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FEMINISM, FEMININE DISCOURSE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE NEW ROMANIAN CINEMA

Abstract: The main research question of this paper is centered around the possible connections between the new Romanian cinema and the contemporary feminist theories. Are there any traces of a «women's cinema» in the «Romanian new wave», is there any ideological link between the changes of narratives and the return of the female protagonists in the contemporary moviemaking and the “first” and “second” waves of feminism? The paper follows three main aspects of this line of thought: the first one is discussing the problems stemming out of the transformations from a patriarchal society, dominated by a “Father-Leader”, towards a society missing a well-established center; the second has to do with the changes of narratives and the troubled relationship between the viewer and the subject; while the third questioning comes from the issues of «the look and the gaze», as generating power relations. The author discusses both movies made by female directors, like *Ryna* (2005) or *Felicia înainte de toate* (First of All, Felicia, 2009); productions dealing with homosexuality, like *Legături bolnăvicioase* (Love Sick,

2006); movies about rape *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, 2007), *Katalin Varga* (2009); and narratives concerned with power issues like *Cea mai fericită fată din lume* (The Happiest Girl in the World, 2009), *La source des femmes* (The Source, 2011) and *Loverboy* (2011).

Key words: Women's cinema, Representation of female identity, Male gaze, Violence against women, Feminist theories, Rape in movies.

Feminist criticism and the new Romanian cinema-making

There is a long tradition of women moviemakers in the European cinema, many of them rewarded with public and artistic recognition, unlike in the Hollywood cinema industry, where the first woman director was awarded an Oscar only in 2009, for a very “male centered” film (*Hurt Locker* 2008). Starting with the remarkable example of the first woman director, the French born Alice Guy-Blaché, who directed over 750 movies during her entire career (both in Europe and across the Ocean) and ending with authors like Agnès Varda and Sally Potter (*Hurd* 2007), one can witness the richness

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of this tradition. European movie directors made various films, from promoting radical feminist views, to movies simply "made by women", or from movies addressing specific women problems to movies presenting profound experiences of womanhood, like maternity or sorority.

In a predominantly "male business" and a patriarchal view of the world, with heroes and subject matters portraying men as prominent, the women were representatives of alternative cinema-making, not only from the point of view of movies being made by women, but also in terms of looking for different stories and different perspectives, not yet exploited by men directors.

It is also relevant that some of the most important concepts in recent film practice came from feminist practitioners and theorists. Three of these I believe to be fundamental in understanding the recent Romanian moviemaking.

First, there is the problem of the ideological shift from a patriarchal society, dominated by a Father-Leader, towards a society missing a well-established center; the second is the question of changing narratives and the troubled relationship between the viewer and the subject, while the third stems from the issues of "the look and the gaze".

The issues of ideology and authority come from the so called "first wave feminist" theories, mainly criticizing the traditional Hollywood narratives, built around a presumed male spectator, and his desires. The dis-centered narratives have to do with the new forms of subjectivity, proposed by "the second

wave feminists", discussing the myths and the myth-making functions of cinema. Last, but not least, there is the concept of the gaze, stemming from the Lacanian psychoanalysis, which was developed by Laura Mulvey's classical studies (Mulvey 1975, 1989). While the male gaze is voyeuristic and it is used as an instrument of controlling and dominating women, both on screen and off the screen, regardless if it belongs to the movie-maker or to the spectator implied, the female look has more to do with observation before anything else. All these elements form the theoretical support of this analysis.

Can we speak about a women's cinema?

A first terminological clarification must be stated from the very beginning of the discussion. There are no "feminist" traits in the contemporary Romanian cinema as there is no feminist filmmaking movement in the Romanian cinema, before or after 1989. Even the new Romanian cinema is dominated by male directors and producers. At the most, as it is in the cases of Cristi Puiu and Tudor Giurgiu, the director's spouses are involved in the moviemaking business as co-producers. Even in this case, apart from being a successful "family business", the situation does not evolve to a conscious effort of building into their productions women related subjects and themes.

Still, even though there are not many women cinematographers in the young generation, with a few worthy exemptions, feminist issues and approaches are transparent in some of the most important

movies of the decade. Also, one can say that there is a feminist predisposition of the contemporary Romanian films, which can be traced to the feminist film theories developed in the '70s, involving especially concepts like the male gaze, the power relations and the male aggression against women. Also, some of the key subjects, put forward by the feminist theories and practices in world cinema, are present in the so called "new wave" Romanian cinema.

As previously noted, there is no counter-cinema, in the understanding of the term Claire Johnson developed, since there are no women film-makers expressing the values and principles of such a paradigm (Johnson 1979). Although there is no "women's cinema", in terms of a cinematic alternative to the male cinema, and no women have tried (yet) to establish another type of cinematic work or approaches to cinema making, the young Romanian directors have explicitly expressed their intentions to break with the "old" ways of making movies, and this has strong ties with the patriarchal attitude towards storytelling in cinema.

