

**Intellectual Feminism in Romania**  
**Study of Academic, Civic, Political Meanings and Impact**  
**Doctoral thesis**

The present critical study is a monograph of Romanian feminism crystallized in the production of knowledge, but also in its dimension of civic and political action project in between 1990-2020. My assumption is that feminism has had an important role in criticizing the communist regime, significantly mitigating residual communism, and in engaging in a discourse of modernization and democratization. Consequently, feminism was prone to connect with and to complement the macro-processes by which the political and social space has been reconfigured over the last three decades, and continues to do so, even though it has been acclimatized on an hostile soil. At the confluence between personal destiny choices and intellectual and ideological options, Romanian feminism was marked *ab initio* by a series of options and orientations.

The mapping of Romanian feminism is placed - at least aspirationally - in what should be an *ethos* of recognition and, ultimately, an intellectual and moral *reparatio*. A recognition that, beyond the internal tensions of Romanian feminism, of different epistemic positions, of alliances and enmities, is all the more important in a field of knowledge with a complicated recent history and marked by substantial efforts to gain scientific legitimacy. Three decades away from the first feminist work in the Romanian intellectual space, we can speak of an intellectual tradition of Romanian feminism with one condition: to know and recognize it overcoming the perpetual reflex of reinventing the wheel of Romanian feminism.

In the analysis of feminism in Romania in the temporal and political context, we followed a series of fundamental landmarks in a linear temporal perspective, only partially chronological, from a historical-interpretive point of view according to the essential moments

in the knowledge production of Romanian feminism . Thus, chronologically, we detected four phases of it with the mention that there are juxtapositions between the stages:

1. Foundational feminism, with an anticipatory character, contained in the interval 1994-2002, marked by the import of concepts and analytical tools as well as the connection to the agenda of transition and democratic consolidation;

2. Feminism during the period of consolidation (2002 - 2012), of European integration, an interval that includes the most prolific years in the publishing field and the consolidation of the academic institutionalization of a field of knowledge that has gained its scientific legitimacy - gender studies;

3. Multiparadigmatic feminism, from the aftermath of the economic crisis (2008 to 2010) when the anti-austerity mobilizations generated a general socio-economic critique, having a feminist dimension and which divided the field of research between liberal and socially inspired feminism. Also, the year 2015 and the refugee crisis marked a repositioning of feminism at the European level and, in the particular case of the Romanian one, an additional opening towards social inequalities, poverty and the feminization of poverty, class and ethnicity.

4. The second "foundational" stage of Romanian feminism, this time in relation to the democratic deconsolidation trends in the Central and Eastern European region as well as the imperative to build a response to the political insurgency of conservatism. In this new political context, which had as its decisive moment the constitutional referendum of 2018 regarding the banning of same-sex marriages, Romanian feminism preserved its diversity built in the previous period, but was forced to consolidate, becoming at the same time one of the most assertive paradigms of opposition to it. I choose, therefore, to call the period after 2018 "the second fundamental feminism". From the early transition to the present day, conservative attacks on feminism highlight its contributions to social change.

I believe that the initial options of Romanian feminism marked its entire dynamic, starting with the engagement in the criticism of the communist regime and in the significant mitigation of the remaining communism - above all, the participation in integrum in a discourse and practice of modernization and democratization. Consequently, the consolidation of Romanian feminism as a feminism of rights, from the category of what we call the foundation of liberal democracies, was a necessary and pragmatic option, demanded by the social and political context.

At the methodological level, the work has the profile of an intellectual history that follows a series of fundamental milestones in the field of knowledge production. I fundamentally referred to the vein of moral and political philosophy from which the development of feminism in the social sciences, especially in the political sciences, was inspired. I combined knowledge production with what I called "democratic moments" to highlight the contiguity of academic interests and research with social and political reality. I also chose to refer - at the risk of epistemic injustice - to the production of knowledge in Romania, sacrificing, as a consequence, the contributions of foreign authors who wrote about Romania, such as Gail Kligman, Maria Bucur, Jill Massino.

As a historicized act, feminist intellectual production, more than any other kind of intellectual production, occurred simultaneously or almost simultaneously with its civic and institutional manifestation, with at least two visible consequences: on the one hand, the existence of a feminist school of thought of liberal orientation in relation to an insularization of socialist feminism and an orientation of the latter towards activism. A second immediate consequence is the need for Romanian feminism to manifest itself everywhere and to oscillate between theory, civic and political space, remaining simultaneously in all three spaces - which constitutes a local particularity of Romanian feminism and, at the same time, in its main limit.

