

## POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIAN FEMINISM AND GENDER EQUALITY. BETWEEN STEREOTYPES, CONCEPTUAL AMBIGUITIES AND THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX<sup>1</sup>

ALINA HURUBEAN

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania

### Abstract

*In this article I intend to carry out a critical exercise relative to Romanian feminism and the concepts with which some of its representatives or their opponents operate. By this approach I do not claim to put in order the natural diversity and the dynamics of social representations, but I attempt to establish this practice of a constant critical (self) examination of the meanings with which we operate, of the principles that we support, and of the theoretical options available at a given moment. This article aims to bring attention to certain clichés, theoretical and semantic distortions that are frequently encountered in various communication contexts (in daily life but also in professional or specialized public communication: within projects devoted to this topic, within educational establishments, disciplines, programs of study etc.) concerning the themes of feminism, of equality in gender relations, of femininity/masculinity, and other correlated concepts (discrimination, gender inequalities, differences between sexes, and so on).*

*These conceptual confusions or ambiguities have a twofold negative effect: on the one hand, they affect/denature the correct reception (in the sense of nuanced, documented, and grounded understanding) of feminism in this country, producing reactions of a priori rejection of feminism/gender equality and, on the other, they distort, reduce or even annul the expected results of projected social action and intervention (through programs of information, education, and public policies) as well as the development of a strong feminist movement.*

*This paper seeks to argue answers to some questions: Which are the most common stereotypes and clichés that are operating in the collective mindset and how they preserve the patriarchal model*

---

<sup>1</sup> **Acknowledgments:** This work was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/89/1.5/S/62259, Project „Applied social, human and political sciences. Post-doctoral training and post-doctoral fellowships in social, human and political sciences” co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013.

*of gender relations? What kind of feminism and gender equality that would be needed today in Romania? What are the opportunities and the means of action needed in order for gender equality to be naturally assimilated in the Romanian collective mindset, deprived of many of prejudices and stereotypes?*

**Keywords:** Romanian feminism, gender relations, stereotypes, communication

## **Introduction**

Today, to talk about feminism in Romania, a place where there are still so many pressing problems to solve, might seem a far-fetched and even outrageous exercise in the eyes of those who are in charge of the "nation's well-being" or a futile and gratuitous gesture through the lens of those consciences that are resigned and doubtful in the face of any idea which could question the pre-established epistemic and social order. For many of our fellow countrymen (men and women alike), who are accustomed to operate within the framework of easy-going thinking, permeated by stereotypes, and which does not need any argumentative effort or interrogative-critical insight, the topic seems to be of no interest and does not seem to get their attention because they claim that they already know what everything is about when such terms as feminism or gender equality are mentioned and, as a result, these themes hardly gain the status of important and current matters. Other fellow countrymen (and mainly our fellow countrywomen) are eager to nervously detach themselves in their public or private discourse from any affinity for this type of words and ideas with a subversive load. Cliché statements of the "I am not a feminist, but..." type are quite often heard, both in the context of ordinary daily communication and in intellectual environments, which, by the nature of their work, have good access to sources of information and to argumentative reasoning, and which are expected to be open to the diversity and divergence of theoretical opinions and options.

The fact that the topic of feminism and gender equality is received with criticism, reluctance, or indifference or, on the contrary, is defended with the fierceness specific to binary ("black-white") and totalitarian thinking, that is, with precisely the kind of thinking from which they are trying to detach themselves, justifies our cognitive endeavour and makes necessary the intellectual effort to clarify, delimit, permanently interrogate critically the concepts with which we operate, in a ever-changing social and cultural context such as the Romanian one, as well as the

exercise to analyse the faces of Romanian feminism during the last 20-30 years. I start from the premise that these conceptual and theoretical distortions or "mental obstacles" relate mainly to the dominant traditional-patriarchal cultural models in our society, correlated with the hasty import of some European principles, values, and programs of action, insufficiently contextualized in a society in course of democratic reconstruction and historical recovery.

To this purpose, my approach focuses on the following main objectives: a) identifying the possible causes for the negative reception and low visibility of feminist ideas and gender equality issues in the Romanian society ("invisible software of the mind"); b) identifying the effects produced by this reception and knowledge/information deficit; c) bringing arguments in favour of the thesis that feminist ideas, the principles of equality and partnership in gender relations need to be known and assimilated by wide audiences as critical or *outside the box thinking*; d) looking for new adequate and effective ways to convey these ideas/messages, so that they would attract the interest of various audiences and contribute to the formation of a *critical mass*<sup>2</sup> needed to produce major changes leading to gender equality in actual reality.

