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STRONG FEMINISM, WEAK IMPACT. INGREDIENTS FOR DECODING THE PARADOX

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ABSTRACT

Reinvented after '89, feminism in Romania is in good shape. There is a solid academic feminism, with relevant gender sensitive researches and generations of MA and PhD students committed to women and gender issues. More than twenty years of activism produced concrete results-new organizations and legislation, good practices of gender sensitive projects, various partnerships with governmental and nongovernmental bodies in terms of supporting gender issues. At this moment, a revived, energetic, vocal type of feminism is to be observed. A young generation of feminists (majority with a solid academic background), at ease with the new communication technologies, is more vocal and active than ever in the public arena, especially in social media.

However, change is still slow, main issues from the public agenda of the feminist movement are more or less the same as twenty years ago and society's general attitude towards feminism and women's movement remains negative or, at the best, reserved. The audience of the new strong, radical, committed feminist messages is often reluctant both to the content and the forms of expression. Why feminism is not yet a public authority able to really change the political agenda? Looking for some possible answers, the article will focus on two critical issues: (i) the magnifier effect of the online activism; (ii) the perverse effects of addressing sexism to neo-sexists.

KEYWORDS

- *feminsm*
- *women movement*
- *civil society*
- *sexism*
- *neo-sexism*
- *modern sexism*
- *cyber feminism*

‘Am sentimentul că se întâmplă ceva frumos cu feminismul din România. Suntem tot mai multi/multe’ [I have the feeling something nice is happening with feminism in Romania. We are more and more] (Facebook message, Diana Neaga, February 2nd, 2013)

Introduction: A Subjective Assessment of the Current Romanian Feminism

I have been reading, teaching, doing and living feminism in Romania for many years. As a subjective doer and observer of what has happened in the area of both academic and activist feminism in Romania, I have enjoyed seeing new legislation initiated, new institutions created, books published, experts in the area appearing, networks functioning. I have also contemplated and bitterly opposed those slippages in the field of gender equality that took place.

Reinvented after '89, the women movement and feminism in Romania are at this moment in good shape. There is a solid academic feminism, with relevant gender sensitive researches (books, articles, journals) and generations of MA and PhD students committed to gender equality issues. More than 20 years of activism in the field produced concrete results: new organizations and legislation, good practices of gender sensitive projects, various partnerships with civil society and governmental bodies in terms of supporting gender issues.

At this moment, a revived, energetic, radical type of feminist activism is to be observed. It is an activism that is fed by a *young generation* of feminists (mainly women but also some men), majority with a solid academic background. Having MAs or PhDs in the area of Gender Studies and Feminism is common nowadays among activists. Many of the leaders and members of the active groups and NGOs¹ have such academic solid backgrounds. This means that the arguments for doing things in certain ways are much more solid, based on empirical data and theoretical perspectives, adapted to various target groups, delivered in a professional way.

It is a fresh generation of **tech-savvy activists** that grew up with technology, rely on it and consequently very *active on social media*. 20 years ago we started doing feminism in post communist Romania by discovering with amazement for the first time the internet connection (Romanian Society for Feminist Analysis received for example in 1995 a router and a laptop from the Network East West Women-NEWW, being among the first women NGOs in Romania connected by email to international women's networks²). Today the “Y generation” of feminists has no

1 Such as Front Association, Filia-Center for Curricula Development and Gender Studies, Pro Women Foundation, Center for Equal Partnership-CPE, Society for Feminist Analyses-AnA, Association for Liberty and Gender Equality-ALEG, Transcena Association, Artemis Association-Cluj, Roma Women Association, Association Equal Chances for Women-SEF, Iași, etc.

2 See L Grünberg, *biONGrafie. Istoria trăită de un ONG de femei*, București: Polirom, 2008, for a lived history of this Romanian women NGO.

problem in using various types of social media to connect, to spread information, to lobby, organize and ask for support (e.g. feminism.ro, the excellent online gender sensitive press reviews by Tudorina Mihai³, “The Misogyny Files”-a campaign initiated during the 2012 elections⁴, other individual vivid websites of various NGOs, etc.). This computer high level literacy means faster reactions and solidarity in case of emergency (as for example the fast and intense civic reactions against the recent proposal for a revised “Law on Mediation”⁵) and instant access to the world wide activism.

The new sort of activism is much *more inclusive* than the one noticeable some years ago. Especially representatives of Roma organizations, but also LGBT and human rights organizations, organizations dealing with family, health or environmental issues are signing petitions, commenting on various thematic websites, participating on line to debates, coming to meetings. Intertwining aspects of gender equality are present in the academic discourses and also in practice, particularly with reference to gender and ethnicity.

