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Mihaela Miroiu,
Neprețuitele femei.
Publicistică feministă
(Priceless Women. Feminist
Newspaper Writings)

Iași, Polirom, 2006, 271 pp.

Motto:

Before the universal truth 'All people are mortal', there is another one 'all people are born'.

A few months ago I wrote *Feminist and not ashamed* on my t-shirt and wore it at a round table about women, equal opportunities and feminism. I felt good to have a statement, at least a little bit of activism (in the sense of second wave feminism), even if only within supposedly feminism aware (I do not say feminist!) groups. Yet, as I was reading Mihaela Miroiu's collection of articles *Priceless Women. Feminist Newspaper Writings*, I realized that my political statement - however brave and subversive I wanted it to be -, through the ideological orientation it is related to, remains within the reductionist and exclusivist paradigm it attempts to counteract. It would have been much more courageous and fair to wear a t-shirt with the inscription, outright shocking at first, saying *Woman and not ashamed*.

Mihaela Miroiu's book is full of people. Women-as-people and men-as-people from various geographical, temporal, cultural, political, economical, social backgrounds. Many of these people have several things in common, from affiliations and filiations to fights, theories and convictions. But a feature common to all of them is the fact that they are born of women-as-people. This is a striking observation even more so for its seeming banality. The universal truth 'all people are mortal' is a likewise banal truth, but one that has a philosophical value repeated throughout the curriculum and culture. Put differently, it has a history, it can no longer amaze us. But it is amazing that the truth of all humanity being born of women, rather than being a commonplace basis for common and elite wisdom, is not taught in schools. You see the difference: all people are mortal; but all people - both women-as-people and men-as-people - are born of women-as-people.



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Priceless women. Feminist Newspaper Writings is a collection of articles published in cultural and academic Romanian publications such as *Revista 22*, *Observator Cultural*, *Dilema*, *Contrapunct*, *AnALize*, *Sfera Politicii*, *Curentul*. As the subtitle suggests, the articles are written from a position of declared feminism. This is an extremely rare occurrence in Romanian culture, if not to say a unique publishing choice - collections of newspaper articles on feminist themes certainly exist, but not one that I know of from a single author. Mihaela Miroiu is the most well-known feminist in Romania. She has even been labeled the 'feminist on duty' - for the fact that for over a decade she has often been the single clear voice publicly responding to the cacophony of misogynist, sexist and anti-feminist comments. And these comments certainly have not been few. Likewise, neither the answers have been few, or gentle. The volume *Priceless women* is not gentle. If each of the articles produced anti-feminist irritations, I imagine that this collection of articles will further irritate many more readers. This is not necessarily a negative effect in itself - it is sad, but not negative. And I think that the distinctly positive effects are greater in number and importance.

Priceless women is a book that will be useful to both women-as-people and to men-as-people. As a history of a woman's be-coming, in the sense of her gynomorphoses, of the formative-existential imprints left by women in a woman's life, the book has an effect that I would call, if I did not have a certain reserve towards the term, initiating. This is a contribution to the creation - or rather the recognition - of a feeling of 'sisterhood'. No, we do not have this term ranking beside the much lauded brotherhood of man, but the emotion nevertheless exists. And naming the sentiment, mapping its formation and dividends in private experiences, writing its history, is a vital step towards valuing the function of sisterhood.

From another perspective, Mihaela Miroiu's volume can be read as a text for students and as a self-reflective critique. The reader finds here elements of the history of women and of women's movements of the world and of Romania, of Romanian feminism and anti-feminism which is predominantly located in the postsocialist period, but not only. Many amongst these articles are responses to attitudes and arguments in which stereotypes of and discriminatory behaviors against women and feminism are interrogated and dismantled. There are also articles in which Miroiu tells the stories that constitute her own experiences, alongside interviews and introspective dialogues, feminist political analyses and reflections of feminist philosophy. The common denominator of all these scholarly, political, journalistic, personal writings is the priceless and *trivial* female experience. But why priceless and why *trivial*?

Priceless can be read in the dual sense of both holding an inestimably high value, and referring to 'that which is not valued'. Somewhere else, Miroiu cites an extremely telling anecdote: two men meet, and one says to the other: 'My woman is an angel,' to which the other replies: 'Mine isn't a human being either.' I believe the title of the volume needs to be read from this perspective, in which 'priceless' encompasses both meanings: the priceless women about which Miroiu speaks are valued as anything else other than human beings. Moreover, Miroiu shows how women's value, roles and symbols - I purposely avoid to use feminine in this context - are stolen, misused and despised, the example being Trivia. Trivia is the mythological tree of life, a feminine divinity, and yet the profound value of it, of procreation which IS creation above anything else, has been stolen and transformed into a triviality which does not deserve attention. I think that all of us, as women-as-people and as men-as-people, need to contribute to the recovering of women's experiences as valuable, at least through the simple fact of being proud that we all originate in and exist owing to women. For, despite all the sexist socio-cultural constructions which we choose, reject and live through, 'women are the *Trivialities* common to us all' (Mihaela Miroiu).