

Chapter III. Accents (*selection*)

The black points of the equal opportunities between women and men

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In the post-socialist Romania, two big thinking mechanisms functions within the public opinion as to the issue of equal opportunities between women and men. On the one hand, the memories of the practice or application of this idea during the communist period undermined the idea about equal opportunities between women and men; on the other hand, the idea came to life again together with the process of accepting and implementing the terms of the equal opportunities legislation within the process of access and integration of Romania in the European Union. Both mechanisms gave life to superficial reactions and reflections developed between the two extremes: total rejection of the idea and unconditioned acceptance of the idea.

What exactly is happening alongside these lines? Superficial talks with considerable public impact about equality refers either to egalitarianism meaning a system that promotes anything else but value, or to the disappearance of any kind of differences; and further more, “feminism” is charged for the negative consequences of these. The major negative issue in this debate is communism. There is also another side of the debate, a very abstract one, sounding a lot like the official documents of the Romanian Communist Party! And maybe that’s why it does not sound “dangerous” for people used with a double reality: one commended, one lived. It also might sound innocent as it uses the word “gender” and not “women” and thus for many it looks like avoiding feminism by using *a gender mainstreaming* language. And even more, it looks all nice and positive as it is connected with the idea of Europe. The only sight where these contrasting views are meeting, the idea of equality a la communism and the idea of equal opportunities a la Europe, seems to be within the idea of system of cota for women defined as a “preferential treatment”, part of the process of real equalization of chances. But there are other mechanisms that are functioning here for those that do not want to see this system working. And anyway, these rules are just recommendations and our national sovereignty allows us not to take them serious enough! And even we formulate them as recommendations for political, economic, educational institutions, local or national, we should be sure that in our society people do not know to claim their rights, especially women.

Between the two opposite opinions just shortly described, there are on the one hand, a set of women’s experiences of everyday life, women of different ethnic background, age, social position, religion, that are living many experiences of injustice, subordination and discrimination, giving signs that they are welcoming a new political movement to give voice to their personal experiences; on the other hand, there is a network of different non-governmental organisations for/by women, but very seldom feminist, that have their activities focused on several concrete issues, being structured and dependent on foreign funding, and by this meaning that most of their activities is driven by the interests/goals

of the founders. There is a fight for funding among these organizations, there is a scare of being centralized, there is a lack of a tradition of cooperation and mutual support for each other between these organisations, and all these out of fear that they might lose the monopoly on the funded domain of “equal opportunities between women and men.” At the same time, we have to admit that these cultural behaviours won’t be active if on the market of funded projects some organisations would not have a privileged position and would not have free/open market behaviour and would promote with pride the liberal ideology of meritocracy. And, not to forget, there are the academic programs concerned or having included courses about equal opportunities between women and men. Under the name of “gender studies”, these projects try to prove that knowledge and especially scientific knowledge can be used differently, more close to the idea of civil responsibility; but either they are not looked for by the civil society, or they do not manage to apply their idea as it seems they can not get out of the academic “ghetto” that implies different criteria of recognition and promotion.

Gender and diversity. Gender and ethnicity

[...]

And what is happening with Hungarian women? Or what is happening with the Hungarian feminism in Romania? Is it possible that such a thing exist? Does it have any particularities? Why I do not want to talk about this? I chose not to talk about this because for me feminism means a trans-national space and in the last period I was not interested in to promote a closed feminism within ethnic boundaries. A reason for this is that I consider that Hungarian women have similar problems with the Romanian women, according or not to their age, jobs, social class, and geographical area of living, sexual orientation.

[...]

(Translation (selection) by Ioana Borza)

Warning: If we do not have a history,...we do not have anything ...

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Rediscovering and re-evaluating the history of the women’s movement in Romania shows care for the national heritage, for the history and values of this country. After several years during which I have been trying to rediscover/bring to life the history of women’s movement in Romania, I think I have a moral authority to warn about some aspects related to the way we as a people know how to preserve and to ... our heritage.

First of all it is mandatory to remake the prestige that the Romanian movement for women’s emancipation used to have until the communist regime was established. I have

several recommendations to make in order to reach this goal and to emphasize the authenticity of the Romanian women's movement.

1. It is absolutely unjustifiable the absence of the contribution of the feminist personalities to the creation of Great Romania from almost all history dictionaries, encyclopaedias and synthesizes. One example is the book *History of Romania in Data* (Bucharest, Encyclopaedia Publishing House, 2003) where the name of Elena Ceausescu is cited 28 times; the book even mentions all the titles and distinctions she received, of course by mutual understanding, from different international institutions. The book does not mention at all the name of Alexandrina Cantacuzino who was one of the most prominent women within the Romanian women's movement, known nationally and internationally. In the same case are Elena Meissner, Calypso Botez, Maria Butureanu, Ella Negruzzi, and many others.
2. It is very important to make known and to use the work of several feminist women that are not well known or at all known today: Elena Ghica is such a case as she was the author of 120 studies, articles, comments, novels, poems, and diaries. G. Calinescu names her as "an international known writer." The publishing of her written work from the 19th Century has been abandoned. Written work of several others women should or must be republished in the future: Adela Xenopol (1861 – 1939), Maria C. Butureanu (1871 – 1919) or Alexandrina Gr. Cantacuzino (1881 – 1944).
3. Support and encouragement of research about the movements of minorities' women in Romania, movements that were very active especially during the years after the formation of the Great Romania state; it would be of great help for the scientific community to write monographic studies about the activities of the Union of Israelite Women (1904 – 1937) that had as a newspaper the *Jew Woman* (Bucharest, 1928 – 1937), the General Secretary of Hungarian Women (Cluj), the Union of the Catholic Women, the Union of the Reformed Women, the Union of Unitarian Women, and many others.
4. It is not at all justified at all the lack of history of women and about women's movement in Romania from the beginning until today from the historical literature. Such a history should be a team work of historians, literature historians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and others.
5. We must find out in what conditions and how the archives of several well known women's organisations, like the archives of the Union of the Romanian Women that had the headquarter in Brasov, disappear. The archives of the previous mentioned organisation are available until 1918, and what should have existed after this year when it became national through its activities does not exist.
6. There are no proper reasons to motivate the disappearance of the archives of one of the most important women's organisation, the National Council of Romanian Women, created in 1921 and affiliated to the National Council of Women. A similar situation is the case of the archives of the Union of the Democratic Women in Romania and of the National Council of Women. The Union of the Democratic Women in Romania was formed in 1948 and the National Council of Women in 1956 by the Romanian Communist Party in order to replace the