I would also say that it is a “wave” of *uninhibited, playful, and eager to show off feminism*. Activists (women but also some men!) are not afraid to proclaim themselves feminists. On the contrary, in the spirit of the third wave of feminism, they are willing to declare themselves in public as feminists, creating as many opportunities as possible to speak out and be provocatively committed to street protests, in various creative ways, for important feminist causes. The eagerness to intervene is visible. Messages such as “*Incredible, we have to make noise, as much noise as possible! It is unbelievable what they can do! I am so angry.....We need a strategy and a coherent mobilization*” (Andreea Molocea, online group discussions on the case of the mediation law, January, 2013) or “*Let us mark the International Women’s Day by a protest meeting against violence*” (group message on www.feminism.ro, March, 3rd, 2013) are more than usual now on the online communities of feminists. Only in the last couple of months, in Bucharest there have been: a protest march against violence against women (March, 8th, 2013); a flash mob organized in one of the city’s Mall, part of the Global project “One Billion Raising”, focusing also on raising awareness on violence against women (February 2nd, 2012); a protest meeting close to the Headquarter of many of the daily Journals in Bucharest, targeting the journalists and the violence against women in the media (November 25, 2012⁶); a protest meeting nearby the Police Headquarter in view of protesting for the “Mediation Law” (February 2nd, 2013).

Taking into consideration only the above mentioned aspects, one may conclude that there is definitely an unprecedented energy and commitment for

3 Blogul-medusei.blogspot.ro

4 <http://candidatmisogin.worldpress.com>

5 Law nr.214/2013 that included rape among the conflicts situations that should first be solved within a mediation process before going to Court. Including of penale cases such as rape within the mediation process was strongly criticized by many women NGOs that organized online and off line protests.

6 More information about these meetings on www.feminism.ro (archives).

feminist causes. However, change is still slow. Main issues from the public agenda of the feminist movement are the same as 20 years ago: lack of representation in politics, violence against women, pauperization of the feminized domains such as education and health, sexism of media institutions, etc. In terms of concrete figures Romania occupies last positions among EU countries on all areas (work, money, knowledge, time, power, health) analyzed in the framework of the recent Gender Equality Index produced by the EIGE.⁷ At a more general level, society's general attitude towards feminism and women's movement remains negative or, at the best, reserved. The targeted audience of these new strong, radical, committed feminist messages is, at least in my opinion, often reluctant, both in content and forms of expression. Media is almost ignoring or, at its best, treats such events as exotic happenings. Governmental institutions pay usually some formal attention with no concrete follow up. The rest of the article will spot some impediments in making feminist ideas and gender equality policies in Romania more visible.

Looking (first) in our own backyard...

Why change is so slow and why feminism is still not alluring? I intend to look for some possible explanations. Of course, there are many reasons and many angles for approaching the issue. I do not intend to take the easy path: the victimization perspective. I do not intend to look at us- women, as victims of the patriarchal society we inherited or to look at us- activists in women's movement as the ones suffering in a transition society that marginalizes issues of women's rights and equal opportunities. In other words, I will avoid from the start the "externalizing failure" approach: others are guilty for the current situation: men, society at large and its patriarchal conservative values, social institutions such as media, health, politics, etc.

Yes, there are patriarchal values strongly embedded in our culture and it may take much longer to change the cultural "DNA" in people's minds. Yes, there are gender insensitive political leaders- men and women alike (for which we voted for a lack of a better choice!). Yes, our media is aggressively promoting a commercial primitive, sexualized gender model. Yes, our schools are not paying due attention to issues of diversity and equal opportunities, etc. Yes, civil society does not have a strong voice - only 2% of Romanians would appeal to a NGO or a union in case of a discrimination situation⁸ in comparison with countries such as Norway where there are 115.000 NGOs, 80% of the population are members of one or more organizations and only about half of the population participates in volunteer work⁹. Despite all these, my focus is different: not looking outwardly but inwardly, that means concentrating on the feminists themselves, engaged in changing the state of affairs in Romania. The questions to be asked are numerous: What have

7 EIGE, *Gender Equality Index*, 2013. Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Gender-Equality-Index-Report.pdf>

8 Council of Europe, *Eurobarometer: Perceptions of Discrimination in the Eu countries*, 2012, Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/discrimination/news/121122_en.htm

9 Source of information: Lilian Solheim, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, speech at the "Launch Conference of EEA funds", Bucharest, 18 April 2013.

we, feminists, done, actually? How do we do what we do? How much do we reflect critically on our strategies and options? How much have we learned from the mistakes we made?

I strongly believe in the need for self assessment, for being critical first to yourself (at individual and group level) and then to others. It is from this perspective that I want to look critically inside the women's movement in Romania and pinpoint some aspects that could be causing the discrepancy between the energy, creativity of the moment and the slow impact stemming out of it.

