's activism, such as Alexander Street "Women and Social Movements International" (WASI), the Gerritsen Collection of Aletta H. Jacobs and the digitized archives of the Labor and Socialist International (LSI/SAI) were very useful.

To understand debates on social policy and the policy frameworks that emerged in Bucharest, I consulted Romanian government publications, including the *Bulletin of Labor, Cooperation and Social Insurance* [*Buletinul muncii, cooperației și asigurărilor sociale*] and the *Official Monitor* [*Monitorul oficial*]; the latter publishes parliamentary debates, the text of new laws and all kinds of mandatory announcements. I included articles from social reform journals such as the *Archive for Science and Social Reform* [*Arhiva pentru știință și reformă socială*] of the Romanian Social Institute (ISR), the *Review for Social Hygiene* [*Revista de igienă socială*] and the journal *Social Assistance* [*Asistența socială*] and various publications of the Ministry of Labor.

Finally, to understand how welfare programs functioned and failed in practice, I researched the archives of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection (MMSOS) and the Eforia (Foundation) of Civil Hospitals, at the Central National Historical Archives (SANIC). In the Bucharest Municipal Service of the National Archives (SMBAN), in the handful of files available for the interwar General Bucharest City Hall and the Sector 4 (Green) City Hall, I found several letters and petitions for social assistance. As a historian of welfare, I can only wonder how different this book would have been had a large number of preserved casework files or individ-

ual questionnaires, such as the ones at the core of recent volumes on welfare work in Paris and the American Midwest,[104] been available for Bucharest. Publications by social workers from Bucharest mention hundreds of case files and tens of detailed interviews,[105] yet the closest I got to the archives created by such welfare workers were a few questionnaires from the framework of the Hospital Social Service in the late 1930s and the published case file of Marioara I.

By design this volume places the spotlight on women as historical actors and women's experiences as gendered experiences. It refrains from reading educated women's class position strongly in relation to that of their men relatives. For this historical case study, this is a justified choice. For most of the educated or otherwise privileged women discussed in this book, wealthy or supportive fathers, brothers and husbands were certainly important. Yet many if not most of the women welfare activists mentioned here were actively involved in a political project or at least a concrete practice of changing the terms under which they were expected to live their lives, through association with the broad feminist current energizing women's activism across the world after the First World War and by doing new kinds of jobs. These relatively privileged women controlled at least some of their money (whether earned or inherited), were educated as well as the men in their circles (even if, at times, in less formalized or prestigious settings) and were internationally connected through networks of their own. Many sought to wield power and gain public recognition, often pushing against restrictive legal frameworks. The lower-class women whose experiences are discussed here are often women "without men" at high risk of destitution: orphaned girls and young women, unmarried mothers, widows. As they encountered social reformers and thus became a part of the archives of social reform at the core of this book, their lower-class position was very much their own.

Although focusing on women's experiences, this remains a gender history account. As needed, this book notes middle-class and aristocratic women's alignment with the men who dominated the public sphere and the professional domains in which they were active. As possible, it links precarious women's labor patterns to

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104 Lola Zappi, *Les visages de l'État social. Assistantes sociales et familles populaires durant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2022), 23; Helmbold, *Making Choices, Making Do*, 3–4.

105 A study from 1939 claimed to have drawn its conclusion after summarizing files about 764 families, created in the previous several years. Veturia Manuilă, "Pauperismul şi criza familială într-un cartier mărginaş al Bucureştilor (Tei) (1939) [Pauperism and familial crisis in a peripheral Bucharest neighborhood (Tei) (1939)]," ed. Zoltán Rostás, *Între proiecții urbanistice și sărăcie letargică. Bucureștiul arhitecților, sociologilor și al medicilor. Antologie* (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2015), http://www.cooperativag.ro/veturia-manuila-despre-pauperism-si-criza-familiei-in-bu curestiul-interbelic/.

patterns in the work of men in similar circumstances—by discussing, for example, the link between men's unemployment and women's entry into domestic service. A further developed intersectional analysis would bring to light many more of the intricacies of social reproduction mechanisms than captured here, particularly in relation to the effects of ethnicity and race in a Romanian nationalist, antisemitic and anti-Roma racist context. Most likely, accounts that look at constructions of gender through welfare provision would problematize and queer, to illuminating effect, the "women" and "men" historical categories which this book does not explicitly question, and their impact on welfare provision. Still, this volume hopes to persuade that its women-centric approach does not result in rudimentary exercises in historical visibility that miss out on major phenomena because of a lack of more attention to men's and boys' experiences, nor on account of its, admittedly, very limited dealing with gender fluidity and sexuality. Instead, beyond its limits and inevitable flaws, it hopes to show how a focus on women as part of a focus on gender history can lead to rich historical accounts of major phenomena (interwar austerity, modern versions of the gendered division of labor) that were strongly co-produced by women and affected women the most.

Chapter overview

This monograph reconstructs welfare provision in interwar Bucharest and reveals the gendered austerity welfare work at the core of such provision. In a nod to feminist accounts of welfare provision as linking states, markets and families (or rather households),[106] it deals with both welfare policy and welfare work, in institutions and within urban communities. Therefore, the first three chapters focus on policymaking and policymakers at the national and the municipal level and their effects on developments in Bucharest. The last two chapters focus on austerity welfare work especially within households, be it paid (domestic service) or unpaid work (household work). In the book, as often in reality during the interwar, women welfare activists—through their "private initiatives" and social research works—link the seemingly distinct domains of public institutions and private households. Unstable markets and their effects on welfare provision are integral to the analysis in each chapter.

