Feminism as an Ethical Discourse of Inclusiveness

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FEMINISM AS AN ETHICAL DISCOURSE OF INCLUSIVENESS

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Abstract

This article approaches the feminist discourse as an ethical discourse. The feminist discourse is interpreted as a symptom of the relationship among speech, symbolic power and worldview. Discourse situates people, while emphasizing, if not sustaining, reinforcing, or challenging power structures. The awareness of the connection between speech and action as well as the awareness concerning the power of language to emphasize inequality and marginalization should be manifest in intellectual and in more popular contexts of life, although it is not. Feminist discursive considerations continue to be disregarded as unimportant constituting an intriguing parallel to the general approach of feminist matters, interests and ideals and to women's affairs in certain carefully adorned social and more personal contexts (for instance, related to harassment, violence and rape). The feminist discourse represents the discourse of autonomy, public presence and dignity of women. However, feminism is not just a discourse, and it is not just one unitary discourse, since it prescribes a paradigm of a specific and very complex worldview (a *Gestalt*) and the category of women is assumed as being heterogeneous. As an ethical discourse, the feminist discourse aims to transform society. It articulates the emancipation from prescribed social roles, human rights as rights for all humans and as rights to dignity. The study is based on the theoretical perspectives opened by feminist classics such as Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, as well as on arguments engaged by more recent authors, such as Chantal Mouffe and Mihaela Miroiu. We ground our investigation also on the findings of Pierre Bourdieu in what concerns the relation between language and power. In our (holistic) view, a relevant discussion of feminism cannot approach separately the feminist discourse, the feminist theoretical and political tenants, the feminist worldviews and potential reformation of power structures. In this way, feminism is very close to the postliberalism of Richard Rorty, although it presents specific differences from other postliberal views and liberalism. Feminism, as inclusive ethical discourse, places the accent on a more emphatic worldview where solidarity is based on care (Carol Gilligan) and not on the gratitude of being born a man. As a consequence, this

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worldview endorses security rights for women in society and at home, the reproduction rights for women and on the equality of opportunity for women and men.

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Feminist discourse is a symptom of the relationship among speech, symbolic power and worldview. In this respect, stereotypes become specific landmarks against which feminist discourse is positioned, challenging the ethical climate of the open societies, often, with the reinforcement of hierarchies and implicitly of the positions of subordination for women, of course, with the nuances brought about by the economic, social, cultural and political determinations and status[2].

Discourse situates people, while emphasizing, if not sustaining, reinforcing, or challenging, power structures. Feminist discourse is not only an ethical discourse about the otherness, but a discourse animated by feminist values (such as "care", "voice", "choice", "difference", "empathy", "equality", "compassion", "the personal, which is political") aiming to transform society via the social opinions, the social norms and the social conditions.

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[2] A humoristic video seen the other day, expresses *the naturalization of the subjection of women* placed at the basis of an enchanted worldview of (a good part of) men. In the YouTube video entitled "Magic coffee table" a man thinks that he actually has got magical objects in the house: for instance, a magic coffee table (that has chosen him), on which he can put things or forget dirty cups and dishes, and they disappear from that table, only to appear cleaned up and wiped, arranged in the right cupboards etc. This video captures interesting aspects related to the phenomenon of naturalization mentioned above, accurately describing the lives of women: 1. The invisibility of women's action; 2. The characteristic naïve "serenity" and "lack of clues" of most men in what concern the gender inequalities; and, possibly, 3. An extended romantic view concerning the "mysterious", "incomprehensible", "irrational", "nature" of women, captured in the joke (who could ever understand them?). When the woman "disappears" in the video, that man's explanation is that she must have fallen by accident over the magic coffee table… (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_kXIGvB1uU accessed November 29, 2018). Women's disenchantment comes as an attack on the comfortable, enchanted masculine worldview. The success of the feminist ethics seems to relate to a masculine disenchantment, at least in relation to gender roles, their "naturalness" and the idea that "women are closer to nature," as a consequence of "their government by biology".