I took, several times in the past, the same position of "looking first in our own garden", criticizing ourselves in a constructive emphatic way before criticizing "others"¹⁰. Up to 2008, the so called "black list" (the "good" and "bad" in the area of institutionalizing gender in Romania), consisted of aspects such as¹¹ (selection):

- At the level of discourses on women/genders: perpetuation of unclear terminology and terminological inconsistency; usage of generalizations/over-generalizations that lead to the erasing of diversity between and within women and men groups; 'copy-paste' type of doing things and quite often the use of a "magically" alienated, specialized, usage restricted, language, or of the development of a new "wooden" language within the feminist discourses.
- At the level of relevant institutions created: a human, institutional, legislative, financial, conceptual dilution and segmentation in the area of equal opportunities; many forms and less (no) content/funds; an institutional inflation; gender sensitive politics that are more on paper but not-budgeted; lack of continuity; good laws which are either not known or not applied; lack of a culture of evidence in the field of equal opportunities between women and men; more monologues (inter-institutions, inside institutions, between women/men, etc) than dialogues.
- At the level of women NGOs: the field of study and research on gender issues is tolerated but not exactly recognized by the academic community in Romania; a strong "brain drain" vs. "brain gain" at the level of local feminism; low number of men involved in the domain; underdeveloped collaboration and cooperation culture among the feminist NGOs or women's organizations; fewer women NGOs each year and a visible gap between academic and activism movement.

10 L Grünberg, 'Romanian Women NGOs', in G Kligman, & S Gail (eds), *Reproducing Gender. Politics, Publics and Everyday Life*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000; L Grünberg, *biONGrafie. Istoria trăită de un ONG de femei*, București: Polirom, 2008

11 The extensive presentation of the "goods and bads" in the area of institutionalizing gender in Romania is to be found in I Borza, L Grünberg, & Th Văcărescu, (2006). The full "black list" could be found in English on www.anasaf.ro. Extracts and comments are also published in *Journal Chronique Féministe*, special issue on "Feminisms in Eastern European countries", 2009.

Some of the remarks above remain, in my opinion, viable today, though they may be updated and new ones should be identified. This may prove itself as a good sign of the dynamics within the area of feminism growth and gendering the public agenda. The critique of “too much” (what we called at that moment an institutional inflation) would be today a critique of “not enough”, while The National Agency for Equal Opportunity, in which much energy and funds have been invested, almost vanished and the number of NGOs has decreased significantly. The gap between academic and activism movement should be also redefined. I would say that today there is more of an *academic feminist movement*, carried out at the level of grassroots activism by highly educated activists. Conceptual inconsistencies are clearly diminished. More men are taken part in the movement. Increased percentage of women in top position in various fields (breaking the glass ceiling, though not yet in politics) could be celebrated. This should be complemented now by an attention to the “decoy effect”, which refers to the illusion that women have finally made it, and to the fact that justice at the top masks in fact inequalities at the bottom and that it is time to reflect on these aspects too. There is also a quite visible process of renegotiation of alliances and of self labeling - a strong request coming from within the movement to clarify amongst us our ideological positions within the movement (who is liberal, radical, socialist and so on).

Looking critically to women’s movement in Romania, I was concluding at a certain moment that probably what is needed nowadays, at least in Romania, for a successful process of institutionalizing gender equality, is the emergence of a new generation of young feminists able and willing to propose an all inclusive type of feminism, one that includes more than excludes.¹² And this is exactly what happened. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the impact is below expectations. That is why it seems only natural to revise and update the “black list” aiming at distinguishing a new set of possible explanations for the slow impact and for the persistence of negative reactions towards feminism in Romanian society.

Both themes proposed below are in a hypothesis stage that needs to be confirmed. Each should be further documented and investigated, an endeavor that I would like to embark on in the near future.

1. The magnifier effect of the online activism.
2. The perverse effects of addressing sexism to neosexists.

1. The Magnifier Effect of the Online Activism

One may easily notice the vivid worldwide debate about the role of new communication technologies and especially about the role and impact of social media on social change. Can or cannot social media provide what social change has always required? Could social media produce revolutions? It is clear that the new tools of social media reinvented social activism, changing traditional relations

between political authorities and the general public. And yet a bothering question comes to the fore: were the events of 2009 in Moldova the expression of a true “twitters revolution”? Have social media contributed to Obama’s election or to the political change in Romania in 2012? Is access to internet really facilitating democracies everywhere? What are the consequences of us being not only consumers of media but also producers of media? How could we make best use of these new technologies that diminish the role of nations and increase the feelings that we truly live in a global village? These are just few of the important topics of reflection in the field.