A further explanation is necessary here. In my attempt to define the possible lines of what one may call women's cinema, I was confronted with two possible options: the first would be the concept of cinema made by women creators and the second one would take into consideration movies that tackle feminine and feminist issues. I chose to follow the definition of Alison Butler. According to this view, women's cinema is the type of cinema "made by,

addressed to, or concerned with women, or all three" (Butler 2002), and thus should not be restricted to cinema made by women. Following this understanding of women's cinema, as that type of moviemaking concerned with violence against women, abuse of women by men, or authority conflicts and alteration of women's lives, this paper looks for these elements in the new Romanian cinema. Of the above mentioned themes, several are ominously present in the kind of cinema the young Romanian movie makers are creating: domestic and sexual abuse, sexual taboos and awareness of sexuality, women as victims of individual or social violence and women's identity within the social hierarchy.

These traits are explicitly present in some of the most representative movies of the new Romanian cinema, and this analysis will discuss productions like *Ryna* (2005), *Legături bolnăvicioase* (*Love Sick*, 2006) *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, 2007), *Katalin Varga* (2009), *Felicia înainte de toate* (*First of All, Felicia*, 2009), *Cea mai fericită fată din lume* (*The Happiest Girl in the World*, 2009), *La source des femmes* (*The Source*, 2011) and *Loverboy* (2011). Of these movies, only two have women directors (Ruxandra Zenide and Melissa de Raaf), while all the others are made by male directors. Accordingly, a first question stemming from analysing the intentions of the directors of these movies would be to explain the relationship between the new Romanian cinema and feminist theories (the gaze, scopophilia, objectification),

the feminist themes (abortion, lesbianism) and the feminist practices in moviemaking (change of narratives) and understanding their impact in each of them. Even if there is no “feminist” trend in the new Romanian cinema and these movies are neither explicitly targeting a specific feminine public, nor oriented towards a specific feminist outcome, their “feminine” predisposition is nonetheless important.

The “old cinema” dominated by phallocentrism

Most of the movies in the Romanian cinema, until the appearance of the new generation of young directors (1989-2000), even more so in the case of the productions made during the Communist regime (1948-1989), were either directed by men, or had men as main protagonists. This meant that there was a pervasive symbolic representation of men as fathers, or authority figures, or simple heroic characters, all of them placed in powerful and representative situations, while women were second rank characters. This has an ideological consequence, following the suggestions of Luce Irigaray, that femininity was represented as secondary, adjunct and even dependent of the male source of signification (Irigaray 1977/ 1985, 69).

Some of the most popular movies made during the Communist time, like the international co-production movies about the Dacians (Sergiu Nicolaescu, *Dacii*, 1967; Mircea Drăgan, *Columna*, 1968), or the later heroic depictions of the national history in the series about the Romanian kings and heroes (starting with Lucian

Bratu’s *Tudor*, 1963; Sergiu Nicolaescu’s *Mihai Viteazul*, 1971; Constantin Vaeni’s *Buzduganul cu trei peceți* 1978, Malvina Urșianu’s *Întoarcerea lui Vodă Lapușneanu*, 1980 and ending with Mircea Mureșan’s *Horea*, 1984), were deeply rooted in a patriarchal view of society, stemming out of the social control practiced by the authoritarian regime of Ceaușescu. History was made by powerful male figures, and the women around them were just background helpers or sources of comfort (domestic and social) and pleasure (visual and physical).

Another contention that stems from here is that we can talk about a “phallic domination” (Kaplan 1983) in the Romanian cinema, one that was not only centered around the male hero, but it was also oriented towards the belittlement of women. It is here that the national chauvinism meets male chauvinism. More so, as it was in the case of another popular movie series, made by Mircea Mureșan, and entitled *Toate pânzele sus* (*Full Sail*, 1976), the women were described either as burdens for men, or simply objects of desire. In the above mentioned movie the only woman in the main cast, played by Julieta Szonyi, was visually described as an object of desire, yet at the same time depicted by the male characters as a “danger” for their sailing enterprise. In a certain sense, she fulfills both the archetype of the unknowing child who needs protection and that of the menacing mermaid who endangers the sailors by means of her seductive power. The stereotypes about women

and their role in society, with caricature-like formulas, designed to understand the role of women in history, were leaning heavily on this kind of depiction. For example *Șapte băieți și o ștregăriță* (Seven Guys and a Gal, 1967), directed by Pitt Popescu, an international co-production with Romanian actors, gathering about 6 million viewers in Romania only, seems to directly exemplify the concept Laura Mulvey has put into the debate about the representation of women in cinema (Mulvey 1989). The movie presents the woman as an object materialized only in the gaze of the implicit male spectator, so that his desire for the woman becomes a pleasure source which is accepted as norm and even a social reality. While the woman is only a spectacle for the eyes of the intended males, both on screen and off screen, the movie is filled with gratuitous naked scenes, male aggressions against women and frivolous women behaviors, inherently turning the male (and female) viewers into a voyeuristic captive audience.

On the other hand, it is not too much to characterize the nature of cinema-making industry in Romania as patriarchal, first and foremost because the business was under the monopoly of male directors. If we look at the statistical data, of the hundreds of students graduating from the Film Academy in Bucharest since the 1950s, over 90% of the directors who managed to make their way to financing and public awareness were male. These male directors were mostly responsible, during the early years of Romanian

communism and later, for the prevalent aesthetics of social realism, where one of the major type of discourse, that pervaded the field of all arts, including film, was the idea of realistic depiction of society, with the intent of creating a phantasy-like view of the world, filled with ideological connotations. Such discourse typically foregrounded narratives of national identity, using the epic heritage of history, but it proliferated a type of history that was almost an illusion, having more to do with an idealized socialist future, than that of the real historical events.