In Chapter 1, I set the stage, conceptually and historically. I argue that social policy in Romania after the First World War was stingy, by design and by necessity. I show that the risk of destitution for those depending on wages or doing unpaid

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106 Jane Lewis, "Gender and Welfare Regimes: Further Thoughts," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 4, no. 2 (1997): 160–177.

work for their families was much higher in Bucharest than in other large cities, such as those in Transylvania. This stingy "interwar welfare conjuncture", to gloss on Stephen Kotkin's term,[107] meant that welfare provision through women's societies as well as care work within families carried a comparatively heavy burden of care work in the Romanian capital, in European, even East-Central European perspective. I historicize "austerity welfare work" by drawing on the historiography of welfare, expertise and women's work; describe living conditions in interwar Bucharest; and map insurance-based welfare policies and practices, analyzing the limited coverage various rounds of social insurance reform afforded to women.

In Chapter 2, I explore unpaid or underpaid social work and activism as a form of "austerity welfare work". I establish the existence of a loose network of women welfare activists who shared an interest in understanding how recent social transformations in Romania were affecting women. Formed in the 1920s, with links to organizations and social movements in Europe and the United States, this network would be influential in municipal welfare politics until the middle of the 1930s. Organizations and activists discussed here have until now been researched in isolation of other similar organizations or at best as connected by suffragist activism. In this chapter, I argue that feminist and non-feminist social researchers were part of a network of social reformers whose members debated and shared research in the Section for Feminine Studies. Such debates and research were then translated into municipal welfare policies. Social democratic, communist and Jewish welfare activists were part of this broad network and shaped its workings through their critical positionings towards the left-liberal or socially conservative women at its core.

Chapter 3 reconstructs the workings of municipal social assistance policy in Bucharest. I uncover how councilwomen who were first co-opted and then, from 1929 to 1937, elected, drove reforms of municipal social assistance. Women welfare activists who became councilwomen formed the core of the women's network that met at the Section for Feminine Studies. They sat in Bucharest City Council meetings as representatives of different parties and as such were clear political rivals. Despite rivalries and different understandings of scientific, expertise-based approaches to social work, they supported a vision of "assistance through work" while nevertheless seeking to increase the eligibility of women with caring duties, especially single mothers, for the meager aid available. Because of this focus, councilwomen and their allies contributed to constructing a low-spending version of local-level public welfare provision.

In Chapter 4, the focus shifts from policies and networks to austerity welfare work practices. I argue that paid household workers, servants, became increas-

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107 Kotkin, "Modern Times."

ingly important for managing the effects of the Great Depression for families in the city and in the countryside. In the chapter, I reconstruct the role played by women welfare activists in perpetuating domestic service as a seemingly predestined occupation for orphan girls and women migrating from the countryside and discuss servants' own accounts of work they perceived to be emotionally and physically difficult. I suggest that women welfare activists in Bucharest cooperated with state authorities in controlling domestic servants to an unusually high degree, even as volunteers for organizations such as the Women Friends of Young Women [*Amicele Tinerelor Fete*, ATF] devoted considerable energy to providing emergency help for young servants.

Chapter 5 deals with austerity welfare work as work done by low-income adult women for the well-being of members of their families and how such work was reflected in small-scale survey research conducted by women welfare activists and medical professionals throughout the 1930s. I show how social workers and social hygiene doctors had different understandings and especially different prescriptions for the seemingly new trend of women's work outside the home. Social workers linked to the Section for Feminine Studies insisted that women had no choice but to work to support children and elderly relatives. They assigned the blame for "familial disorganization" on men. This stance was a product of their links to American social workers and women bureaucrats from the International Labor Office. I read this research against the grain, showing that women overworked themselves to provide for families, in the context of high levels of male unemployment.

In the book's conclusion, I return to the cross-cutting themes of this work and provide an epilogue. I reconstruct, thus, a Bucharest without welfare but with plenty of welfare work meant to enable the survival of households and "dependents". In the epilogue, I bring the histories of key welfare activists mentioned here into the post-1945 period. Finally, I reflect on how a focus on austerity welfare work, or perhaps "austerity welfare labors", might help us rethink the twentieth century in Eastern Europe and beyond. Whereas the past century has been frequently associated with the peaking of biopolitical rationalities, in much of the world unpaid or barely paid care work made up for missing resources to match rhetoric and ambition. The ten-page transcript of the casework file for Marioara I., as previously published in *Asistența socială*, provided as a now anonymized appendix (Appendix 1), illustrates in vivid detail the themes of want, work, welfare and unequal interactions explored throughout this book. A table and timeline of councilwomen and general mayors in Bucharest's four sectors (Appendix 2) is meant to help readers to place key names in a broader setting of municipal politics. A table on the evolution of prices of basic consumer items between 1918 and 1938 (Appendix 3, Table 1) can be used to quickly grasp the smaller amounts of money (in Lei) mentioned in the book.

Map 1: Plan of Bucharest, 1940, with sectors indicated in roman numerals (I–IV).
Source: Institutul Cartografic "Unirea" Brașov, *Planul Bucureștilor cu liniile de tramvai, stațiile, Editura Ghidul României [Plan of Bucharest with tram lines, stations, publisher Editura Ghidul României]*, 1940, Paper (51 x 61 cm (original medium and size). Digital reproduction cropped and color modified. Culturalia, Europeana, https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/951/Culturalia_6e9e24f6_c0a8_456c_82ad_c9ffaae15d47. CC BY-SA 4.0.