### **1. What kind of equality do we want to establish at the level of actual social life?**

Social realities and mindsets are hard or even impossible to change if we operate with ideas and concepts void of meaning or too abstract and non-operational, and which are not correlated with the needs and interests of the audience they address. The issue of gender equality in the post-communist Romanian society has passed successively or simultaneously through each of these situations. Starting from the mid '90s, in Romania, the topic of gender equality, with its civic, academic, legal, and institutional support has gradually become a theme of analysis in theoretical research, and, to some extent, in civic and political debates. During the past twenty years, this issue has gone through various stages and different manners of approach and reception. Upon a closer look, we could identify specific features and distinct agendas for every stage, mainly if we are to consider them in a chronological progression: a) the early stage of familiarization with the ideas of

---

<sup>2</sup> The concept of *critical mass* - taken over by social and political sciences from nuclear physics - refers to the optimal quantity or percentage needed by people to produce a major and/or irreversible social change. Although it has a mainly quantitative dimension (for instance, it is thought that a representation of 30%-40% for women in decision-making, political, or other types of organizations would ensure a fair and effective representation of their interests), which is highly insisted upon, mainly in discussion relative to the introduction of gender-quotas in politics, this concept was developed and completed with the concept of critical players, which nuances the idea that numerical representation must also be supported by qualitative (substantial) representation, understood not only as merit or specialist professional competence but also as the capability to advocate for the needs and interests of the group represented. In this case, we talk about a critical mass both in the quantitative and qualitative sense of this expression, a mass able to understand and promote equality in the relations between women and men. See: Tudorina Mihai, *Cotele de gen în politică și aplicarea lor în România* ("Gender quotas in politics and their application in Romania"), dissertation paper, 2011, pp.12-13.

feminism and gender equality (the '90s); b) the stage of pre-adhesion to the European Union, of preparations for the admission into this structure, the institutionalisation of feminism and the introduction of gender equality into the public agenda (2000 – 2007); c) the stage of post-adhesion and of European funding programs (structural funds 2007-2013) aiming to generate substantial changes in what regards the equality of women and men in various sectors of social life, particularly the labour market, the level of employment and social inclusion, or gender mainstreaming.

Besides the undisputed acquisitions at the level of knowledge and institutional construction, accumulated during all these stages, there are still many language ambiguities in the use of the concept of gender equality, both in the contents of official papers and legislative texts on gender equality in Romania, and at the level of the collective mindset. Analysts from the civil society and the academic environment have signalled a few problematic aspects<sup>3</sup> that still represent obstacles on the path to the materialization and integration of this principle into public policies and daily reality, often producing twisted by-effects. Among these, we should mention: the insufficient personalization, streamlining, and adaptation of the principle in and to the Romanian context; the general and abstract nature of formulations on this topic; the imprecise nature of the definitions given to concepts; the import of the European agenda, insufficiently contextualized, or imposed, to a great extent, by outside funding; the limits of framework-laws, which encompass mainly general principles; the small number of specific regulations; the precarious nature of the gender expertise acquired by the staff that handles the elaboration and implementation of the legislation and government programs devoted to gender equality; the deficit of information and general knowledge in Romanian social media in what regards human rights, the respect for differences, equal opportunities, and gender partnership.

Conceptual ambiguities and confusions feed attitudes of rejection and depreciation in what regards the importance of gender issues compared with the social and political priorities of the moment, and make difficult and postpone to an uncertain horizon the structuring of a coherent public agenda on this topic. Thus, the fact that gender inequality is a major barrier to human development, to the modernization and democratization of a society, with important social costs, is ignored. During the last twenty years of post-communist transition, the attitudes towards feminism and the issue of gender equality have fluctuated between ignorance on the topic (seen an exotic, imported topic, with no relevance for the Romanian social environment), minimization (there are

---

<sup>3</sup> **These problematic aspects are detailed in several theoretical analysis with reference to post-communist Romanian society from a gender perspective:** Pasti 2003, pp.78-84; Miroiu and Haşdeu 2004, pp. 88-96; Observatorul Cultural nr. 240/2004; Nouvelles Questions Féministes, No. 2/2004; Albu and Mocanu 2006, pp. 120-129; Băluţă et al., 2007, pp. 29-32; Vlad 2012, pp. 125-131.

always other priorities for the public agenda), rejection (seen as a sensitive topic, which hurts feelings and questions the existing gender order), or formalism or fake confidence in gender equality, often formulated in the arid language of strategic documents, country reports of outside funded projects. Also, the promotion of a presumably neutral attitude towards gender and gender equality issues hides gender indifference and gender blindness – options that narrow theoretical approaches and practical intervention, making them ineffective when it comes to the capitalization on the human capital and social development (Hurubean 2011, 25).

