

BOOK REVIEW



With my woman's mind
(„Cu mintea mea de femeie”)

by **Mihaela MIROIU**
Cartea Românească, 2017, 248 pages

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”*Cu mintea mea de femeie*”(With my woman's mind) is the last book written by Mihaela Miroiu, published in 2017 by Cartea Românească, whose official release took place, not coincidental I would say, on the 8th of March – The International Day of Struggle for women's rights. Being one of the most important figures in the public space in Romania, Mihaela Miroiu, who substantially contributed to the construction and consolidation of the political and government sciences in post-communist Romania (see here works such as *Societatea retro*, *România-starea de fapt*, co-written along with Vladimir Pasti and Cornel Codiță, but also coordinating the first philosophy school books published after 89s and the initiation of some university and master degrees programs etc.) and who rather stayed connected to the introduction, development and institutionalization of the feminist and gender studies in this part of the Eastern Europe.

The author's contribution to the development of the academic feminist in Romania it is indubitable. Mihaela Miroiu writes the first PhD thesis which centers the feminist philosophy, initiates the first university course on feminine politics, the first master course on gender studies, coordinated at Polirom publishing house the first collection on gender studies, and the first PhDs in this field. Throughout her career she has written multiple tomes, articles and book chapters in which she systematically approached themes associated with women's rights, women's citizenship, gender

and democracy, gender and transition, gender and philosophy. Among the outstanding contributions to the development of philosophical theories and feminist politics there is the theory of the tenableness which Mihaela Miroiu presents it in the *Convenio* tome, work in which the author proposes a feminist type of ethics underpinned upon the ``tenableness`` in terms of ``coming together, coming from all parts, bringing together, agreeing, adapting, getting together``¹. The paper is even more relevant as it concentrates the way the author will position herself along the time as a public intellectual in the Romanian social and politic scenery, precisely as a feminist, humanist, very close to the Kantian philosophy and right's ethics, with a confessed appetite drive and assumption for the democratic values and for ethic liberalism (see here also the book on politics ideologies which she coordinated: *Current political ideologies. Significations, evolutions and impact*, Polirom, 2012).

It is also relevant the author's contribution to the development of the civil society, Mihaela Miroiu being one of the funding members of The Society of Feminist Analysis AnA, the first nongovernmental organization, assumed feminist, from the Romanian civic scenery (informally initiated in 1990 and formally in 1993), but also to the Curricular Development Center and Gender Studies Filia (2002), both organizations being active in the area of promoting human's rights, and particular women's rights. Furthermore, the book's author whereof I will speak at great length in the following, was in all this years (1989-2017) a public figure that didn't hesitate to take a firm stand on certain present-day topics in Romanian society, being very often by the virtue of the assumed feminism, not a very convenient person for a stiff system in the imperfection of a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the name Mihaela Miroiu remains with overbalance associated with academic feminism and its development in Romania, for that matter of fact this assumed identity being also very often the target of some critics and ironies as it otherwise results from the stories gathered in the volume *Cu mintea mea de femeie*.

This more or less detailed presentation of the author, in the beginning of the *Cu mintea mea de femeie* book review, which it's not at all aleatory, but has the role of introducing in actual fact the main character and a work of an autobiography kind. Although it is not author's first writing in which she distances herself of the academic speech, inflexible, bound/imperative elitist in which she presents philosophical arguments and political theory (see here the book *Restul și*

¹ Mihaela Miroiu, *Convenio. Despre natură, femei și morală*, Iași, Polirom publishing house, 2002, page 12;

Vestul, Polirom 2005, published along with Mircea Miclea, or *Neprețuitele femei*, feminist journalism volume, Polirom 2006), this book differs itself from all the others through the substance of the assumed reflexive of the author's evolution into a woman and a feminist. And I think it is not at all an accident the fact that this book is a follow-up of uncensored analysis and academic studies which Mihaela Miroiu publishes, this fact has in its essence two explanations and overtones: a) first, the analysis and academic feminism to create a public space and legitimacy for and embodied, reflexive, assumed, autobiographic feminism; b) the magnitude generated by the acknowledged public contribution which supposes the reading of this book through the key of assuming a profound act of intellectual and human liberty in which the author presents herself in an authentic way, uncensoring its own evolution, the first assumed identity as being dynamic, with multiple aspects, which are sometimes in contradiction.

Of course, we could wonder how could we know how much authenticity and censoring is in the writing of this book, question which is somehow even more legitimate when it comes to an autobiography tome. The answer, of course, cannot have doubtless value, but there are a few elements that still carry us towards such a conclusion, among all: public visibility of the autobiographic character of the book; the reflexivity which transcends all the texts – the author is looking at herself and at her own lived history critically, through a feminist screen and doesn't hesitate to evaluate the past self in relation to her today self (recounting about the experience of discovering the student girls housing which belong to the Philosophy Faculty, the author says “that year I think I have been downright misogynist” – page 67); the approach in this book of some anyhow uncomfortable themes, on the contrary I could say, still taboo for the Romanian society such as rape, sexual harassment, adoptive father, robbery, disease, death, homosexuality, violence against animals, women experiences such as giving birth, menstruation.