The dividing line between the socialist hero-worker and the heroes of movies like those made by Dinu Cocea between 1966 (when the first installment of the *Haiducii*/The Haidouks or The Outlaws was made) until 1993, when a last version of the series was created (by the cinematographer of *Mihai Viteazul*, Mircea George Cornea, *Doi haiduci și o crâșmăriță*, 1993) was very thin. The "haidouks" were outlaws with Communist ideals, they were against the rich and were giving to the poor, but in the same time they were representations of the Communist illegal operations before the war. In the mean time, titles like *The rape of the virgins* (Răpirea fecioarelor, 1968), or *Zestrea domniței Ralu* (The Treasure of Princess Ralu, 1971) speak for themselves as far as the male chauvinism of these movies is concerned.

Another way of re-writing history was using the nationalist past as a tool of propaganda for the Communist present. Movies like Sergiu Nicolaescu's *Mihai Viteazul* (1970) or Mircea Drăgan's *Ștefan*

cel Mare (1974) represented key cinematic moments in the nationalist-communist heroic integration of historical figures into the Romanian public conscience. The ideological function of this type of cinema served not only the dominant view of the Party, but also the dominant patriarchal view of society, where Nicolae Ceaușescu was installed as the "Father of the nation". The paradoxical reunion of the "Monarch" and of the "Dictator" was centered around the "phallic as powerful" representation of the Leader. For this ideological purpose of mythical proportions of the male leader, a type of cinematic discourse was generated where domination over women and its subsequent submissiveness became a norm. One of the few female characters of Communist cinema, depicted also by Dinu Cocea, was the heroic figure of *Ecaterina Teodoroiu* (1978), praised for disguising herself as a man, in order to fight for the country during WWI.

These typical patriarchal representations of power go together with the male centered narratives in cinema. As Laura Mulvey suggests in her seminal study about the relationship between "visual pleasure" and the narrative cinema, there is a strong link between the patriarchal narratives and the formation of social structures, and even more so of social order (Mulvey 1975). Cinema is connected to male desire. Women are objects viewed and viewable by the implicitly male spectators. Interestingly enough, during the Communist time there were more cases of sexual violence against women than in the post-communist decades, for

example, in 1985 there were 4.699 rape of detainees, while in 1990 the number of those convicted for the same offense was 2.454, and in 1992 it was about 3.717 (Mungiu 1995, 191). The statistical data seem to indicate a link between the cultural attitude towards women and the social behavior of men.

The Mother, the Witch and the Whore in the Romanian cinema

Other movies made during the Communist time illustrate, on the other hand, some of the most common stereotypes about femininity. The characters in the vast majority of films made until 2000 (and after that, mostly by representatives of the "old" cinema) portrayed womanhood either as "The Virgin/ Saint" archetype, as "The Mother", as "The Monster/or The Whore".

Of course, the Romanian cinema had its share of women cinematographers, unfortunately authors like Luminița Cazacu, Angela Buzilă, Letiția Popa, Cristina Nicolae never made it beyond a couple of unremarkable movies. Still, two of the best examples for "women's films" made during the Communist time are Elisabeta Bostan and Malvina Urșianu, some of the few women filmmakers to have their productions financed by the authorities. They managed to be successful during the Communist regime. Elisabeta Bostan took a very personal and clear turn in the Romanian moviemaking, as she gave maternity and motherhood its best and biggest narratives. As Lucy Fisher noted in her study on the relationship between

cinema and maternity (1996), showing that motherhood is a common theme in various cinema genres, motherhood/maternity plays a fundamental role in understanding how sexual politics are generated by narratives and cultural forms. Bostan's most popular movies, like *Mama* (1979), *Veronica* (1972) and *Veronica se întoarce* (Veronica returns 1975), used the prescribed gender role of the woman as caretaking Mother. In the center of these movies there was the positive feminine figure, who was supposedly fulfilled by performing this social activity as her pre-established duty. Here the cinema also played an ideological purpose, since the idealized "mothers" of the communist time were epitomized by the wife of the Party leader, Elena Ceaușescu, who was entitled "the most beloved mother and consort" in all the cultural representations (poems, public displays and, of course media). It is relevant that the theme of the Mother was most often connected with that of the orphan (as it is the case with *Veronica*, a little girl living in a foster care institution) who is nurtured by dedicated "social apparatus", obvious representations of the Communist state's institutions.

So the ideal woman was, on one had, manifesting herself by submissiveness and passivity, since she was described generally as "faithful wife and devoted mother". Women were "nurturers and caregivers", and Bostan's movies illustrate this predisposition for "family" or "children's movies", since most of her productions are either memories of childhood (Amintiri

din copilărie 1964, *Pupăza din tei* 1965) or fairytales about childhood (*Tinerețe fără bătrânețe* 1970), or an edulcorated reality, where people live in a dreamlike world, in an un-realistic innocence (*Unde ești copilărie?* 1988).