Contrary to the postfeminist main thesis, feminism is still meaningful in our times. Nowadays, feminist epistemology calls the attention to the category of *gender* which proves to be very important for contemporary discussions concerning the epistemic practices, principles and views. Feminist epistemology is diverse, as contemporary perspectives in epistemology are, as well, so that we can talk about feminist epistemologies, or, about feminist approaches to epistemology, based on the particularity of the knower, who is no longer abstract and "universalizable" on the sociality of the knower, rather aware of the historical, cultural and hierarchical character of the social relations as knowledge relations. In this way social experts interpret in different manners epistemological key-concepts starting with "knowledge", "objectivity" and "rationality". These revolutions in epistemology are going to influence in a feminist manner, even more, the realms of legal rights and ethics. Feminist ethics in world politics is a beneficiary of the paradigm of human rights connecting the philosophy of human freedom, equality, emancipation and dignity to "a moral and legal mechanism for ensuring the dignity and equality of all persons and for giving voice to the moral and legal claims of individuals against states and other powerful collective actors" (Robinson 2009, 83)[3].

There is a long tradition of dismissal if not of shredding apart public women[4], apparent in media and social media, which

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[3] As Charlotte Bunch shows, violence against women is an "affront to human rights" and "a major source of insecurity" for women (more than half of the world population) all over the world. See Bunch 1990, 486-498.

[4] See, for instance, considering all the nuances, the readiness of the public to discredit Monica Lewinsky and to sympathize with Bill Clinton, or the readiness of the public to trust, during the 2016 USA presidential campaign, a suspicious relation to Russia via e-mails entertained by Hillary Clinton. During the first wave, feminists succeeded despite the iconic image of the violent hysterical women, during the second wave, feminism brought about socially relevant achievements despite the public reticence in front of women's decision to defend their reproductive rights considered a manner of "washing their clothes in public", while during postfeminism, feminists are yet active, despite the fact that are seen as obsolete and deprived of the sense of humour (in our view, still, a patriarchal standpoint). These three main perceptions of the feminists currently overlap in the Western popular culture and worldwide.

accompanies, doubles and shadows the entire history of the first-wave feminism (suffrage and equality, universalism and romanticism sustaining mainly the feminist movements for voting rights and property rights), the second wave feminism (characterized mainly by the struggle for reproductive rights and safety rights in public and private spheres, against domestic violence and marital rape) and the postfeminism, too. An ironical and self-ironical worldview such as that sustained by postfeminism does not challenge the unethical attitudes faced by women in media, social media and society nor the more serious instances of violence and rape, taking place more often than we would like to believe[5].

We intend to emphasize the particular relation between language and action, with ethical and social merit, this way going from feminism seen as a peculiar attitude and discourse, to feminism as ethical discourse, which is sustaining a worldview characterized by the reinstitution of respect for women and equal opportunity for women as normality, or, even more, from the "discourse of the irreducible stranger and designated victim", towards feminism as "discourse of the potential partner". Feminism as valuable ethical discourse in society is a discourse of autonomy, equality of opportunity and, implicitly, dignity of women. But we mostly speak a "naturalized masculine discourse" – one form or another of a masculine discourse and worldview, unfavourable to women and inherited as "natural" via socialization. Before acting in a feminist manner, someone has to be fluent in this feminist

[5] Rape statistics depend on the claims made by the victims. To do that the victim has to overpass shame and sometimes the lack of understanding from the part of their peers or the police forces. Even so, the statistics describe a tragic situation, which we may think, considering all the aspects involved in the process of reporting a rape and the trial itself, it is in fact worse. The most alarming statistics indicate that every four hours a rape takes place in Romania. See "Ce au făcut românii în ultimii 5 ani. O crimă pe zi, un viol la patru ore!" April 28, 2015, available at http://urbology.ro/ce-au-facut-romanii-in-ultimii-5-ani-o-crima-pe-zi-un-viol-la-patru-ore/, accessed at May 8, 2016. Another statistics account shows that in Covasna county (Romania) there are no rape reports. Should one infer that there are no rape cases there or that the ethic, economic and traditional situation there is that complicated that the victims prefer not to report it? At the international level, the statistics portray a bleak image in the West, too. See http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Crime/Rape-rate, accessed May 8, 2016.

discursiveness, to see things, to think and to speak in a certain way, in order to understand this specific philosophical, social and political orientation of feminism as an ethics of inclusiveness and care, with specific purposes and aims.

Fluency in this ethical feminist discourse (which is obviously) not directed against others does not come naturally and it is not guaranteed via general education. An ethical feminist discourse seems "foreign" and artificial. The very awareness of the masculine worldview captured in discourse is surprising and generates either rejection or disenchantment in terms of power relations, worldviews, thought, language and discourse. The disenchantment acquires specificity, articulating in an ethical discourse the emancipation from prescribed social roles, promoting the right of women to speak for themselves and plan their own life in personal terms, even against prescriptive feminism, which tends to level the differences among women (Anthes 2011).