The online activism has plenty of benefic effects such as: the chance to place and get information on line so quickly; the anonymity of the virtual space that creates a safer space which frees individuals of social and physical restraints and encourages a more open discourse, etc. Nevertheless, there are some perils too. I am not in total agreement with Virilio’s technophobia¹³ and his remarks that the net is offering a “dyslectic vision of reality”¹⁴ but I agree with Barbara Epstein that “a lot of the Internet traffic may represent an echo chamber of virtual activism rather than meaningful protest. The web allows people who agree with each other to talk to each other and gives them the impression of being part of a much larger network than is necessarily the case.”¹⁵

The discussion about the use and impact of new media communication technologies on women’s movement in Romania is important today because a lot of energy, creativity, commitment to gender issues problems is visible at the level of social media. The online image of the Romanian feminism looks great at this moment and it deserves an in-depth analysis in order to examine its content. The site “www.feminism.ro” for example is a popular one with thousands of viewers (3,941 likes in September 2013), regular articles, and permanent updates on what is going on in the area. More and more the organizations’ web pages are professional, permanently updated.¹⁶ Facebook, flashmobs and online petitioning are already “usual staff”. Individual feminists are active on Facebook and spreading informally gender sensitive information¹⁷.

My only concern is that we may be overestimating the role and power of social media, considering it as a successful tool of gender sensitive macro socialization when, in fact, it is still more of a tool for gender sensitive micro-socialization. My

13 P Virilio, *The art of the motor*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 97.

14 *ibidem*, p. 72.

15 Source: Hillwatch.com. Internet and Political Quotes. “Quotations on the impact of the internet on politics and political activism”. Accessed March 29, 2013, http://www.hillwatch.com/PPRC/Quotes/Internet_and_Politics.aspx.

16 I would mention here some of the women NGOs with very good online activity and visibility: Filia, CPE, Aleg-Sibiu, E- Romnja.

17 Such as Blogul Medusei (www.blogul-medusei.com, Tudorina Mihai) with 176,842 hits in September 2013. Other individual feminists such as Mihaela Miroiu, Andreea Molocea, Diana Neaga are using frequently their personal Facebook pages for feminist messages and gender sensitive information.

worry is that we may have the feeling that we are more than we really are, that we may feel we have many more friends and followers than we have in fact in real life, that our computers may act like a magnifier lens allowing “us” to be seen bigger and stronger (in terms of number and power to influence). If this is so, some frustrations could come from here. The existing unprecedented mobilizations for certain causes may look great on internet (hundreds of “likes”, comments, confirmation of participation, exchange of opinions, etc.), but sometimes they are not so great when the non virtual community really gathers, when embodied meetings really take place. Often, we are more online and less offline, in real life! We may feel powerful on social media and then disappointed when media is almost ignoring the public events we organize. This is not something specific for feminism, as media is ignoring the most important things anyway¹⁸ but feminist activists should be aware of this contrast between energy invested online and the off line visibility and adjust the expectations accordingly.

There is also a puzzling amalgam of online feminist activist messages (signing petitions, working in group on certain texts, informing each other on certain public initiatives, etc.) mixed with many human and normal micro socialization conversations on individual Facebook pages (what movies we have seen, nice quotes about happiness, sharing food receipts and pictures with our pets, or children, etc.) that are also somehow confusing in terms of giving a clear identity to the online feminist activism.

Internet has for sure provided women (and not only) with new opportunities to fight for women rights by entering into transnational dialogue with women from other nations and cultures, opportunities to exchange and share information about different campaigns and strategies. In this sense, I continue to strongly support the cyber feminism- meaning the feminism(s) performed in cyberspace¹⁹ (Rosser, 2005; Daniels, 2009; Yancey, 2013). At the same time, I know, from my readings, that “*clicktivism*”²⁰ is a debatable form of digital activism, that clicking few links is not always an engagement, that clicktivism helps but will never breed alone social revolutions. One should be realistic concerning the coverage, dimension or impact of this technocratic and/or *cyberphilic* approach to activism. I believe that there is a potential danger of an illusion of solidarity and commitment produced by the (over)use of social media. We do have to enjoy the opportunities offered by new communication technologies, but should also be realistic in observing that we are often more or less speaking among ourselves, networking online in relatively closed networks of expression. There is a long way to go until our most visited blogs and

18 The best example is offered by the recent masive civic demonstrations in Bucharest and other cities in Romania against the project Roşia Montana that was almost invisible on public TV channels.