Hence, from the point of view of the main message of the work there is one which concentrates around the idea of liberty, the liberty of the woman Mihaela Miroiu, who using the autobiography instrument, actually talks about women's liberty, their value beyond the traditional gender roles and especially about their minds and souls values (who must transcend the traditional norms in which the women are just a gratification body of satisfying sexual pleasures or reproductive instruments). Not ultimately, all along the book, Mihaela Miroiu talks about power in all of its forms using a critical feminist screen which adds new valences to the concept, others than most of us are used to – *the power on, the power of and the power against coercion*. The author does, in a

formula more accessible to the wide public, *the apologetical of becoming, of accepting, of understanding, of the power of giving power through sorority and solidarity, claiming and taking the power* by the disproof of the masculine authority embedded in the society's patriarchal norms.

As structure, the book contains six parts (The Child, The Girl, The Young Girl, Je chante avec toi, Liberté!, Simply life and The women's century) which opens to the reader's, in a chronological formula, chapters from the author's life starting with the first memories of early childhood, until to very present moments such as the parliamentary elections from 2016. All along the stories, initially published as a sort of serial-story columns on Literatura de azi (Literature today) site, we discover formative experiences for the child, the adolescent and the woman Mihaela Miroiu, we get to the characters who marked her becoming, but in all this report we also discover a world with men and women, boys and girls, neighbours, a world in which the gender becomes a variable for many of the questions, frustrations, traumas, failings from the author's life. Mihaela Miroiu presents ourselves in a lyric formula, gentle here and there, or brutally trenchant, the way in which she has learned or has been taught to be a woman, initially in the stereotypical traditional sense (see here *Un eșec de femeie*), the way she started questioning herself, and she began to deconstruct the traditional model, but especially the manner in which, after all this phases, most of the times attained by revolts and interior sufferance, she accepted and loved herself as a whole woman, with a mind of her own, capable of producing knowledge with nothing less value than the one created by Men.

Of course, revealing in all this process there was the encounter with philosophy and feminist political theory, which similar to a magic wand is offering answers to the author's questions, which maybe were deposited in the acceptance and resignation cupboard.

Exemplificative is here the story *Dactilografa cugetătorului* which presents the student's cycle at the Philosophy Faculty dominated by male professors: "My problem: when I went to the Philosophy Faculty, I knew it or not, as a woman, that I don't have sufficient brain or an adequate one for the university? I knew it or not, I cannot be a metaphysician because I am the metaphysics itself, as well was saying Paleologu The Elder? Or that my intellectual statute can maximum be the one of a savage asset, as Noica believed and Liiceanu poached. Or that, word of Nichita, I could be as beautiful as the shadow of a thought – but who has seen thinking shadows?"²

² Mihaela Miroiu, *Cu mintea mea de femeie*, Cartea Românească, 2017, page 85;

In counterparty, there is the emancipative and empowering story of the meeting with Mary Daly in 1998, at Cornell University: "I have understood from her part and from other authors that we will never reach an intellectual androgynous world until the women will not create their own *weltanschauung*, based on their intuitions emerged from their own feminine experiences, whereof the one of containing and giving life is the first foundational one³".

Another theme that earns a certain importance, through the references frequency from the text, but also through its shaping power upon the character, is the communism (along with post-communism). In this way, even though sometimes, she explicitly assumes herself in the text to overcome the communist era, not to refer herself to that stage of life, Mihaela Miroiu, reveals herself as profoundly affected by living under a communist regime. The lack of liberty irretrievable marks her, and its implications are multiple: from the hard criticism and trenchant of the communist regime, to the profound attachment, sometimes interpreted as naïve, towards the liberal democratic values, to the assumption of the competition and the interceder system, acquaintances and relations learned on her own in communism) in the construction of a better world.

Ultimately but not last, the way the author chooses to end the lived stories cycle gives a certain shade to the book and kind of marks the final touch which completes the portrait of a feminist with body, emotion and mind. Hence, the last parts come undone in a certain measure apart from the chronological line of the presentation, staying in the autobiographical model, reaffirming the need, the author's wish of returning, through self and her own experiences, towards life and all of her's (disease, death, extremely intimate fears) and women. The feelings, thoughts, experiences presented in these last parts are so profound and authentic that can be even hard to read, touching moral support of the most intimate, opening the doors to the most deep fears, presenting ourselves in the same time the natural and even the beauty of vulnerability. Mihaela Miroiu doesn't fear talking differently about death, even though you can see it's not easy for her to do it, about the great fear of her life that is losing her eyesight. But even more than that, she doesn't let her readers being sad and ends her book with a series of stories in which she turns to women, in which she tells them about the friendship between women, about sorority, solidarity, and becoming from and through women.

The book *Cu mintea mea de femeie* "(*With my woman's mind*) is without a doubt a paper that can be laid in the feminist literature category and has the great virtue of bringing feminism

³ ibidem, page 160;

closer to those that are fighting for this movement. The autobiographic dimension stirs curiosity, and the period of time presented in this book creates a wider identification space for different readers categories and most of all female readers: from women from rural environment, to teachers, mothers, career women, women who work in emasculated fields, girlfriends etc. This paper is in the same time a reflexive thinking model of a combination between feminist epistemology and lyric genre, might be able of becoming very easily a study object for those interested in gender studies.