Simone de Beauvoir is famous for her describing best the expulsion of women from the whole of humanity: Women are not brothers to men (in *The second Sex*, 1949)[6]. We can talk about human brotherly relations at the core of humanity in order to describe its sensitive, warm and family-like nature of humanity, but since women are something else to men than their brothers – mere helpers (mothers and sisters), or possessions, or distractions –, women are banned from the grand human family. Men *are* brothers, even though, sometimes, they are Cain and Abel sort of brothers. Public space is the space of men where women come as foreigners, as tourists in a foreign country, if you would like, having to learn the male language of the public male space.

As the main pillars of feminism are *the personal is political* and the *glass ceiling*, which is actually separating the public and the private spheres, and women from the business of the polis and men, then, it is easier to understand that from behind the glass ceiling, or, from within the confines of the private sphere, women are unheard and have no voice. Their "natural" language is silence (as a preponderant social reality, not necessarily acknowledged fully by either gender). Men's

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[6] See Mitrea 2005, 91-96.

"natural" language is public speech – a discourse of rights affirmation, competitiveness and male solidarity. Women's presence, behind the glass ceiling is silent, but because in this theoretical representation the separation is transparent, made of glass, women are seen but not heard and they seem also present there, in public. Feminist discourse and feminist action are the means to enact the *will* to give more substance to women's presence into the public space and resolve a few stringent problems. Women express the personal, private problems, that need social attention and resolution. Certain personal problems (family violence against women and children) are as well (educational and ethical) problems of society, influencing directly the future of society or the fate of the future generations. This is how the personal becomes the political. Most women, though, learn a masculine discourse dominant in the public sphere along with their worldview intuitively for public sphere purposes. This is why, when we are talking about a feminist discourse as an ethical discourse of inclusiveness and care (Milton Mayeroff, Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick), we are talking also about the authenticity of a strain of socio-liberal feminism and its foreign feel (or its reception) from the masculine and traditionalist standpoint. Briefly put, the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) was ground-breaking in emphasizing the crucial role of ethical relationships in forming and maintaining an ethical community. In her study, ethical relationships are rather grounded on care (the feminine manner of reasoning and relating to others) than right (the masculine manner of reasoning and relating to others). These manners of reasoning and relating are socially constructed and, in our view, they are generated by a dichotomist and hierarchical worldview (nature-culture etc.) in which feminine values are placed below the masculine values at an implicit level in human reasoning (and explicitly in philosophy, for instance). This work was criticized at the level of the empirical investigations (mainly interviews) included in the published work, which were considered un-reproducible and unable to sustain that the different manners of reasoning have anything to do with gender. However, the complex interdisciplinary study conducted by Paul J. Zak (2015) and published in 2012 shows precisely that moral reasoning and acting has everything to do with

gender (with no acknowledgement for Carol Gilligan's work), namely with the subtle dynamic of oxytocin and testosterone, the former being rather a feminine hormone and "the moral molecule", which induces caring and emphatic behaviour with economic and social positive implications. This way both manners of engendered reasoning and acting are reconnected with a biological support, while providing arguments for the social and economic "superiority" of the women's manner of reasoning and relating to others, although the intent of his research did not include the hierarchical aspect (being interested solely in the beneficial aspect of the engendered manner of reasoning and relating to others, induced by oxytocin).

Virginia Held (1987) criticizes the view that women are more governed by biology (while men are not) with a series of arguments, the most interesting one being that of human mothering. Human mothering is not just a mechanism for the propagation of the species, but it is a complex of creative activities oriented to the formation of complete, independent persons. It is a human complex activity with crucial psychological, social and cultural dimensions aiming to cultivate a new personality, born in a social and cultural realm and who is going to live in a cultural and social realm. This is not a natural activity. She also approaches the ethics of care as a moral theory. The ethics of care is not a virtue theory indicating a "bag of virtues" that cannot be differentiated and prioritized. In the ethics of care, care itself is the orientation value, which allows people to interact, to take part in a dialogue as their concrete selves and not as ideal persons, involved in an ideal dialogue, in an ideal relationship.