- hundreds women's organisations that had juridical status and existed before the WWII. The lack of these archives is the main reason why the publication of the history of women's movements in Romania stopped at 1948.
7. Writing and bringing to life the history of women's movement was harden also by the partial access to information about women's associations placed within National Archives, and especially access to information regarding the period between 1944 and 1989.
 8. Many collections of women's newspapers and magazines are incomplete or missing, and not only several numbers, but publications from entire years. Making photocopies of these newspapers or magazines is a problem as the access to them is limited or not allowed, almost impossible to make as in many cases they have a big format and they are not in proper physical conditions. The Library of the Romanian Academia does not allow their photocopying as they are unique materials.
 9. These women's organisations like the National Council of the Romanian Women, National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, Christian Association of Romanian Women had a rich ownerships. It is mandatory to re-establish these ownerships. It would be very important and recommended to regain the ownership of the several buildings that belonged to these organizations placed within Bucharest and other cities in Romania. These buildings were constructed and maintained by these organisations with a lot of financial effort during the years.
 10. In this line, it is urgent to regain ownership on the building placed on Independence Street no. 47 in Bucharest where the House of Woman was placed during the interwar years. This building was constructed with the help of Alexandrina Cantacuzino during the '30s and this kind of support was a model for women's and feminist activities for other organisations in the South-East part of Europe. Within this building during that period, several important organisations had their headquarters: the Romanian branch of the Feminine Small Understanding, National Council of Women, Young Women Association, Feminine Branch of the F.I.D. A. C. In the building there was a conference room, a library, a hotel and a host, a restaurant, a medical surgery and a law consultancy office, both of them free of charge available for women in need or difficulties. Courses for qualifications for women were also available/given here. After the WWII this building became national owned and it was destined for other types of activities. The building where the Christian Women's Association had the General Directorate, placed now on Popa Rusu street no.13 in Bucharest, and also several other buildings in Bucharest, Iasi, Constanta, Chisinau, Cluj, Timisoara had the same faith: became national owned and their use had different purposes. Another example of this kind are the awnings of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women like the building where the Orthodox High-school for Girls in Craiova had its place, nowadays a construction firm is placed there.

(Translation by Ioana Borza)

(NOT) MADE IN ROMANIA:

To import or not to import – this *shouldn't* be the question

Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu

One of the greatest problems (and critiques!) of equal opportunities policies in Romania consists of its imported character. On all levels, from NGO agendas, that run projects financed (read “ordered”) from abroad, to the key-concepts and the content of normative papers and laws.

Alien priorities

During the past 15 years programs and projects concerning the promotion of equal opportunities between women and men and, generally, those related to different aspects of women’s lives, have benefited from financial support offered by several sources. Most of this support, though, came from Western European and North American international organizations, institutions, foundations etc., and, during the past few years, the support offered by the European Union (EU) has increased. All this financial support has one feature in common: establishing the agenda and priorities for women in Romania. Naturally, NGOs and other Romanian institutions that deal with equal opportunities between women and men and women’s issues have complied to the requests of these “Western” donors and have carried on projects meant to fit the norms and requirements established by international organizations, for, on one hand, this was the only way to guarantee at least the partial fulfillment of the projects and, on the other hand, their own survival.

We are all familiar with expressions such as “Central and Eastern Europe”, “Southern and Eastern Europe”, “the Balkans” etc. – used more frequently in English than in Romanian. But it is not about the expressions themselves, but about the fact that they have artificially built a unitary image of these geographical regions, while the reality is extremely heterogeneous complex, with distinct specificities and needs, for both women and men. The monolithic image of “Eastern” women and men erases the identity of several groups that are not represented and whose problems and needs are not even known, all the less taken into consideration by social policies.

Thus, the negative aspect consists of the fact that in many cases several problems that are characteristic for the Romanian society were not made visible enough and addressed properly, being obliterated in order for the priorities established by the financers to be respected. The impact is serious from two points of view: firstly, because real problems remain unresolved or, even worse, unidentified, and secondly, funds are being spent on issues that might not be the most important ones for women’s lives in Romania.

The “wooden language” of equal opportunities

Many legal provisions in the field of equal opportunities between women and men in Romania, as well as text-books, guides, definitions, explanations, examples etc. designed

to be used in applying it are based on translations made without adapting the concepts to the specific local needs. Moreover, these translations are so close to the original version that they are difficult to understand without knowing the English version (the most popular language of equal opportunities between women and men policies). This is why, very often, the expressions are unintelligible, even alien to the Romanian language and, most of all, to the Romanian realities, using concepts that require explanations, unknown to the legislators, to the representatives of central administration and, all the more, to the public.

The situation has severe negative effects. The language that we use builds us, it structures and organizes our activities and, no doubt about this, a language of „forms without content” can not produce real transformation and betterment. If before 1989 we had a certain type of “wooden language”, at present governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies have imported and adopted a new kind of “wooden language”, the one of equal opportunities.

(Translation by Theodora Elena Văcărescu)