## **2. Gender equality as equality with the masculine standard - confusion or diversion?**

In Romania, many official documents and EU funded projects openly promote the idea of gender equality, but it remains camouflaged by the new wooden language, abstract and specialized, accessible only to the "initiated". Because these official contexts use the expressions gender equality or equal opportunities without specifying in a clear manner the type of equality at stake, they implicitly promote the idea of women's equality with men, in which the masculine standard is taken as reference (Miroiu 2004, 28). The implementation of strategies<sup>4</sup> and policies for gender equality take over many of the social representations configured at the level of the collective mindset and daily practices, marked by stereotype and prejudice, which operate with narrow or distorted meanings of the expression gender equality (Albu and Mocanu 2006, 117-136).

In predominantly patriarchal/male cultures, the idea of gender equality itself is perverted (or we may say that is culturally contextualized in different manners) and becomes equality with the masculine standard. Thus, gender inequalities and asymmetries perpetuate in a more subtle and paradoxical manner, even under the cover and by the means of gender inequality. In this context, it is cultivated the idea that "women emancipation" means that women have access to social and professional position then occupied by men (Hofstede and Hotstede and Minkov 2012, 159). It requires the image of the "manly woman" who, while wanting to enjoy social success, performs according to the same male qualities or socio-cultural prescriptions (she is authoritarian, ambitious, aggressive, ferocious), it promotes "masculinity in women's clothing" and legitimizes the idea of equality with the masculine standard.

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2006-2010; 2010-2012).

Our entire system of formal, institutionalized education is constructed according to the male model, in the sense that it mainly or even exclusively cultivates the features associated with the masculine standard, which are better valued in society: *rationality* at the expense of empathy and affection/emotion, *competition* at the expense of cooperation, *quantifiable/measurable aspects* and less qualifying (in-depth) features, the *appearance* at the expense of the essence/substance/meaning of behaviours or actions. Carried out based on the principles listed above, *differentiated/stereotypical*, dichotomous and asymmetrical gender *socialization* leads to imbalance in the gender relationships of power and increases the likelihood of various forms of discrimination or violence physical or "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 2003, 9) in gender relationships and mainly against girls/women, dramatically reducing the equal opportunities of development for the two sexes. Research on *the differentiated socialization of girls and boys* brings to the fore a series of problematic issues in this process, investigated through the lens of the (in)equality of the opportunities it brings for both genders, in different ways and to different extents for women/men. Although the results of research show that sex-differentiated socialization produces gender hierarchization and segregation, perpetuating the same patterns in the construction of social gender relations as relationships of power, the socializing agents (the family, the school, the mass-media, the church, and groups) remain the conservative keepers of traditional, gender-role and asymmetrical models (Hurubean 2012, 96), which means that gender representations, the norms and values conveyed through the process of differential socialization, *social features, roles, and statuses are projected and valued in a different manner for the two sexes*. Socially accepted models of masculinity and femininity are built in a dichotomous manner, following the axes *public-private, active-passive, strong-weak, autonomy-dependence, rational-emotional, subject-object*, and they group asymmetrical and unevenly socially valued features (Miroiu 2003, 15; Baudelot and Establet 2006, 245; Dafflon 2006, pp.39-45; Bereni et al. 2011, 75-86). The features associated with feminine models are weakly valued socially when compared with the features that circumscribe masculine models, seen as norm or universal standard.

Examples of the application of a "double standard" (superior-inferior; permissive-restrictive; man subject, woman object (Hofstede and Hotstede and Minkov 2012, 157-158) in the socialization and representation/valuation of the two genders are numerous and they can be identified in stereotypical images and expectations (high expectations for boys versus different and lower expectations for girls, expectations which present a high potential of confirmation and self-achievement), very present both within the family and within the school (the teachers' and

classmates' behaviours and attitudes; the contents of school books, etc.) and, through contamination, in the public area and at the macro-social level (Bereni et al. 2011, 99).

Public opinion barometers and gender studies focusing on the Romanian area also reveal the imprecision of the meanings given to gender equality, which produce confusion and distortion as well as the perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes (mainly in relation to the features and roles attributed to women) with which various social environments operate. All these show the serious lack of information and contextualized analysis on this topic with which operate the social stakeholders and various professional categories (journalists, educators, public servants, opinion formers, activists from the civil society, politicians, decision-makers), who play an important role in the change of mindsets, systems of values, action strategies. Also, a significant role in the perpetuation of conservative gender stereotypes, in post-communist Romanian society, is played by the mass-media (such as it was revealed by direct observation and various studies conducted on this topic: the Gender Barometer, 2000; Roventă-Frumușani 2002, 47-67), which contribute to the public opinion's reception of gender-related issues and feminine/masculine images in a confuse, hostile, and superficial horizon, delimited by the scarcity of information, the ignorance or minimization of gender relations, or their unconditional criticism and rejection.