> The ethics of care is hospitable to the methods of discourse ethics, though with an emphasis on actual dialogue that empowers its participants to express themselves rather than on discourse so ideal that actual differences of viewpoint fall away. (Held 2006, 20)

Therethrough, we should investigate the feminist ethical discourse in relation to the framework described by thought-language-worldview-symbolic power-social relations-social realities. In his work, *Language and symbolic power*, in the chapter entitled "Symbolic Capital: An Unknown

Power", Pierre Bourdieu stars from the investigation conducted by Austin who identified for the first time the social conditions of success for performative enunciations. On the one hand, the linguistic constructions recognize and reaffirm a certain social order and they benefit or not from the existing and accepted social hierarchies. The symbolic capital gathers the benefits of recognition granted by advantageous positioning in hierarchies and networks of power relations. At Austin and Bourdieu orders are examples of power, which becomes manifest in language. But while linguistically anyone can give an order, this remains inefficient unless the time, the place and especially the agent who orders are recognized (in a conscientious or less conscientious manner) as the correct ones. The "magic" of words works according to certain respected and recognized social hierarchies, contexts and power relations, in the direction they are sustaining. The pretention of power expressed only linguistically or sustained just by words is not just ineffective, but actually weakens the position of the agent extending it. Capitalizing on the work of Lakoff (1980), best known for his contribution to the study of metaphors and their social role, Bourdieu shows that the very routine of daily existence imposes ever more complex strategies to adapt to the complex situations. Their complexity increases for the agent in an inferior social position who wants to convey, though, the impression of force and creates settings that mitigate or alleviate the tension accumulating while somebody accedes to higher social positions. The authors identify a series of hedges, that is, words or phrases used euphemistically, to nuance or weaken the certainty of a statement, making it harder to be criticized or refuted (*sort of*, *rather*, *strictly speaking*, *loosely speaking*, *technically*, *regular*, *par excellence* etc.), but also the similar use of substitutive phrases (Labov) – for instance, expressions such as *such a thing as*, *some things like that*, *particularly*[7].

From this perspective, the feminine expression is euphemistic, while the feminist discourse is too rough or too blunt, or both. Bourdieu

[7] See Bourdieu 2012, 79-109.

emphasizes another extremely important aspect in this relation among language, self-expression and power:

> Language is a technique of the body and the true linguistic competence, especially the phonological one is a dimension of the corporeal *hexis* by which the whole relation with the social world and the entire relation, socially instituted, with the world are expressed. (Bourdieu 2012, 79-109)

The term *hexis* (ἕξις) is the Aristotelian one for *possession* (of qualities) and for the (specific, active, durable) *disposition* that may sustain action. The body offers the premises (the disposition, the state or the *hexis*) for the expression of the self and of positioning someone within the social hierarchy. This is the role played by the mouth and maw: *hexis* and "headquarters of the person" or "privileged site for the affirmation of the person". The folklore captures these aspects in the numerous terms for mouth and in the variety of idioms dedicated to mouth in all languages. Here, we cannot conduct an extensive documentary, but we can illustrate the remarkable and symbolic interest for *la bouche* and *la gueule*, the feminized and, respectively, masculinized words for *mouth* and *maw* in English and in Romanian the feminine versions *gură*, *meliță*, *fleancă, cloanță*, *râșniță* and many more, and the masculine versions *bot*, *mestecău* and we can notice the richness of mouth idioms following the examples offered by Pierre Bourdieu: *bouche fine*/educated mouth/ *gurău*; *bonne gueule*/ motor mouth or big mouth or to run the mouth/ *bun de gură, gură cât o șură, gură bogată*; *sale gueule*/ unpleasant mouth, not necessarily dirty, foot in the mouth/ *gură antipatică* or *gură proastă*; *lèvres pincée*/pursed lips/ *buze țuguiate*; *faire la petite bouche*/ little mouth/ *guriță* or ciocul mic; *coup de bouche*/ mouth blow/ *a face din vorbe pe cineva.* There are the verbal locutions and verbs *casser la gueule/ to broke smbs.mouth/ a-i sparge cuiva gura*; *engueuler/to foam at mouth/ a face spume la gură*.

There is thus certain universality about the symbolic power of this part of the human body. For example, the English expression "somebody's heart is in the mouth" translates in Romanian almost word to word as "to have the soul in mouth", that is, to be anxious or excited about something. And there are other examples, too.