While in this kind of cinema women were vehicles of positive social role taking, some of the "partners" of men in these movies were "dark women", distributed in gender-biased roles, opposing those of mothers and/or housewives. It is not only the case of Anița, the inn keeper from the *Haiducii* series, played by Marga Barbu, the wife of one of the most important figures of cultural propaganda in Communist Romania, or the partner of Florin Piersic in the Romanian urban-westerns from the "Mărgelatu" series. Just like her, feminine characters existed only because men around them acted (a certain way). It was even in Bostan's movies, designed for a young public, and integrating elements of the musical fantasies of the Western cinema-making, that the two opposing archetypes of feminine identity, the virtuous and the vicious, were ominous. For example, in one of the most viewed children's movies (like *Veronica*), this opposition is non-exclusive, since the angel and the demon coexist in the same figure. Elisabeta Bostan uses the same actress (Margareta Pâslaru) to play both the severe educator and the angelic fairy, to represent the inflexible Matriarch of the ants colony and the loving character of the Mother.

In this very biased view of womanhood, the good and the evil woman were never

compatible, there was no middle ground between the two. These representations of women in the Communist era movies corresponded to patriarchal stereotypes deeply rooted in society. For example in the Haiducii series, the portrayals of women were also divided among the two stereotypes: the dark voluntary, devouring woman (usually played by Marga Barbu), and the blonde innocent, the victim of the desires of men (played by actresses like Aimee Iacobescu). These representations of women as adulteresses, sexually immoral, or having an insatiable sexual appetite correspond to the depictions made by Kaplan when she described the dominant cultural discourse as founded on the opposition between the “angelic Mother” and the “evil Witch” (Kaplan 1992).

Another type of wife in the cinema of that time was the solitary widow. One of the most important examples is the character remarkably played by Leopoldina Bălănuță, in the Mircea Veroiu’s episode from *Nunta de piatră* (The Stone Wedding 1974). Fefelega is a woman working in a stone quarry, a vision of the tragic condition of the woman pulled out of the private space, doomed in the absence of a man, condemned by society to a Sisyphus-like effort to raise her child. Another such character is to be found in *Baltagul* (The Axe 1970), by Mircea Mureșan, where the story centers around another strong woman, Vitoria Lipan, who was played by the Italian actress Margherita Lozano. Here the main character, who searches for her husband’s murderers, is also forced by society to get out of the private space,

but only to fulfilling her duty, and then to return.

In this typology, femininity could not escape the bias of being either domesticated or monstrous. If the mother was absent, than the seductress and the vamp took its place. Again, as Fisher puts it in *Cinematernity*, the powerful mother is an expression of the fears of the male-child. Barbara Creed (1993) calls this representation of women in cinema “the monstrous-feminine”, as it is the product of male anxieties and fears, caused by the realization of sexual difference. While the public propaganda around social roles was always positively charged, it expressed what Mary Ann Doane calls “masquerading”, it was just an excess of representation, which lead to a distance between what it was “seen” about women, and what was described as natural and normal (Doane 1987, 40). In this case, the misrepresentation of women was also a manifestation of oppression. It is obvious that, although the official ideology was claiming equality among sexes, the gender issues were almost inexistent in the Romanian cinema, and more so there has been no marxist-feminist approach to cinematic themes before 1989.

Regrettably, this kind of attitude towards women continued in the movies made after 1989, especially visible with the ceremonial belittling of women in “screwball comedies” like *A doua cădere a Constantinopolului* (The Second Fall of Constantinople 1994), a movie considered to be a huge success of the box office, since the director claimed to have had

1,5 million viewers (uncertified), where the story was degradingly presenting young Romanian women (Loredana Groza) going to Istanbul to “earn money”. Mircea Mureșan, who directed one of the first rape scenes in Romanian cinema (*Ion, Blestemul pământului – Blestemul iubirii*, 1979), “specialized” himself after 1990 in these low budget, low humor, low quality of representations films like *Miss Litoral* (1900) or *Sexy Harem Ada-Kaleh* (2001), based on female nudity, sexploitation, mocking transvestite episodes, and other vulgar male chauvinism filled productions. Mureșan, who made a name for himself for adapting for screen one of the most powerful women in Romanian literature, Vitoria Lipan (1969), and also got an *Opera prima* prize in Cannes in 1966, for *Rășcoala*, ended up depicting women as “fatal” hitchhikers, populating men’s dreams in alluring outfits, and zooming on body parts in a disgusting manner (where touching breasts while she puts his hands between her legs is considered to be a natural expression of the male character).

Other cinematic productions made after 1989, like *Patul conjugal* (The Conjugal Bed 1993), Mircean Danieliuc’s second movie after 1989, present specific feminine issue (abortion), in some of the most degrading pictures about human life and human relationships. Known for his “miserable” representations of Romanian society, Danieliuc builds a grotesque scene, where the woman wants to have an abortion, but does not have the money, so the husband makes her jump from atop of a drawer. This monstrous

depiction continues the style of movies Danieliuc programatically made in the likes of *A unsprezecea poruncă* (The 11th Commandment 1991), a metaphoric cinema in the style of Pasolini’s *Sodom and Gomorrah*, where brutal aggression and senseless macabre were totally out of rational explanation. Later, in *Această lehamite* (Fed-up 1994), Danieliuc tells the story of an unborn child, who still lives in his dead mother’s body - then in comes the alcoholic father of the baby (named Bebe!) who decides to keep the baby only to get an apartment from the Mayor’s office. The final sex scene of the movie is also degradingly nonsensical. Bebe, completely drunk forces himself on the young doctor Vali, in a car, in the middle of the highway, while the music in the background is the national anthem: “Deșteaptă-te române!” (Wake up Romanians!).