19 SV Rosser, ‘Through the Lenses of Feminist Theory: Focus on Women and Information Technology’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2005, pp. 1-23; J Daniels, ‘Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment’, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2009, pp. 101-124; MP Yancey, *Rethinking Feminist Organizations*, 2013. Accessed January 9, 2013, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0891-2432%28199006%294%3A2%3C182%3ARFO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-4>

20 Term introduced by the journalist Micah White in 2010 in an article in The Guardian.

sites will approach the audience of our local entertainment stars. There is no way we may ever compete with global virtual successes such as the famous “*Gangnam style*” song-the first you tube video to reach a billion views. Feminism online activism will probably never be viral. Last but not least, the documented digital divide (e.g. differences in terms of access to new communication technologies between women from rural vs. urban areas), the unequal access to social media for special groups (roma women, rural women, elderly persons, technological illiterate women) should be also considered in assessing our enthusiasm for cyber feminism and in designing campaigns to support various rights of these specific groups of women. Feminism aims to include more than to exclude. In this legitimate endeavor, cyber feminism could help but not solve the issue of inclusiveness. Feminism wants and needs to be heard by many more. Cyber feminism could create sometimes the illusion that this is really happening.

2. Addressing Sexism to Neosexists

We probably all agree that at socio-structural level, gender is a system of power relations, but at individual level it is a practice and is continually created and reconstituted by the activities of people²¹. It is through the beliefs and actions of women and men, acting in ways which generate male domination, that gender inequality is produced and observed. Many contemporary studies have shown that today more and more people deny gender inequality and consider that at least overt discrimination against women is a thing of the past²². It is a noteworthy theme in current socio-psychological research on sexism that has been the refinement of the construct of „sexism”, in view of using an updated version of it, in the updated contemporary environment, be it called post liberalism, post conservatorism, post social democracy, etc.

Conceptualizations of sexism are not limited today to old fashioned indicators of sexism: negative beliefs and attitudes towards women. Aiming at finding an explanation for the discrepancy between *de facto* and *de jure* gender equality, several scholars have argued that there must be new expressions of sexist attitudes, more covert and subtle, that could justify the persistence of the gender gaps²³. We are not talking anymore (only) about sexism as such, but also about *benevolent sexism*²⁴. And this is not an oxymoron, but an attempt to encapsulate the odd conjunction of what seems incompatible: subjective affection as a form of prejudice. Complementary to hostile sexism, benevolent sexism manifests itself through protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and heterosexual intimacy. Other researchers

21 R Connell, *Gender and Power*, Sydney: Allen and Urwin, 1987.

22 JK Swim, KJ Aikin, WS Hall, & BA Hunter, ‘Sexism and racism: Old-fashioned and modern prejudices’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 68, 1995, pp. 199-214.

23 M Moya, & P Exposito, ‘It is for your own good. Benevolent sexism and women’s reaction to protectively justified restrictions’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 33, 2007, pp. 1421-1434.

24 N Benokraitis, *Modern Sexism: Blatant, Subtle and Covert Discrimination*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986.

invoke the *ambivalent sexism*²⁵ with reference to the fact that the combination of men's power over and dependence on women often creates ambivalent attitudes toward women. Male structural power fosters hostile sexism- unfavorable attitudes toward women that justify men's higher status. At the same time, men's dependence on women fosters attitudes toward women that are subjectively positive for the sexist (feelings of protectiveness toward women, the belief that women are men's better half, without women men are incomplete, etc.). So, due to men's dependency on women as wives, mothers, romantic partners, women have some degree of "*dyadic power*"²⁶. Other recent studies operate with the concept of *neosexism*²⁷ as a manifestation of the already mentioned duality. It takes as initiating reference the paradox that whereas traditional gender relations involve dominance and subordination, members of the two groups also routinely have close romantic and familiar relationships, that in the workplace men compete with women for resources and power while also devoting their resources to providing for the women in their lives. This duality suggested that prejudice toward women did not fit the theoretical pattern of prejudice as a conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings towards women. A neosexist would discriminate women in the work place based on their competence compared with men's rather than on gender (as in the case of direct discrimination). Others talk about *modern sexism*²⁸ with reference to the denying of continued discrimination based on sex and the feeling that women may be asking for too much from policy makers which in turn results in unsympathetic response to women's demands. In general, in all contemporary forms of sexism under scrutiny, the focus is on the lack of support for social policies directed at reducing gender inequalities, suggesting links between sexism and non egalitarian individualistic ideologies.

The research in the area is in its initial stage and it has been primarily developed in the context of US and Canadian cultures. Inspired from contemporary racism research, such authors adapted models of modern racism to describe contemporary sexism. As a follow up to this "refreshing" given to the field, a new category of people is under scrutiny: the modern sexists, the neosexists. They are people who discriminate in hidden ways. They are people (men and women alike) not necessarily opposing equality, people that may even maintain non-traditional gender roles and discourses about gender while denying the existence of discrimination against women. Neosexists are the ones that refuse to recognize that women are discriminated against and therefore that sexism actually exists. Various scales to measure these types of manifestations of sexism (Ambivalent Sexism Scales,

25 P Glick, & S Fiske, 'The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 70, 1996, pp. 491-512; P Glick, & S Fiske, 'Ambivalent Sexism Revised', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 35, 2011, p. 530.