Therefore, the promotion of gender equality in the post-communist Romanian society seems to be marked by a paradox: many policies and programs developed in the name of gender equality actually perpetuate the gender inequalities specific to the masculine-patriarchal culture. This is only an apparent paradox, which becomes explainable if we conduct an in-depth analysis of the invisible "mental software" (the values, attitudes, and behaviours specific to the Romanian society and culture) which underlies the laws and regulations enforced and the institutions/organizations created. Implementing governmental programs, public policies, and EU funded programs that promote gender equality does not necessarily mean that they will produce durable effects in actual life.

In the recent study conducted by G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede and Minkov concerning the system of values and the cultural models present in various countries of the world, *the masculinity-femininity dimension* holds a special position, alongside other dimensions seen as relevant in the study of cultures: individualism-collectivism, distance from power (equality-inequality ratio), avoidance of uncertainty, permissiveness-austerity, long-short term orientation. According to this study, in what regards the masculinity-femininity dimension, Romania has a moderate score for the masculinity index (MAS = 42), within a scale that goes from 0 for the most feminine country (in

which the values corresponding to the feminine stereotype / standard are dominant) to 100 for the most masculine country (in which the values attributed to the masculine standard prevail). This position means that in the configuration of our country's values there are both feminine and masculine values, but the masculine ones are predominant, at the expense of feminine ones.

The masculinity-femininity dimension in the analysis of national cultures is relevant for the reception and development of the ideas of feminism and gender equality, because *"from a country to the next we encounter a more masculine or more feminine form of feminism. The masculine form claims that women should have the same opportunities as men. (...) The feminine form [of feminism] wishes to transform society, including men. Freedom not only for women, but also for men"* (Hofstede and Hotstede and Minkov 2012, 157). In Romania, there is a masculine culture in which we can identify a more masculine form of feminism, at least at the level of state, official (mainstream) feminism, identifiable both at the level of discourse and in the contents of some EU funded projects, governmental programs or public policies, which, while promoting equal opportunities as non-discrimination or as respect for the principle of meritocracy create only shallow changes, at the formal (not substantial) level, and which, in fact, keep and perpetuate the order/gender relations of the patriarchal type (Dascălu 2012, 90-91). In masculine culture, changes oriented towards gender equality are seen with suspicion or remain only formal statements. The question is how can we introduce changes oriented towards gender equality in spite of this conservative, extremely reluctant to change "mental software"?

A first direction in our quest for an answer should bear in mind the fact that both the conservation and the change of gender patterns are a question of socialization: *"Socialization means that both girls and boys learn their place in society and once they have learned it most of them want for things to stay the way they are. In male-dominated societies most women desire the domination of males"* (Hofstede and Hotstede and Minkov 2012, 152). For gender equality to become real and substantial and not only a formal presence in our society major changes need to happen at the level of the collective mindset and of the basic structures of society, achievable through changes at the level of the values conveyed through the process of socialization and education. To see gender differences from an anti-essentialist (which refuses to explain gender asymmetries and inequalities by biological differences) and materialist (woman-man, masculinity-femininity are social categories built within relationships of power) perspective brings a much needed conceptual clarification and an equidistant epistemic position (Pfefferkorn 2012, 21-25).

### **3. Equality as the levelling of gender differences: gender equality as intrinsic equality**

In order to avoid the semantic confusion and ambiguities to which the idea of gender equality is exposed, we need to correlate it with other fundamental concepts such as those of difference, equity, inequality, liberty. The correlation *gender difference-equality*, vividly debated in specialist literature, provides new theoretical insight and new possibilities for conceptual handling. When we talk about gender differences we refer to both the natural and biological differences and the "social, economic, and cultural differences between men and women, in order (...) to emphasize the complex social mechanisms through which particular differences between women and men transform into inequalities" (Grünberg 2011, 208).

The manner in which we approach and understand the issue of gender differences may lead us to distinct meanings and nuances of gender equality. At the level of common thought, gender differences and equality are seen as opposed and, as a result, incompatible, for the plain reason that the mere existence of differences between people makes it impossible for them to stand on equal positions. Earning equal rights (legal equality), although it is a major victory of the modern world, does not bring new insight into the understanding and the application of gender equality in day-to-day life. In response to the limits of the idea of formal (legal) equality, which solves only in part the issue of inequity, *the feminism of difference* (as was called the Western feminism of the '60s and '70s - the second wave) tries to reconcile the principle of equality with the acknowledgement of gender difference, upholding the value of the *woman-subject*, a state in which "*women must see themselves through their own eyes, through their experiences and peculiarities, from a womanly perspective (leave the state of object and become the subject of knowledge)*" (Dragomir and Miroiu 2002, 140-141). Within various current feminist trends, the issue of differences between women and men is replaced by the issue of differences between women in particular social and political context, of upholding/acknowledging differences and multiple identities.

