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Mihaela Miroiu, The road towards autonomy. Feminist Political Theories

Polirom, Iasi, 2004

The most recent book by Mihaela Miroiu achieves a stabilization and concentration of her previous volumes, the ideas of which are recollected and exposed in this structured, condensed version. The topics that have occupied Miroiu in the scholarly press are collected in this volume, revealing their inner logic and articulations.

Thus, in part I the author proposes an introduction - with historical accents - to feminist theories, developing both the idea of "women's experiences" (initially proposed in *Gindul umbrei. Abordari feministe in filosofia contemporana* (1995) and the phases of the feminist movement, briefly sketched in *Lexiconul feminist* (2002). The second part explores the major feminist ideological families – liberal, Marxist, social, and radical, with special mention of ecofeminism (analyzed in details in *Convenio. Despre natura, femei si morala* – 2nd edition, 2002) and communitarian feminism. The latter part (and at the same time the most original one) proposes an applied analysis of the period before and after 1989, with special reference to the Romanian situation. The socio-political analysis of these latter chapters compliments the historical and conceptual investigation of the previous ones. One is impressed by the examination of the different patriarchies of Romanian society (the rural patriarchy, the "state" patriarchy, and finally the capitalist patriarchy) that is, to an extent, convergent with the examination proposed by Vladimir Pasti in *Ultima inegalitate. Relatiile de gen in România* (2003).

Throughout the book, the author extensively uses comparative analysis between the Romanian situation and the western and/or eastern one. This characteristic receives more emphasis then in previous volumes. This may be due to the consolidation of the (already) existing tradition of Romanian feminist scholarship. This tradition includes research produced by the MA program in Gender and Public Policies at NSPSA, Bucharest, which has come to fruition in the books from Paideia and Polirom, and also includes the volumes of the Interdisciplinary Group of Gender Studies from Cluj, published by EFES and Desiree.

Miroiu's courageously calls attention to of two phenomena in post-1989 Romania:

1. the relative inability of Romanian feminism to articulate itself as a *socio-political movement*, in comparison with the more advantageous situation of the Romanian inter-war feminist movement;

2. the so-called *room-service feminism* – a kind of "form without content" that has been so welcomed by our so-

ciety – intended to answer Western requests for integration, and monopolizing the dominant political discourse

Several features of the author's book deserve special notice, to my view. First of all, it is remarkable that this book reconsiders the *ideological* dimension of feminism, especially of the positive side of the movement, that is mentioned elsewhere by Susan Moller Okin:

"As an ideology, a way of seeing and making sense of things, we expect feminism that it spreads across the globe, to take forms not easily predictable from Western experience... The interaction of women's experiences, feminist politics and a feminist philosophy that sees the personal as political will produce, in continual evolution, feminism as an ideology."

This fact is important especially in the framework of the undeserved "fall into disgrace" of the concept of ideology, both in the West and in the ex-soviet space (due to distinct reasons in the respective regions). In the West, the postmodern mistrust of the "great narratives" has contaminated the concept of ideology itself, which has been regarded precisely as a kind of foundational meta-narrative. In the ex-soviet space, the excess politicization of the term has lead to its rejection after 1989, or to the extremely cautious use of it, generally as a negative concept (with notable exceptions, see for instance Slavoj Zizek's books).

Without a mature and conscious consideration of its inclusive (*not* exclusive) ideological dimension, the feminist theory is in danger of losing its own specificity and of dissolving into the corporatist, "soft" post-feminism sustained by the multinational companies and actively promoted by the media. To the author's view, this fact is not at all desirable – she is convinced that feminism and feminisms are necessary for women.

Along the same line of thought, the recovery of the significance of *liberal feminism*, together with the other types of feminisms, seems particularly important. In the Romanian context, this thing is most urgently needed because, of all the types of feminisms, liberal feminism is the least represented, a fact that is highly regrettable in view of liberal feminism's emancipating potential. However, the author's remarks are still accurate even if we expand the level of generality. Thus, if the history of feminism has more frequently registered the conflicts and disputes among the different types of feminisms, perhaps now the time of their combination and hybridization has arrived, at least at the personal level. This is one of the significant conclusions of the book: "Without any doubts, whether they admit it or not, women need feminism. Their road towards safety passes through socialist feminism; their road towards difference and female development passes through radical feminism; their road towards autonomy needs both, but it also necessarily needs liberal feminism".