The “femme fatale”, embodied by Marga Barbu in several movies made during the Communist regime, was a constant in the post-1989 cinema. Sergiu Nicolaescu’s latest movie *Poker* (2010), a production with a budget over 1 million euros (while *4 months...* had only half this budget), is on one hand an example of the relationship between the “old” and the “new” cinema-making, since the director is constantly mocking the ability of the “young directors” to do movies in the “editing room” out of anything which was previously filmed, but it is also a chauvinist male portrayal of women, where the main character, played by Jojo, is a Moldavian hooker, represented simultaneously as a sexually predatory woman, yet one who

knows and accepts her lower role in the social hierarchy of men.

The victimization of women and the attribution of social roles for females being typified and belittled, represented as commercial sexual goods were the dominant narratives about femininity. The “new cinema” will go against these types of representations, which show women as objects of desire, as well as will use this counter-narrative as a form of critique of society, better understood if seen in opposition with the “old” biased stories.

Looking (without finding) for other (alternative) narratives

According to Căliman (2000), the first attempt to bring new characters in the Romanian moviemaking history was made under the influence of the “French new wave”, using the models of Godard and Truffaut (and even Agnès Varda), and was made by Lucian Bratu (screenplay written by Radu Cosașu). Presented as an example of a “new narrative”, since it was centered on a young woman, even adolescent, *Un film despre o fată fermecătoare* (A movie about a charming girl, 1967), starred Margareta Pâslaru, a rising star in popular music at that time, and her portrayal of an aspiring movie star. The production was immediately criticized by the Communist press as showing a superficial way of life typical for the capitalist society, “strange to the communist morals” (quoted in Căliman 214). Yet the film presents the same stereotypes about womanhood, some of the views of the world expressed by the young aspiring actress Ruxandra

and her carefree way of life being far from realistic. In a dialogue with one of the men surrounding her, she asks: “Are you scared by my new decision”, as we see her stereotypically presented as changing her mind suddenly and often, while the man answers: “A positive hero is never scared by anything”. The comparison with Agnès Varda’s *Cleo* is far fetched, while her evaluation of their roles in society is nothing but misogynistic; he does the “thinking”, and she has too much “charm”. Even here we have a typical narrative of the male dominated cinema – the dismissal of subjectivity, and the creation of a separation of genres based on sexual prejudices.

For other critics (Modorcea 1979), the “new narratives” in Romanian cinema exist since the 70s, when the first experiments with the narratives took place, as an example was the movie *Nunta de piatră*, where two directors told the same story from two different points of view, apparently with no connection between them, yet intertwining. This “fresh” wave of cinematographers were, of course, influenced by the Western experiments in cinema-making, but de-centering the patriarchal narrative and introducing “a woman’s story” did not happen in the Communist Romanian cinema.

Even the women directors took the path of their male counterparts. When in 1968 one of the few women directors of the time, who relevantly enough did not graduate the Film Academy in Bucharest, made her debut, she was supposed to represent a new chance of

the “auteur” cinema (Căliman 267-272). Malvina Urșianu’s movie *Gioconda fără surâs* (The Smileless Mona Lisa) was awaited as a break through in Romanian moviemaking. But the fact that Urșianu was writing and directing her own movies did not generate a “women’s cinema”. Irina, the main character in the movie, is an engineer, who gave up her sentimental life, sacrificing it for the social success. Although Malvina Urșianu is an example of a woman director who tries to find a personal voice, her movies (*Serata* 1971, *Trecătoarele iubiri* 1974 or *Liniștea din adâncuri* 1981) deal nothing more than with couple issues and with emotionally damaged relationships, and I would argue that this type of cinema is closer to what Mary Ann Doane called “a woman’s film”, that is a cinema responding to the masochistic identification of women spectators, fulfilling their desire for emotional comfort, of identifying with the characters on the screen. The idea of women always sacrificing themselves or part of their existence remained a topic for Malvina Urșianu, her last movie, *Ce lume veselă* 2002 (What a Happy World 2002) continuing the same discourse of women’s sacrifice for social success, in the logic of woman’s film as trying to describe a feminine subjectivity punished by male social order (Doane 1987).

Either by using the identification with the male hero, acting on behalf of the viewer, portraying the male as active, while the female as implicitly passive, requiring confirmation from male counterparts, the “old” Romanian cinema

is characterized by an all-male, masculine authority, patriarchal imaginary. This paradigm, together with the dissolution of the male authority, is put into questioning by the new wave after 2001, explicit in the way the screenwriters and the directors were looking for new narratives, for other types of discourse and were interested in discovering different approaches to reality, other than those of the cinema before them.