We delimit at least four main options within the approach to gender differences in the process of education/socialization, as well as in other frameworks of knowledge or actual action, with reference to the Romanian collective mindset and social realities: a) gender differences get deeper (gender segregation and hierarchy; conservation of gender inequalities; "double standards"); b) gender differences are ignored (neutrality with respect to gender; hiding masculine domination; "universal standard"); c) differences are erased (gender egalitarianism; "the single standard as masculine standard"); d) gender differences are equally valued (gender equality as

intrinsic equality and freedom of choice; two standards that are equally valued). These approaches produce either a different treatment or an equal treatment of women/girls and men/boys in the process of socialization and in various contexts of social life. The principles of "equal treatment" and "different treatment", respectively, are accompanied by several problems in their application to the Romanian society, because, in practice, they are often interpreted starting from the single standard - the male one - when, in fact, this principle supposes accepting two standards for women and men - with different capabilities, needs, and aspirations, which leads to the understanding that equal treatment does not mean identical treatment, but a differentiated yet equitable treatment. Therefore, the *equal treatment* of the two genders is not reduced to them being treated in an identical manner, regardless of the situation, which would mean, in fact, to apply the single standard (predominantly male or female); in the same fashion, *differentiated treatment* does not imply using a double standard (inequitable or prone to produce inequalities), but an attitude that takes gender differences into account in an equitable manner. Thus, the fairness of gender-based treatment may mean *equal treatment or differentiated treatment*, but seen as equivalent in what regards rights, obligations, and opportunities. The identical treatment of women and men is no longer a guarantee for gender equality/fairness, and a fair approach seems to be *differentiated treatment that leads to equivalent results (Gender mainstreaming – metode și instrumente, 2004, Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate)*.

The model of gender partnership and of social cohesion is based on the respect of gender differences, the avoidance of gender hierarchy and segregation, it supposes the equal cognition, understanding, and valuing of gender features/roles, aspects which lay the foundation of *balanced socialization* (the androgynous model), provide a high level of freedom of choice, and equal opportunities for development to both genders. Starting from the recognition and the respect of gender differences, this approach makes possible for equality to be established in and through difference. Although the differences between genders are not as great as common knowledge would have it, through the adoption of particular models of socialization, of the traditional-patriarchal type, they are artificially deepened and become *socially built inequalities*, limiting the development of the human potential of the two genders and the freedom of choosing one's life-professional path.

The political acceptance of equality supposes precisely *the (re)cognition and acceptance of gender differences* (Magyari-Vincze 2002, 77-105). This is a conceptual and theoretical ground that seems to be more suited than equality with the masculine standard, on which effective strategies to establish gender equality in a democratic society can be built.

The orientation of gender policies in the post-communist Romanian society towards the attenuation of gender differences and disparities (by anti-discrimination measures) is believed to be superficial, because it only deals with the effects and not with the causes of gender inequalities. This type of approach does not produce lasting changes at the level of gender relations, often resulting in at least two "twisted effects": a) "equality in a field led to the deepening of inequalities in other fields. The classic example is the equal right to paid work, which led to women's overworking in general, because it just added to the work that they already did in their households"; b) women's right to vote "did not significantly change the face of politics in almost any of the states in which this process took place. Women were forced to simply integrate into the policies defined by men" (Pasti 2003, 90). In their turn, gender blind policies (the non-gender biased approach) are no longer considered to be a solution to the issue of gender asymmetry and inequalities. Changing the orientation of gender policies towards the deep mechanisms of the structuring of gender relations as relationships of power (in the context of private life, of inter-personal relations, and of primary and secondary socialization), correlated with the principle of acknowledging and respecting specific gender differences, could be a realistic alternative in order to balance gender relations in our society (Pasti 2003, 244).

The difficulties encountered in the understanding of gender equality as equality in difference stem, to a great extent, from the confusion that feeds the many a dispute on this topic, between intrinsic equality and empirical equality (Rosanvallon 2011, 351). Feminists and all the real supporters of gender equality relate to the concept of *intrinsic equality* (the equality of women and men due to their intrinsic value as people, as human beings). Those who support gender equality as equality with the masculine standard as well as those who believe in the possibility of gender egalitarianism, operate with the meaning of empirical, contingent equality, which refers to quantitative, measurable aspects of equality, and is rather difficult and strange to translate into practice, even if, more than once, in order to identify and monitor gender inequalities we use figures in order to argument that there are inequalities between women and men in all the sectors of social life.