26 M Guttenberg, & P Secord, *Too many women?*, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983.

27 F Tougas, R Brown, AM Beaton, & S Joly, 'Neosexism: Plus ca change, plus c'est pareil', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 21, 1995, pp. 842-849.

28 Swimm, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, op. cit.

Modern Sexism Scales, Neo Sexism Scales²⁹) measure the degree to which respondents tend to: (a) deny the existence of discrimination against women; (b) resent complains about discrimination; (c) resent special favors against women.

Beyond various refinements in these definitions of contemporary forms of sexism, the bottom line is that they all have been developed in view of capturing the new prejudicial attitudes towards women present in the new cultural and political context, in which blatant derogations of minority groups have become increasingly stigmatized. There are new forms of sexism expressed in a more subtle way. It is clear that it is important to look at these complementary ideological supports for gender inequality. Modern sexism beliefs provide some indication of people's orientation towards gender relations and feminist goals. Rejection of affirmative action programs (strong item on feminist political agendas) has its origin in these neo-sexist attitudes. Neosexists are the ones opposing affirmative action programs, but without it meaning that they necessarily oppose equality³⁰. Also some facts (concentration of women in less paid jobs, different spending of time, etc.) may be explained by that neo-sexism which shows evidence of the conflict between adhering to the abstract and general value of equality and rejecting its application in practice. Neosexism is useful in that it permits denial of the existence of discrimination and also upholds the belief that inequality is no longer a problem. Convincing men of the need for feminism, making them allies in promoting gender equality has been always challenging. Neosexism could also be a variable that helps to explain the difficulties men experience with feminism.

The framework of this schematically outlined context proves a vivid academic interest in refining the conceptualizations of sexism in contemporary research. More importantly from the perspective outlined hereon, I want to pledge for adding a new ingredient to explaining the gap between the vibrant articulated activism in Romania and the not so visible impact of it. I suggest as another possible explanation for this gap the existence of an uneasiness between some of the recent antidiscrimination/anti-sexist type of messages, formulated and delivered (in different forms and content) by the Romanian feminism and women's movement, and part of the audience implicitly targeted: the non-sexists, the opportunists non-sexists and/or the neosexists.

Romanian society has for sure, like many other societies, its sexists but also its neosexists, together with the "I am not feminist but" ones, the opportunists that, only due to political correctness, will declare themselves pro-women and pro-gender equality. Research in the area does not exist yet and would be in my opinion beneficial for a better understanding of the complexities of the sexism discourses. These "others" need special treatment and adapted strategies for increasing their gender awareness.

²⁹ Details about various scales for measuring new forms of sexism in (Glick, & Fiske, op. cit., 2011). The majority of scales use 8-11 replies to self administered surveys, where respondents rate their agreement with individual items on a 5 point Likert type scales.

³⁰ B Campbell, EE Schellenberg, & CY Senn, 'Evaluating measures of contemporary sexism', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1997, pp. 89-101.

Rejection or lack of trust in feminism is present in many public messages. Quite often women in power positions talk in different contexts about women's issues mentioning that they are not feminists. Politicians declare openly that they love women but hate feminism³¹. Even when a book about women's lives is published, the text for the launching event is approaching feminism in a very conservative way as in the following example:

The book is not dominated by a sensation of an aggressive feminism, one that in today's context is less and less credible. It is a book about women not because of an instinctive rejection of masculinity but just because of the need to work on intimacy (excerpt, launching invitation text for the volume "Povești cu și despre femei" [Stories about women], Michelle Jackson & Juliet Bressan, București: Nemira, 2013 (personal translation)).

In a general hostile environment towards feminism, there is recently a visible change in the boldness of the public demands from women's movement in Romania. A couple of years ago, the communication style used within the feminist activism was one much softer, diplomatic, shy, "feminine" in the sense of "non aggressive", with only some singular more aggressive voices among us. Our general strategy was to avoid the word feminism, to disguise our demands carefully, to make allies before making enemies. Looking back, we may say that it was not a very successful approach. Today, the "Y generation" of feminists delivers more confident, ambitious, stronger, imperative, non compromising public messages. They demand, not just ask. They summon, not just speak. They want, not just say. See, as an example, an extract from a collective manifesto against domestic violence, written through a joint group effort, in which the main verbs used are: we demand/ask (9 times), we solicit/require, we summon³².