Going against the “patriarchal” narrative

Even if the cinema industry remained a “male dominated” business, after 2000 several Romanian women directors had their movies selected or awarded in international film festivals. Some authors, like Luiza Ciolac, who started to make movies immediately after 1989 (*Un pas spre Vest*, 1991), took the path of the documentary filmmaking, as it was the case with Anca Damian, Cristina Ionescu, Iulia Rugină, Ana Vlad (*Metrobranding* 2010, with Adi Voicu). The documentary moviemaking seemed less oppressive and more pervasive to women in the field. Others were striving to make it in the fiction filmmaking business, newcomers like Ruxandra Zenide (*Ryna*) and Ioana Uricaru, old timers like Cristina Nichituș and Malvina Urșianu, joined by foreign filmmakers like Fanny Ardant (*Ashes and Blood/ Cendres et sang* 2009) and Melissa De Raaf (with Răzvan Rădulescu). A couple of even younger women directors like Adina Pintilie (*Oxygen*, 2010), or Ruxandra Ghițescu (*Urban Groove*, 2010)

were slowly confirming their place in this new cinematography, mostly with short and medium length films. And they were all competing for the meager financial resources available.

Of these moviemakers three stand aside clearly: Ioana Uricaru (directing "*Legenda activistului în inspecție*" a segment from *Tales from the Golden Age*, 2009), Ruxandra Zenide (*Ryna*, 2005) and Melissa De Raaf (although a Dutch director, she belongs to the new Romanian cinema), and their accomplishments show that women directors can confirm their place in contemporary cinema. Beyond this gender based description of the struggles in the industry, what became even more explicit after 2000 was the fact that there were signs of a cinema forming in opposition to the traditional style of narrative, directly contradicting the dominant codes of storytelling of the patriarchal narratives. One explanation can be stated in terms of the women's cinema theory: we witnessed a search for new narratives which coincided with looking for narratives that were able to move away from the patriarchal, all-knowing author model. While there are no theoretical references to a distinct feminist/feminine attitude towards storytelling, the young Romanian cinematographers were integrating in their moviemaking some of the cultural elements that were put forward by feminist theories.

One profound change was at the level of the representation of womanhood. More and more women were described as being in search of their independence

from the control of their families, of society and of men, in particular. Another change was in the way men looked at women, and the way domination was generated by cinematic discourses. Even if this was not a political manifestation of feminism or feminist identity, the changes of the male gaze and the represented women shows that these were not simply movies about femininity, or representations of an ignored typology of women and their role in society. These movies indicate clear changes that go beyond the female portraits, they are narrative changes, focusing on the transforming of social imaginary (Mulvey 1975/1989).

Being in search of a new rhetoric, the cinema of the last decade provides some of the most challenging use of female characters and depictions of men's roles. In this respect the new Romanian cinema operates fundamentally in similar way as the feminist criticism of the mainstream Hollywood cinema functioned. Defining the "old cinema" as a hegemonic-patri-archal narrative, centered around the male hero (be it the Party activist or the historical figure of nationalist-communism), the young directors of the "new wave" showed a clear interest / in the experiences and filmmaking practices that were not deemed interesting by their predecessors.

One explicit manifestation of this "new narrative", was, on one hand, the return of the female protagonists and plots dealing with the problems of women identity, of representing female subjectivity. And this came from depicting problems that

were specific to women, womanhood and feminine in a different way than they were represented in the cinema made before the “new wave”.

**Two institutions under criticism:
Motherhood and Marriage**

There are several instances in the new way of making cinema where the role of the “Mother” is critically re-evaluated. One of the first examples is in “4 months...”, where the role of Adi’s Mother, the weak boyfriend of Găbița, was played by another “darling” of the new Romanian cinema, Luminița Gheorghiu - first casted in Puiu’s *Marfa și banii*, (Stuff and Dough 2001), also as the Mother. In Mungiu’s movie Adi’s mother is only preoccupied with the quality of her cooking, of serving the guests, and of the welfare of her offspring. Gheorghiu, unlike the role in *Stuff and Dough*, becomes here an archetype of all the mothers in the new Romanian cinema, who move beyond the edulcorated view of the benign mother, nurturer and protector, towards a more realistic, albeit detached and cold, depiction of motherhood.

This is even more troublesome in the case of Florin Șerban’s character from *Eu când vreau să fluier...*, where the mother (played by Clara Vodă) is not only seen as causing psychological damage to her children, but also as the source of abandonment and of the subsequent lack of identity. While the relationship of the mother with her sons is externally conflictual, they are internally destructive, here the development of the negative view

of the character of the mother, is based on a deeply psychoanalytical consequence. As Christian Metz argued, the cinema is fundamentally about the relationship between the infant and his mother, by the relationship generated by seeing and being seen (Metz 1977), and thus the abandonment of the child by the mother has to do with the lack of visual relevance of the infant, or as Vicky Lebeau (66-67) developed Metz’s idea, it is finally a failing of the representation. The child is unable to discover who he is because he lacks the mother to tell him just that.