#### **4. Gender equality as equal opportunities and freedom of access to social rights**

Another cliché often cited when feminism and gender equality are criticized, mainly in a post-communist society accustomed to reduce the idea of equality to egalitarianism, is that of the incompatibility between equality and freedom.

In modern democracies, liberty is the necessary condition of equality. Freedom guarantees if not equality de facto then at least *equality in opportunities* for all individuals: before the law, in political life, in the economic competition, etc. *Equal opportunities* represent the characteristic option of modern societies based on the values of liberal democracy. As these societies accept the idea that *social inequalities* are natural and inevitable (because they are determined by natural differences, by personal qualities, and specific circumstances), *men are nevertheless equal in their rights and freedoms* (A.P. Iliescu 1998, 83; Sainsbury 2000, 276). Therefore, inequalities are acceptable for people if they are the result of the "impersonal functioning of a free social mechanism" (the economic market or the competition), but are unacceptable when they emerge as the result of someone's interventions, of an institution's actions (as it happens in planned or dictatorial regimes) or as forms of discrimination (A.P. Iliescu 1998, 80).

Ever since the establishment of the modern state, built on the values of liberal philosophy, this meaning of the concept of equality, as *equal freedom*, has inspired two fundamental principles which have been included into constitutional norms: *equality before the law* (legal equality); and *equality in rights*, with special focus on fundamental rights, civil and political rights, and less on social rights.

Therefore, classic liberal values defend the principle that society and the state have an obligation to ensure equal rights and liberties (*equal access; equal opportunities, fairness in the liberal sense*) in all fields, for all their citizens, but reject the idea - specific to left-wing doctrines - that they also have an obligation to create the conditions needed for people to become actually equal (with reference to *the equality of results or the fair distribution of resources*) (Colțescu 2005, 92). In this respect, "...there is no general consensus among liberals as to whether the government should ensure only equality before the law or also equal opportunities. Many contemporary liberals have pleaded in favour of the former idea and for a minimal intervention of the state (mainly the libertarians: Friedrich Hayek, Robert Nozick, Milton Friedman). General-welfare liberalism opts for the latter idea, becoming one of the main allies of feminism" (Miroiu 2004, 114).

Among the various liberal trends which founded modern and current democracies there are major differences in what regards the correlation freedom-equality, civil and political rights versus social rights. If classic liberal doctrine and practice sees gender equality as equality in civil and political rights, things become more complicated when equality in social rights is brought to the fore, an aspect which reveals the structural gender inequalities present in the sphere of public and private life and the inequalities relative to paid work and domestic work, respectively. From the

perspective of social liberalism, gender equality, understood as freedom to access social rights is far from becoming a tangible reality in all European countries. Thus, the meanings of equality in relation to the idea of liberty are currently reconsidered from the perspective of the feminist research that has analysed the welfare states in the European area. The case of Sweden and the other Northern countries (Denmark, Norway, Finland and The Netherlands) are cited as examples of a successful harmonization of the values of freedom, individual autonomy, gender equality, and social welfare. These countries hold top positions both in what regards their support of the values of freedom and individual initiative (countries with a high level of individualism and equality) and the way they ensure equality (as equal opportunities, access to social rights, etc.) (Hofstede and Hotstede and Minkov 2012, 66-100).

Therefore, the theory and practice of classic liberal democracy, far from being gender neutral, blocked and limited for a long time women's access to full citizenship, with reference to the multitude of the dimensions of this condition, an aspect which had a direct impact on the formulation of public policies in relation to the generic category of the "universal citizen" which, in fact, refers to man as the head of the family and an independent paid worker. Against this "universal benchmark", women, as "second-rank citizens", were given only derived and fragile rights, which have kept them in a condition of economic and symbolic dependence to their husbands/partners. Feminist research and gender studies question the supposedly universal concept of citizenship and the issue of women's exclusion, for a long time, from the scope of civil, political, and social rights. The victories won by women in the area of political and civil rights in the 20th century also contributed to the improvement of the status of their social citizenship, in relation to which there are still many things to change, which, to a great extent, are related to the re-conceptualization of the complex relationship between various types of equality and freedom in the both spheres of social life, the area of public and private life, productive and reproductive work, themes launched by the feminist theory as early as the 1960s but which are still not exhausted (Del Re, Heinen 1996, 12-21).