31 As the case with some recent declaration of Crin Antonescu, President of the Liberal Party, President of the Senate and candidate to Presidency. Some women NGOs (Society for Feminist Analysis AnA, Front Association, CSIP) protested against his declaration and asked for a public clarification (see <http://www.ziare-pe-net.ro/stiri/crin-antonescu-somat-sa-dea-explicatii-dupa-ce-a-declarat-ca-uraste-feminismul-3003375.html>)

32 Whole text in Romanian on www/feminism.ro (archives).

Manifest (fragment, personal translation):

We demand that the state transmits a real signal of 0 tolerance concerning violence against women.

We demand that public manifestations promoting violence against women to be sanctioned.

We demand that the Police, Justice, and Medical Staff to act as a real support institutions for victims [...]

We demand that victim safety to be main preoccupation for institutions and policies in the field.

We demand adequate budgeting for the field [...]

We demand real protection for women [...]

We demand free access for legal medical certification for victims of rape and other forms of violence.

We demand elimination of all forms of violence against women from the Mediation Law.

We solicit the creation of an Emergency Center for victims of violence.

We ask for hard punishments for those in charge with trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation purposes.

We summon the National Council for Audiovisual to find means to stop dissemination of programs that depreciate women, promote a culture of violence and transform violence in entertainment.

This new type of peremptory, imperative public discourse, delivered by women's movement, could be the break through that is much needed. The long term intention is to enlarge its audience, to be heard by many - population and authorities alike. I have nevertheless some doubts about its efficacy in view of recent results of European Opinion Polls. 2012 data show that Romania is a country where 42% of the population consider that „sex discrimination is extremely rare” (a high percentage, although below the average of 57% for the EU countries) and 13% consider that „sex discrimination is not existing” (Eurobarometer, 2012). Romanians answered also in large proportion that they would feel very comfortable with a woman being in a top political leadership position. If this is the case, we may conclude that, at the level of perception and/or declarative level, Romanians do not see themselves as being sexist and do not consider sex/gender discrimination an issue for the public agenda.

There are of course plenty of studies showing that gender discrimination does exist and takes concrete forms. We must continue to talk about signs of patriarchal society. Sexism is embedded in our institutional structures, norms, policies, daily practices, etc and by “snow balls effects” – other forms of intolerance or marginalization combine with gender discrimination and create obstacles in the fulfillment of various individuals. Nevertheless, the self perception of Romanian citizens as not being sexist, and the possible significant percentage of neosexists out there should also be taken into consideration in designing thematic campaigns, deciding on the adequate messages, communicating with large audiences or evaluating the results of our struggles.

It is easy to ignore sexism when it works in your favor! We, those involved in the academic research in the area, know this mechanism very well. Of course, we

should be also aware, as gender sensitive researchers, that, as sexism becomes a less socially desirable trait, people are less likely to admit their attitudes - and that could be one reason behind these kinds of results! To be sexist today, in Romania as in many other countries, is no more „trendy”. It is not desirable, it is not in the spirit of today’s political correctness to say loudly, officially, that you do not consider women being capable of high positions, or that their place is in the kitchen. You will no more recognize openly your misogynistic attitudes. But even so, if there is only a facade nonsexist attitude „imposed” by the fact that we are now „Europeans” or „citizens of the world”, this aspect should be also taken into consideration in adjusting the feminist messages to such „opportunists”.

Subtle, implicit, modern or ambivalent sexism is perverse, harder to investigate but not less important. Feminists in Romania should start doing research on the contemporary forms of sexism and think about these issues too when designing strategies for fighting old fashioned sexism, as well as new contemporary expression of it (neosexism). Many Romanians may consider themselves “not-sexists” of various brands, despite them being in fact sexists or unable or unwilling to recognize this. They may be neo-sexists or even the so-called “non-labelers”, those that embrace some feminism principles but eschew self identity of feminists or the “I am not feminist but” type. Such hidden brands will probably ignore open sexist messages or stands - in terms of not paying attention, not taking into consideration, not taking seriously, minimizing, being ironical or making fun of it. They may also oppose and even blame strong, direct type of antisexist messages such as:

Sexistii jos cu ei/Agresorii jos cu ei [Down with sexists! Down with aggressors!]

Vrem politici potrivite/Nu in pumni sa fim strivitel [We want suitable politics not to be beaten to death]

Vrem reprezentare/Nu doar flori și mărtișoare! [We want representation/ not only flowers and presents]

Zeci de pumni eu tot îndur/Iar pe voi vă doare-n curl [Many fists I have to endure/And you care only about your asses]

Sute de femei sunt moarte/Asta ziceți că-i dreptate? [Hundreds of women are dead/This is justice for you?] (selection from an email list of suggested slogans for the protest against violence on women , March, 8th, 2013).