The more flexible a language is, like French or Romanian, the more likely is that we find more numerous terms and idioms that have the potential for sexist use – see for instance the Romanian feminine versions for mouth: *meliță*, *fleancă, cloanță*, *râșniță*, etc. (see the works of Mihaela Miroiu). Although English is not a very flexible language, people use beak, pipe, wind hole or mill, or grinder, with sexist reference to women, which comes to support the above mentioned idea about the universality of a certain worldview associated to mouth and its symbolism, found also in connection to the symbolism associated to the image of the talkative woman (because the feminine ideal is the silent woman).

Feminist discourse, in its ethical aims, implies the refusal of certain prescribed diminishing or offensive identifications. But it is not always an easy task, since these folkloric, stereotypical or/and traditional identifications are embedded deeply into people's world vision, into our manner of thinking and into our manner of relating to the world via socialization. Achieving and using a feminist discourse remains an ideal point of reference, yet to be achieved, still perceived as an attack against humour and "natural" social discourse. Women and men relate to women in the same way in the public and private spheres and this is with suspicion, at best.

The public discourse is a discourse of man. See the feminized and minimized named for professions when embraced by women: for example, "actress" sounds fine, but mostly because we are accustomed with the term and we do not pay attention to such aspects accepted as "natural". But, there are numerous examples, when it is clear that the feminine versions of nouns function as insults, ironically employed by women, at occasion, as a reaction to their marginalizing discursive effects. For instance, the feminine name for a profession is often a diminutive sustained by the traditional conviction that women are childish and immature. And the other way around, there are professions that are feminized (and become iconic) to a point where conceiving a man in that position is hilarious: a male nurse, for example. In Romanian nurse is "sister". Thus, to have a brother who is sister at the hospital is always a source of jokes. The problem here is not the emergence of jokes, as much as it is the naturalization of the subordinate status of women,

which is nowadays strongly denied than ever. Meanwhile, is still normal that the secretary who brings the coffees is a woman and that in a team formed up by a woman and a man, the man drives. It is relevant to remind also that *man* seems to be the wildly accepted synonym for human being in all languages. It follows that women are left to be at best a symptom of man (and just a metonym for human being). But in other languages, namely the more flexible languages than English, this crucial exclusion of the genders that are *not man* acquire obvious forms of expression.

The symbolic power of language reinforces the social hierarchies, social statuses and social roles and worldviews to coherently contain all these. The same symbolic power builds our sense of what is "natural" even in society, in social encounters. Language naturalizes the hierarchies that accept at the top women only when they are exceptional, and there they stay beside men that are not similarly exceptional (Şerban 2000, 237-41). In other words, is easier for men to get at the top, women seem to get there only when they are quite exceptional. Would we like things to be the other way around? No. We consider that an infusion of care and empathy in our ethics and in our discourse are going to contribute to the disappearance of the double standards and of the glass ceiling.

Status est magistratus, Pierre Bourdieu reminds us. This is what happens when someone is invested with a function of honour, or with one of representation, or, and Bourdieu considers that it is similar, when we are aware of the world as our representation, the result of "the great collective rituals of nomination and naming" (Bourdieu 2012, 136). The status and the person tend to overlap. For P. Bourdieu, the status has a core social characteristic. This way, "the insult, as well as the nomination, is part of the class of institution and destitution, more or less founded socially, through which an individual acting for himself or in the name of a group, more or less important numerically and socially, attracts someone's attention that has a property or another, attracting, by this very fact the attention that the individual receiving the invective has to behave in conformity with the social essence that is this way attributed to his person" (Bourdieu 2012, 136), or her person. We have here a different manner in which the heart is in the mouth, or a very

specific meaning for the fact that men speak their mind off and women are left to perform the silent role, behind the glass ceiling. When people nominate a woman as woman, and man as a human being, they attract by this fact the attention to the gap between the social essence of the category represented by "woman" and the category represented by "man".

It may be surprising, but the fact that the philosophers defended with great consistency the idea of feminine as lack and darkness, as inferiority and "natural" subjection (among them, Aristotle, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Cioran) *had not as much impact* as the universal worldview that placed women as helper, symptom, metonym, secondary, or anonymity half *as language did*, through the *naturalization of subjection* (not only for women, but in this discussion, we concentrate on the situation of women). We cannot fail to notice the fact that all these convictions about the worthlessness of women (and any other genders than the heterosexual man for that matter), which begun with their correlation to nature and biology, are transparent in language, in the daily language uttered in our personalized versions of mother tongue.