To ensure *equal opportunities* in social gender relations means to ensure equality as a starting point, equal starting conditions in the social competition. In this case, gender equality (as equal opportunities) is put in relation to the liberal principle of meritocracy, which, however, ignores right from the start, the existence of gender inequalities in the sphere of private life and the fact that women, who are responsible for work in the sphere of private life, get restricted access to competition and resources. "*While they remain housewives and mothers in office, women cannot be*

*equal competitors on the labour market; they have a real handicap in the competition. Meritocracy invoked as a liberal principle applies to those freed from feeding and caring activities" (Miroiu 2004, 114).*

For social welfare liberalism, unlike classical and neo-classical liberalism, equality is the premise needed to achieve individual freedom and independence. In this respect, equal opportunities mean not only removing the obstacles that oppose the exercise of individual liberties but also meeting the basic needs of people (men/women), and the state assumes a role in ensuring the citizens' welfare. This is quite difficult to understand and implement in the post-communist society, which has to deal with many gender inequalities, deeply rooted in social structures. All the more difficult as it has passed from an extreme to the other in what regards the state's role, from the all-mightiness of the intrusive state to the minimal state of the classical liberal type. Therefore, if, in today's Romania we reduce the idea of gender equality to equal chances understood only based on the meritocratic principle, we actually support fake gender equality or at the most, a formal not an actual type of equality. If we act only with legal tools and anti-discrimination measures, without approaching the grounds of gender inequality in the sphere of public and private life, ignoring the fact that social welfare (social citizenship) is not equally accessible to women and men, it means we are dwelling at the level of an ideological discourse with visible demagogic nuances. In the countries of the European Union, gender equality is more visible and tangible where the social-democrat agenda ensures the functioning of social welfare regimes.

**Conclusion: What kind of feminism and gender equality that would be needed today in Romania?**

When we promote a particular type of feminism and support the principle of gender equality (through our research, training programs, EU funded projects, or public policies) we must be familiar with the dominant cultural model within which we move and identify the clichés, prejudices, and values used by the collective mindset in order to take the necessary epistemological distance from them and contextualize the programs we run in agreement with the Romanian reality. In other words, it is better to be aware of the cultural background on which we aim to grow the principle of gender equality and feminist ideas in order to find proper and effective ways to integrate this principle into daily social practices. Acknowledging the obstacles that stand against the materialization of this principle of gender equality and identifying the factors which generate and maintain these obstacles, factors situated outside the area of cultural models, the meanings and significations that the idea of equality has in various cultures should be an absolutely necessary and

permanent exercise in order to define a better structured public and theoretical agenda on the theme of gender equality, cleansed of confusion, bias, and ideological deviations.

What kind of gender equality should/could we tend towards?

Real equality means:

- Equal valuing of feminine and masculine roles, work, and attributes;
- Differentiated yet equitable treatment;
- Equality in and through difference;
- Qualitative indicators;
- Based on an equivalence of the A=B type;
- Affirmation of the woman-subject;
- Focus on gender equality and inequalities in the public and private space; equality with respect to paid and unpaid work.

Formal equality is reduced to:

- Equality with the masculine standard;
- Quantitative indicators;
- Equal opportunities reduced to the meritocratic principle;
- Equal opportunities reduced to equal civil and political rights;
- Equal treatment and identical treatment; egalitarianism;
- Differentiated treatment with reference to the "double standard"; A = non-A; perpetuation of classic public-private dichotomies.

If currently, in Romania, the idea of gender equality is reduced to equal opportunities (the meritocratic principle), this means that we are actually supporting a false type of gender equality or, at least, formal equality, but not real equality. If we act only with legal instruments and anti-discrimination measures, without approaching, through education and public policies, the grounds of gender inequalities in the sphere of public and private life, while ignoring the fact that social

welfare (social citizenship) is not equally accessible to women and men, this means that we are stuck at the level of an ideological discourse with obvious demagogical elements.

In the Romanian society it is necessary and possible to create a feminism of equality, of respect for gender differenced, of autonomy and freedom. Feminism as outside the box (self) critical thinking and discourse would have a transforming potential in all the Romanian social environments. In order to promote this type of feminism it is important to understand that the sphere of private life is an important place where gender relationships are created / shaped and it is necessary to see the two spheres as interdependent because the inequalities from the sphere of private life reproduce in the sphere of professional work. Equality between women and men on the labour market / in the professional sphere will remain formal as long as the issue of the informal care offered to the dependent is not solved by public policies.