In order to have a simplified picture and not to sacrifice important contributions - many chronologically overlapping, but also because Romanian feminism consists of a series of acts of intellectual and institutional pioneering that are often either forgotten or omitted, I use the concept of genealogy of feminist knowledge in which they include important moments in the production of knowledge. The same chronological perspective is useful to me in representing the ramifications of feminist knowledge, the central vein is represented by feminist philosophy, especially by moral philosophy that will branch into political philosophy. I related to this from two interconnected perspectives: on the one hand through autonomous epistemic value, detectable within the production of knowledge and, on the other hand, through the influences that the hard core of Mihaela Miroiu's moral philosophy radiates in philosophy and theory politics.

The first fundamental moment in the production of feminist knowledge in Romania is represented by the works *Problematica feminină în Biserica lui Hristos/ The Woman Question in Orthodoxy* by Anca Manolache (1994) and *Convenio. On Nature, Women and Morals* (1996) by Mihaela Miroiu, as well as the intersections between feminist theology and

feminist philosophy. In the first part of the paper, I focused on an analysis of Anca Manolache's intellectual contributions, combining several fields of analysis: 1. Manolache's observations regarding the church micro-topos and asymmetric power relations, 2. Assimilation of Anca Manolache's reflections as theological feminism in the absence of a self-identification, by highlighting the androcentrism of the patristic tradition, with direct implications on the assimilation of women as secondary beings and 3. The motivation of the relevance of such an improbable and even counterintuitive intellectual contribution to the production of feminist knowledge in Romania.

As a lineage, the ethical perspective of Mihaela Miroiu can be synthesized in three theoretical developments: 1. The anti-binary perspective that we also find in Anca Manolache, but in a biblical hermeneutic, and in Mihaela Miroiu in an ontological, metaphysical perspective, epistemological and, finally, political. 2. The theory of pallor: in canonical philosophy women do not think philosophically, but are treated as shadows of male thought, from *Shadow Thought* (1995) and how it leads to the concept of autonomy. 3. The theory of convenience, which from my perspective, is important for at least two reasons: the first as an autonomous epistemic value and the second through the intersections that *Convenio* and by extrapolation, moral philosophy transcends, the ultimate goal being co-participation in changing women's conditions. Recovering from Anca Manolache the rejection of a binary structuring and understanding of the world and using a more sophisticated theoretical apparatus, Mihaela Miroiu argues for the deconstructing of binary, dichotomous thinking, which represents the conceptual scheme on which philosophy and political thinking are built and which, according to the author, has roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Feminist intellectual production, more than any other type of intellectual production, took place simultaneously or almost simultaneously with civic and institutional manifestation, with at least two visible consequences: on the one hand, the existence of a liberally oriented feminist school of thought in the sense political philosophy in relation to an insularization of socialist feminism. The anti-austerity mobilizations had a strong feminist dimension that also generated a polarization between the challengers of liberal democracy and its supporters. Also, the year 2015 and the refugee crisis, which split the discourse of the European Union, opened a re-positioning of feminism at the European level and, in the particular Romanian case, influenced the adherence to a discourse that opens significantly towards social inequalities, poverty/feminization of poverty, class, ethnicity, challenging mainstream liberal feminism. Against the backdrop of the economic crisis and anti-austerity measures in

Romania, there has been an exacerbation of ethno-nationalism and anti-immigrant (neo)conservatism, which has generated a recovery within Romanian feminism of previously insufficiently developed themes: class exploitation, racialization poverty, the oppression of sexual minorities or housing issues

In the same period, the year 2018 becomes relevant for the history of feminism, more precisely the history of gender studies because we witnessed the devaluation carried to the point of indexing an entire field of knowledge. Most studies on the institutionalization of the field treat as marginal or even omit the role of individual decisions and trajectories in the introduction of gender studies, an aspect that seems substantial to me. Romanian feminism has its own dynamic that means beyond intellectual production, the creation of institutions and their acclimatization in a state that was beginning and going through its transition to a democratic regime, and a whole *modus operandi* of some people who linked their intellectual destiny and professionally from that of feminism, they wrote and are writing the history of Romanian feminism, they migrated from other disciplines where the theoretical construction would have been simpler and with an unsyncopated academic tradition, they carried out intellectual and professional mentorships, they created generations of feminists who found their own epistemes and were *ab initio* convinced that Romanian feminism cannot crystallize in an alienating ivory tower. It is questionable to what extent this continuous intersection between academic feminism and civic activism represented an option or a necessity imposed by a moral and intellectual calculation and what the legacy of feminism (the legacy of Romanian feminism) will represent in the future, taking Lynne Segal's phrase.