Women have to face mainstream misogyny in various forms and from various sources in everyday thought and in philosophy, within the spiritual spheres and in the streets, too. In an interview, Mihaela Miroiu implicitly emphasizes the disconnection between education and misogyny and the depth of misogyny, too.

> I have had Professors who explained to me that my place would be either as a philosopher's secretary, or as a promoter of male thoughts in front of the students. (...) I were a woman, that is, 'mid-way between man and animal' (according to the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer), 'a nice nullity' whose 'sole meaning in the world was to occasion man to escape the tormenting pressure of the spirit' (in the words of the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran), I could not have been a metaphysician as I was 'the metaphysics itself' (as Alexandru Paleologu thinks) and I could not even 'push the stupidity to writing books' (as Friedrich Nietzsche considered)[8].

[8] See Mihaela Miroiu *Drumul către autonomie* (2004), available at http://www.academia.edu/1541266/Drumul_catre_autonomie, accessed at March 10, 15, 25 and April 12, 2015.

This echoes another classical feminist view, expressed by Luce Irigaray:

> The 'feminine' is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex. Hence the all too well-known 'penis envy'. How can we accept the idea that woman's entire sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus by her longing for, jealousy of, and demand for, the male organ? Does this mean that woman's sexual evolution can never be characterized with reference to the female sex itself? All Freud's statements describing feminine sexuality overlook the fact that the female sex has its own 'specificity'. (Irigaray 1985, 69)

The lesson of the "natural" social discourse is that women should mind their place. The invisible masculine hegemony was not learned from the philosophers, but rather the other way around, the above mentioned philosophers gave voice to a historical masculine discourse unveiling the glass ceiling and describing what is "natural" and "normal": the fact that women and men were never siblings. The feminist method, "the personal is political" was identified as a counter-weight, as a method to unveil the social disrespect for women and the masculine social authority, instance by instance, case by case and cause by cause, inducing more respect for women within family and society. To achieve that political and legislative action alike call for the definition of the category of women in order to speak for it.

Judith Butler shows that each time a sort of "we" specific for the category of women is proposed – as childbearers, as caring communities, or as specific knowers, instead of solidifying the movement it gives way to factionalization, because some women are not mothers, other are too socialist or too liberal to agree to place the accent on community, and other women, for instance, may aim to be assimilated to the masculine objective knower or to an impersonal objective knower. The category we call "women" is rather an umbrella for multiplied subcategories, occasioning "permanent openness and resignifiability"[9]. But these subcategories are to be cherished as feminist resources. Also, in our perspective, the fact

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[9] See Judith Butler *Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism* (1995), http://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2006/SOC402/um/1239861/BUTLER.pdf, accessed January 11, February 7 and March 5, 2015.

that the category "women" designates an "undesignatable field of differences", as Butler indicates, is the result of the social construction of intricate states of affairs and invisible glass ceiling using precisely these feminine defining elements (maternity, care and capacity of knowledge) in order to argue that the place of women is at home, in subordination, where they *are* protected and respected and where they *can be* protected and respected. Moving away from this type of discourse, which is nothing else than patriarchal ideology, feminists are to take distance from the possibility to specify the category of "women" on these characteristics that support the glass ceiling, too.

Feminist discourse places care before right and it is not quite the same as a liberal discourse, because although it is founded on human rights legitimacy, it is also a type of actions that restore the wholeness of the human experience, going against the public-private separation and, consequently, against a certain perception of the liberal right at intimacy. Nonetheless, it is not entirely a rejection of the public-private separation and of this right at intimacy, but it is more a reinterpretation. Women's intimacy right is to be defined and decided by the women in question in their best interest and not by a higher (and/or masculine) authority. And it should be the same for men, only that there are not the same stakes in play. The role of the state and law is to sustain this feminist discretion. The interpretation becomes clearer when we think about reproduction rights. In the feminist discourse we can state that women have the right to discern and decide whether or not they want to use contraception, whether or not they want to resort to abortion and this freedom of choice can be discussed publicly although it is an intimate issue, but one choice or another should not be imposed by the state, by a religious figure or by the head of the family upon any woman. The choice belongs to the woman in question, the owner of her body and the one who has to (immediately) live with the consequences of her choice. In this respect, the private-public separation still stands, although women, in a way, impose on the others their right to discuss intimate issues of concern in public and force ahead a certain pro-woman type of solution to these intimate issues.