In the Romanian society, feminism seen as *outside the box thinking* could support two-way modernizing policies: "top-down" (through laws and institutions) and "bottom-up" (in which an important role is played by education).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- Albu, M., Mocanu, C. 2006. *Egalitatea de șanse în România. De la teorie la practică*, în Băluță, Oana (ed.), *Gen și putere. Partea leului în politica românească*, Editura Polirom, București.
- Baudelot C., Establet R. 2006. *Allez les filles! Une révolution silencieuse*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.
- Băluță, O., Dragolea, A., Iancu, A. 2007. *Parteneri egali, competitori egali. Integrarea dimensiunii de gen în procesul de elaborare a politicilor publice*, Editura Maiko, București.
- Bereni, L., Chauvin, S., Jaunait, A., and A. Revillard. 2011. *Introduction aux gender studies. Manuel des études sur le genre*, Éditions De Boeck Université, Bruxelles.
- Bourdieu, P. 2003. *Dominația masculină*, Editura Meridiane, București.
- Colțescu, Gabriela (ed.). 2005. *Vocabular pentru societăți plurale*, Editura Polirom, București.
- Dafflon Nouvelle A. (ed.). 2006. *Filles-garçons. Socialisation différenciée?*, PUG, Grenoble.
- Del Re, A., Heinen, J. 1996. *Quelle citoyenneté pour les femmes? La crise des États-providence et de la représentation politique en Europe*, Éditions L'Harmattan, Paris.
- Dascălu, I. 2012. *Egalitate de șanse și non-discriminare* în Revista Sfera Politicii, Volumul XX, nr.2 (168), martie-aprilie 2012; Index Copernicus, CEEOL, IPSA; <http://issuu.com/sferapoliticii>.
- Dragomir, O., Miroiu, M. (eds.). 2002. *Lexicon feminist*, Editura Polirom, Iași.
- Grünberg, L. 2011. *Identitate și diferență* în Vlăsceanu, L. (ed.). *Sociologie*, Editura Polirom, București.
- Hofstede, G., Hotstede, G.J., Minkov, M. 2012. *Culturi și organizații. Softul mental. Cooperarea interculturală și importanța ei pentru supraviețuire* (Cultures and Organizations. The Mental Soft), Humanitas, București.
- Hurubean, A. 2011. *Problematika egalității de gen – mizele creșterii vizibilității publice și a cotei de audiență*, în Sfera Politicii, volumul XIX, Nr.1 (155), ianuarie 2011: 24-28.
- Hurubean, A. 2012. *Inegalitățile de gen la intersecția mecanismelor discriminatorii*, în Revista Sfera Politicii, Volumul XX, nr.2 (168), martie-aprilie 2012: 94-99.
- Iliescu, Adrian-Paul, *Liberalismul între succese și iluzii*, Editura All, București, 1998.
- Magyari-Vincze, Enikő. 2002. "Regimurile de gen și cetățenia femeilor" în *Prezențe feminine. Studii despre femei în România*, Cosma, Ghizela, Magyari-Vincze, Enikő, Pecican, Ovidiu (eds.), Editura Fudației Desire, Cluj-Napoca.
- Miroiu, M. 1998. *Feminismul ca politică a modernizării* (Feminism as political modernization) în Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (ed.), *Doctrină politică. Concepte universale și realități românești* (Political doctrine. Universal concepts and romanian realities), Editura Polirom, Iași.
- Miroiu, M. 2003. "Despre politica «ultimei inegalități»", în Vladimir Pasti, *Ultima inegalitate. Relațiile de gen în România*, Editura Polirom, București.
- Miroiu, M. 2004. *Drumul către autonomie. Teorii politice feminist* (The Road to Autonomy. Feminist Political Theories), Editura Polirom, București.

Miroiu, M., Hașdeu, I. 2004, *En Roumanie, le féminisme académique a un ascendant sur le féminisme militant: Entretien avec Mihaela Miroiu, fondatrice des Études Genre en Roumanie* în: *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Postcommunisme: Genre et États entransition, 2004.

Pasti, V. 2003. *Ultima inegalitate. Relațiile de gen în România*, Editura Polirom.

Pfefferkorn, R. 2012. *Genre et rapports sociaux de sexe*, Éditions Page Deux, Suisse.

Rosanvallon, P. 2011. *La société des égaux*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

Roventă-Frumușani, D. 2002. *Identitatea feminină și discursul mediatic în România postcomunistă*, în Brădeanu, A., Dragomir, O., Roventă-Frumușani, D., Surugiu, R. (eds.), *Femei, cuvinte și imagini. Perspective feministe*, Editura Polirom, Iași.

Sainsbury, D., (2000) *Les droits sociaux des femmes et des hommes*, în Ballmer-Cao, T.H., Mottier, V., Sgier, L. (coord.) (2000) *Genre et politique. Débats et perspectives*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris.

Vlad Ioana. 2012. *Feminismul*, în Miroiu, M. (ed.), *Ideologii politice actuale. Semnificații, evoluții și impact*, Editura Polirom, Iași.

\*\*\* *Observatorul Cultural* (Cultural Observatory), 28 Septembrie 2004, nr. 240, <http://www.observatorcultural.ro/FEMINISMUL-IN-ROMANIA-INCOTRO>

\*\*\* *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Postcommunisme: Genre et États entransition (2004)