In Călin Peter Netzer’s movie *Medalia de onoare* (Medal of honour 2009), another wife and mother, Ion’s wife, is punishing her 75 years old husband with silence, ignoring him as if he did not exist, and this has been going on for more than six years. A simple years count show that, if he is to be awarded a WWII 50th anniversary medal (by mistake, as is the case), this silence has started in 1989, just before the Romanian anti-Communist revolution. Ion Ion, a name so generic that it stands for about any male in Romania, has denounced his son to the Securitate, the secret police of the Communist regime, while trying to escape abroad during the last year of Ceaușescu’s dictatorship. Ion is a man who has lost his moral value and his social role, and now he looks for a way to regain his authority. Although he publicly behaves like a local “patriarch” in front of his neighbors of the block-of-flats compound, his private life is completely void of significance and power. And, when he tries to get his honor back, he

does it in a completely immoral way, by stealing the medal rightfully belonging to another man, Ion J. Ion (brilliantly played by another “classic” of Romanian acting, Radu Beligan). At the end his son returns home, but his family is nothing Ion Ion has hoped for, he has a black wife and a black son, who cannot speak Romanian and who have nothing to do anymore with the problems and tragedies of a family scarred by Communist past.

The mother in *Felicia înainte de toate* (played by Ileana Cernat) represents another typology of Mothers, the clinging and demanding mother, who does not understand her child and who demands emotional reactions on her terms. Felicia is trapped between her own obligations as a mother (her sick child and the husband in Holland) and the emotional pressures of her mother. This incapacity of dealing with identity and the impossible identification between mother and child belongs to the feminist/ feminine re-drawing of the subjectivity.

As far as the marriage is concerned, two of the most important movies made by Radu Munteanu take on a critical view from their narrative plotting. Both in *Boogie* (2008) and in *Marți după Crăciun* (Tuesday, After Christmas 2010), we are witnessing not only stories about relationships, but also tragedies stemming out of the impossible marital success. In *Marți după...*, Paul Hanganu (played by Mimi Brănescu) is trapped between his wife and his mistress, and manages to destroy his relationship with all the women in his life, including his young

daughter. The idyllic image of the family depicted in mainstream cinema (from the *Repas de bebe*, of the Lumiere brothers, to the movies made by Bostan) is replaced by a totally opposite image. The family is now broken and we emotionally know that after the movie ends their life together will end too. Everything in the storytelling is built around the climatic moment, shot in a ten minute long take, specific to the new Romanian cinema’s approach to visual narrative, when the husband reveals to his wife his infidelity, and we are made witnesses, by means of the observational cinema, to the dramatic dissolution of her personality (admirably played by Mirela Oprișor).

Tudor Giurgiu’s is also tackling these issues, his first fiction film, *Legături bolnăvicioase* (Love Sick 2006) is centered around the dissolving of the traditional family relationships. Breaking the taboos of incestuous love, a brother, Sandu (Tudor Chirilă, a pop singer at that time), falls in love with his sister, Kiki (Maria Popistașu), at her turn in love with her best girlfriend, Alex (Ioana Barbu). The “disease” that is used as a catch phrase in the title, is not the homosexual love, but the monstrous nature of traditional family, who alters identity and ignores personality. Later, Giurgiu followed this critical view with a documentary, entitled *Nunți, muzici și casete video* (Weddings, tapes and video tapes, 2008), presents the universe of the wedding video “business” in Romania, having as a background the remarkable histories of weddings all over the country. The wedding becomes only a

social representation, a show to be put on for the benefit of being recorded.

The homosexual love as social criticism

While Hollywood was projecting a negative perspective on homosexual women, by constructing the character of psychopathic killer lesbian, the European cinema has developed some of the most important representations of lesbianism. One of the most important films on this subject matter was directed by Luis Buñuel. In *Belle de Jour* (1967), based on the novel by Joseph Kessel, we have an account of lesbian love, between Anais and Séverine/ "Belle de Jour", which marks the beginning of her change into a prostitute, and the end of her career. It was this "abnormal" relationship which was the most normal human contacts of Séverine, since her erotic life borders masochistic desires and Buñuel here uses homosexual love as criticism of society's faults and conventions, since all the other encounters of the main character is filled with fetishist representations.

Another important European director has used lesbianism and transvestism as social criticism is the Spanish Pedro Almodovar. In his first feature long film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom* 1980) he uses the same approach as Bunuel, of criticising social stereotypes, through the homosexual love between a rebel teenager and a marginal and typical housewife, challenging the restrictions of the former political regime. In later movie, *Kika* (1993), Almodovar uses

the character of the maid, Juana, to disempower representations of patriarchal society. Men are dependent of fetishism, incapable of natural relationship, while she is a lesbian draining the violent impulses of such men. In his movies, homosexuality becomes an instrument of political critique, following a very much feminist view of social relations.

This is the same in the Central European cinema, where several directors dealt with these issues, treating them as being politically relevant. It is the case with Karoly Makk's movie *Egymásra Nézve* (*Looking at One Another*, 1982), where expressing sexual rebellion, especially homosexual behavior, was a form of expressing dissident political views. Freud has developed this idea in his classical essay on "Totem and Taboo", where he analyses the connection between authority issues and sexual taboo-breaking (Freud 1913), while placing the homosexual predispositions of the child before the incest.