Rape[10] is also a real event that sets in discussion the theoretical liberal private-public separation. Society should punish rape. If the social contract is to hold in contemporary times, society can no longer turn a blind eye to the husband raping the wife because it is an intimate incident taking place within the wedlock. Contemporary advanced and democratic societies need solutions and mechanisms in place for women to employ in protecting their right to dignity. These solutions and mechanisms need, though, a society educated for empathy and care. Society should not entirely forget about the imperative of protecting intimacy and this is why finding a good measure between competing rights in protecting wives against marital rape extremely difficult. Why is divorce an insufficient measure? First, if rape is a reprobable action outside marriage it is all the more reprobable when it happens within the wedlock where people are supposed to love and protect one another, as well as care for one another. Second, in real life, marital rape happens when the husband has the conception that his wife is his possession and when this conception exists, the husband is not going to let the woman divorce unpunished: he would threaten her, punish her through the violence directed to children, through a more aggressive divorce action within which he fights by all means for the full custody of the children, maybe he would hit her, or (and this happened in several real life cases) he would kill her. This is why such a socially important structure such as family (either via marriage, or via the concubinage) is necessary to be protected by well-known free educational and psychological programs, easily accessed by the partner and spouses at need, but also by regulations and defences of the safety of the mother and children in dysfunctional families until separation living ensuring programs can be accessed, until the divorce is concluded and the means for safe and decent living conditions for mother and children are ensured. But this is not what goes on currently in the dysfunctional families where men think of their spouse as their possession: immediately after the refusal of marital rape, and sometimes even regardless of the compromises made

[10] See footnote 4.

by the wife, the life of mother and children turns into a tragic ordeal, characterized by verbal and physical violence and constant terror.

The core of feminist agency stays in its status of contestation, in the "radical democratic impetus of feminist polities". The permanent status of contestation characteristic for feminism, brings a specific permanent dynamics, which in turn nourishes the "permanent openness and resignifiability" for the category of "women". Postmodernism is not an impediment in this respect. Deconstructing feminist biology and bodies, insisting on the omnipresence of discourse, postmodernism does not cancel the materiality of reality, but it reuses materiality and biology, and repeats terms displacing these items from their contextual roles as mechanisms of oppressive power.

> Consider that most material of concepts, 'sex', which Monique Wittig calls a 'thoroughly political category', and which Michel Foucault calls a regulatory and 'fictitious unity'. For both theorists, sex does not *describe* a prior materiality, but produces and regulates the *intelligibility* of the *materiality* of bodies. For both, and in different ways, the category of sex imposes a duality and a uniformity on bodies in order to maintain reproductive sexuality as a compulsory order. (Butler 1995, 17)

"Women" become a category in their action contesting the current significance of terms such as "violence" or "sex", which hide personal feminine and feminist causes that are going to become political. These words become arenas of political debate initially with their placement under quotation marks. This discursive action founds the political action to come.

> If there is a fear that, by no longer being able to take for granted the subject, its gender, its sex, or its materiality, feminism will founder, it might be wise to consider the political consequences of keeping in their place the very premises that have tried to secure our subordination from the start. (Butler 1995, 19)

Against these above mentioned discursive stakes, the marks of the emancipated discourse of Feminism (which was once a subordinate tongue) are *the will and the bravery to speak, as well as the unwillingness to take anything for granted*.

Feminism is the support of the women's experiences, expressed and capitalized in order to emphasize and reform a certain power structure. "Talking like a lady" is a sure method to indicate not only the differences

from men but the position of women outside the power structure (Lakoff 1975, 10). The insistence on detail, the richness of intonation and nonverbal communication through mimicry are just a few universal characteristics of the women's tongue that situates them, in men's perspective, in a realm of trivial preoccupation outside that of reality that calls for the attention of men. The differences in discourse correspond to structural social inequalities:

> If it is agreed that this lexical disparity reflects a social inequity in the position of women, one may ask how to remedy it. Obviously, no one could seriously recommend legislating against the use of the terms 'mauve' and 'lavender' by women, or forcing men to learn to use them. All we can do is to give women the opportunity to participate in the real decisions of life. (Lakoff 1975, 14)

Women may adopt men's type of speech in their attempt to be accepted by men, respected and secure in a power position. Very few men adopt women's language as well as very few men are willing to become nurses, housekeepers or secretaries.