Such a belligerent voice may produce perverse effects and irritate the “hidden” sexists or offend the modern sexists, the neosexists. It is true that the soft voice did not get us anywhere but I consider that this aggressive tone will get us nowhere.

The same type of comment could be made for the next example given by a recent article written by a journalist (Vlad Mixich)³³ about the increased number of births by C-section (40% of total births in 2012) in comparison with the number of natural births. The article in itself, the possible interpretations of it and the reactions to it, deserves a serious in depth content analysis and critical discussions

33 <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-opinii-14667820-jumatate-din-copiii-romani-nu-mai-nasc-cale-naturala.htm>.

beyond the scope of this article. The author made various comments linked with the issue of "fear", the "fashion" and he inserted also a doctor's comment about the increased pressure women put on doctors and the impact of feminism for this situation ("the feminist precepts have still an indisputable status"). An avalanche of online reactions appeared. The online comments from "regular" women have been almost entirely positive in contrast with the strong negative online reactions on the feminist's sites and blogs. Here, the article has been commented mainly in terms of extreme sexism, arrogance, recommendations have been given to the author to go "to the source" before writing because it is a subject in which he has no direct experience. The epistemic privilege paradigm is not among my favorite theoretical options. I consider men could discuss about birth, menstruation, breast feeding at least in the same way a woman is allowed to write about the prostate cancer or men's impotency. If we truly embrace this position, then, following its logic, we have to exclude from the start the opinion of many women (that, for various reasons, have not experienced pregnancy or child birth). But beyond this personal positioning, I consider that this type of vehemence toward a journal article is not contributing to making allies but enemies, is emphasizing gender categorical differentiation - differences in terms of type, instead of gender dimensional differentiation - differences in terms of degree³⁴. It is not about dialogue (even with "enemies") but about "war". It is not about building together something but about accusing and antagonizing each other.

I plead consequently for (i) increasing and refine our knowledge about the diversity of sexism and then (ii) for a balanced creative way to address this diversity. My assumption is that there are, beyond sexism, plenty of neosexism in Romania as well. One reason for the paradox (strong movement, weak impact) could be linked with the inadvertencies between the traditional, conservative anti-discrimination discourses (not practices) and the neo-sexist profile (or the non-sexist perception) of many (or even only of some) of the Romanians targeted. We need to know the level of neosexism in Romania and continue the debate and adjust from here. I doubt that only accusing, blaming strongly "men only" for beating their women or for writing about women issues will have the desired impact. I doubt that blaming institutions and exclusively talk only in terms of category differences will have the desired impact. Sexism will remain sexism, or when irritated, even becoming more sexism. Neosexism, disguised/opportunist non-sexism will probably not listen considering themselves as not being targeted.

According to Festinger's theory³⁵, individuals will do their best to regain their zone of cognitive control and minimize the cognitive imbalance provoked by outside messages. Feminist messages provoke dissonance and people will try to reject it by selecting information and by selectively exposing to information. Accordingly, some radical eccentric feminist messages could be speculated and used as examples to justify the resistance to feminism. Drastic verdicts, like the ones mentioned, may create perverse effects for those perceiving themselves as not

34 C Fine, *Delusions of Gender. How our minds, society and neurosexism create difference*, NY: WW Norton, 2010.

35 L Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Evanston, IL: Row Peterson, 1954.

being sexists (including neo-sexists here). Addressing aggressively sexists is in my opinion, today, in our 21st century society, a lost cause, a sterile war. Addressing in such ways the neosexist audience is again unproductive, in my opinion. Public anti-sexist discourses should be more diverse, radical ones complemented with more subtle and even humoristic ones. I believe that the messages should be strategically rephrased and adapted to various groups of sexists (including the neosexists, non-labelers, the ones “not being feminist but”) if the aim is to get their gender consciousness revised.

The Short Path Forward

I have outlined in this paper some issues meant to explain the discrepancy between the good shape of today’s feminism and the less visible impact of its creativity and work in the Romanian society. Feminism is/could have more social impact in Romania in the context of the European Union effort and support to address issues of diversity, inclusive democracy, equal opportunities, and human rights. What is it needed? For sure, there is no need for the copy-paste concepts, discourses and events; probably neither for the overuse of clicktivism or aggressive anti-sexist messages; nor targeting only sexists but wisely designing messages for the “others”. If all aspects mentioned above make some sense, then my conclusion is obvious. We need refinement in discourses and strategies by: a critically informed import of gender equality models; a moderate enthusiasm for cyber feminism; and a special attention to “other sexism”, to the “special needs” of “others”: the neo-sexists, the modern sexists, the non labelers, and the opportunistic non-sexists. Possible results: more tangible results for women’s movement.

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