> The language of the favoured group that holds the power, along with its nonlinguistic behaviour, is generally adopted by other group, not vice versa (Lakoff 1975, 15).

Children are raised to be either boys of "high spirits" or docile and resigned girls. Stronger means of expression are accepted for men and not for women, which reinforces masculine positions of strength in the real world. Women arrive at a polite type of language, which is encouraged from an early age, while men master with age an impolite type of language socially widely spread, accepted and quite universal. The display of emotions reinforces the feminine positions of weakness in the real world. All the diminutives for the professions practiced by women in the Romanian language and, for sure, in other flexible languages, too, are a further proof in this respect.

As a consequence, we should consider an ethical and inclusive feminist discourse a form of Rortian postliberalism. Richard Rorty expressed in his generous postliberalism a vision of a main agent (a theoretical ideal) who can actually capitalize on the contingency and

embrace solidarity (Rorty 1989). This human being (the ironist) is able to rise *above* tradition, but not necessarily or permanently or uncritically *against* tradition, in order to understand others on the accounts of (our) humanity. The ironist could be either a man or a woman, but is referred to as *she* and this theoretical discourse can be interpreted as a discourse of moderate equal opportunity feminism (similar to the one advocated in this paper). The idea is that people, togetherness and goodness are ends in themselves and the things that people have in common are far more important than the things that separate human beings in genders, in ethnic group, in religions, or in our people and foreigners. The same idea is followed and developed in Richard Rorty's work *Truth and Progress* in the description of an extended community.

The creation of the extended community (a postliberal and anti-cruelty[11] type of community) has to overcome the despise for women who were, on the one hand, too close to nature and animality to be considered included or totally included into the human sphere and, on the other hand, were seen as immature as the children were; as a consequence, women were deemed as inappropriate to vindicate social recognition and respect. Although we have noticed this aspect independently and we discussed it illustrating that "the public discourse is the discourse of man", Richard Rorty said it before us: "Anyhow, when it is about women there are simpler ways to exclude them from the true humanity: for instance, using 'man' as a synonym for the 'human being'". Richard Rorty endorses explicitly the feminist theoretical endeavours saying that *as feminists show* such use of the term *man* reinforces the gratitude of the regular male that he was not born a woman along with his fear for the ultimate human degrading: his feminization. At the same time, Rorty believes that philosophers attempted to include into the category of "the human, the immature, the exotic and the woman, attempting to straighten the confusion and explaining what exactly is special in what concerns these featherless bipeds" (Rorty 2003, 91). We

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[11] Judith Shklar famously defines liberalism culturally and ethically, as the refusal of cruelty. See Judith Shklar (1998). "The Liberalism of Fear." In *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*. Edited by Stanley Hoffmann and George Kateb (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3-20).

think that if this happened, it happened only recently, occasionally and marginally within the mainstream philosophy dedicated to humanism, "built upon the philosophy of tolerance, within liberalism as the refusal of cruelty, within feminisms and within cosmopolitanism, but not always and not with consistency, and not in the least throughout the entire philosophy, as a rule." (Rorty 2003, 92).

Richard Rorty nuances his position: that if for Plato the very aim that they would differ from the animals should prompt people to be good to each other, for Nietzsche and the anti-Plato thinkers, violence and cruelty are the traits that would always and characteristically accompany human beings (2003, 93). From Rorty's standpoint, in the light of this differentiation, the intellectual progress registered by the 20th century is precisely the disinterest for this latter dispute. This is the explanation why we are less inclined to devote oneself to one or another of the theories concerning human nature. The definition for the human being is that of a flexible *animal*, a creator and a self-modelling creator, and then some, but not in exclusive terms, either as rational animal, or as cruel animal (2003, 93). Human flexibility is what allows for the creation of a culture of human rights.

> I shall especially defend the affirmation that there is nothing relevant for the moral choice to separate human being from animals, except the historically contingent facts of the world, the cultural facts. (Rorty 2003, 94)

The feminist discourse of care as an ethical discourse of inclusiveness represents a meaningful discourse of hope for the possibility of the extended community, more emphatic and more prosperous. Any ethical being should be endowed with more empathy and care and awareness in such matters. The feminist discourse has significant ethical and socio-political relevance in infusing the ethical discourse with care.

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