The first level of understanding lesbianism in cinematic narrative would be at the choice of subject matters; if you are in search for 'the different', then the lesbian story is at hand. In order to abandon the stereotype of devouring sexuality of women, posited in sexually voracious postures, threatening men and manifesting aggressive violent drives, homosexuality assures this necessary reversal. Yet the same sex relations between two women becomes a form of critical evaluation of the abnormality of society when seen in connection with incest. As Otto Rank

has put it in his classical chapter on “The relationships between siblings”, incest has to do with power relations, more than just with sexual intercourse (Rank 1992). The incest, as Herbert Maisch has put it, is not caused by the family disintegration, but a symptom of the defected family, especially of the “positive paternalistic” family, where the father is supposed to be a protector of his offspring, and not a sexual predator of his own children (Maisch 1973).

Tudor Giurgiu’s movie, *Love Sick*, came out as one of the most taboo-breaking stories of the recent Romanian cinema, and at this time remains the only feature long movie dealing with homosexual relations in the new cinematic storytelling. Although there are several organizations supporting gay rights in Romania and also a Gay Film Festival organized each year in several cities, a cooperation with the International Gay Film Festival, there are no feature films dealing with these issues in the Romanian cinema (old and new). The singularity of the movie is doubled by the singularity of story. There is more to the film than just the love between two women – in a not so good development the plot develops towards the representation of the twisted dynamics of sentimental relationships inside the family. Breaking the social taboos, Kiki’s brother, Sandu, falls in love with her, while she is experimenting other sources of sexual pleasure for her girlfriend, Alex. This is more than just a story of incest and/or lesbianism, it is a story about the pressures of socially prescribed roles.

Based on the namesake novel of Cecilia Ștefănescu, the movie’s “sick relations” are not between the same sex lovers, but those that prevent them from fulfilling their identity, where the stifling family relations, and the taboos coming from these artificially built bonds, become a source of emotional incapacitation.

Representing and accepting violence against women

The Romanian media (and the international press) publicized many cases of aggression towards women in contemporary society, and this violence is not only taking place in poverty-stricken groups, but is widespread in society. The case of the Health Minister Ovidiu Brânzan, who was accused by his wife, Dana Războiu, a well know television anchor, of physically abusing her, became notorious. She called the police to their house and reported the physical assault, and later divorced him. In this context, it is relevant that the marital rape became a crime in Romania only in the 2000, after it was introduced as a change in the Criminal Code.

Some of the statistics made public by the National Agency for Family Protection (Agenția Națională pentru Protecția Familiei, all data from <http://anitp.mai.gov.ro>) show that the number of cases of domestic violence in Romania was increasing in the period 2004-2009, and about 60,000 cases were recorded nationwide, of which 778 resulted in death. In contemporary Romania one in three women recognizes she has been physically or verbally abused by a male,

and the same records show that 69 women died from domestic violence in 2006 alone, and another 69 in 2007, while the trend is increasing. Women are also more often victims of crimes, in 2006 from a total of 9.372 deaths, 5.160 were women, and in 2007 from a total of 8.787 deaths, 5.794 were women, again a surge in aggression and violent behavior against women.

A national research launched in 2003 by the Partnership for Equality indicate more dramatic numbers: 827 000 women have suffered domestic violence frequently in various forms, 739,000 women were insulted, threatened or humiliated, and more than 70,000 women have been abused in many forms, including sexual. The data concerning the exploitation of women, in the first semester of 2010, indicate that almost 100 girls of ages between 14-17 were trafficked for sex, and over 75 of ages 17-25. In 175 cases the recruiter for sexual benefits was a friend or a person known by the victim. 74% of these women victims were being exploited this way in the streets, in homes, clubs and brothels. It was in 2010 that, for the first time in the last 20 years, the internal trafficking was higher than the external trafficking of women for sexual exploitation.

The second feature film made by Cătălin Mitulescu, *Loverboy* (2011), is based on this context, using real life situations, happening in many Eastern European countries, where young women are drawn into prostitution by means of a technique known as "the lover boy" method. The statistic of the European Commission show an increased trafficking of women in Eastern Europe –

an estimated 500,000 women were forced into prostitution in recent years. This phenomenon was recently "exported" in Romania too, according to the same data provided by The National Agency Against Human Trafficking, usually a handsome, well to do man is pretending to fall in love with girls, who are picked from marginal groups, or from families with difficult material situations, and then are sold for prostitution abroad. This was recently a part of a nation wide Police awareness campaign, conducted under the name "The man with two faces", because, according to the statistics of the Romanian Police, most girls who fall into the trap of these recruiters are between 16 and 25 years old and come from rural areas, mostly from the poorest counties in Romania, mostly from the East and South East of the country. It is relevant that the General Inspectorate of Romanian Police, the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons launched the campaign designed to prevent sexual exploitation of women on July 7, 2009, when Mitulescu's movie was on the project phase, the production itself started at the end of 2010.

Unfortunately Mitulescu's movie can be summarized by the slogan of the campaign run by the Police: "Human trafficking can hide behind a friendly face", since his take on the plot is similar to the awareness film made for the project of trafficking prevention. It is more than obvious that the story takes place in a context similar and even identical with that from the official statistics. Luca (the "Loverboy") lives in Hârșova, one of the

poor cities in Dobrogea, and his job is to seduce teenage girls and then to place them in a network of prostitution. The technique of exploitation is simple and also copied from the Politice statistics. The so called boyfriend is using the feelings of his victim and is convincing her to prostitute herself in order to save him from a hopeless situation. Luca pretends to be "in love" with Veli, then inflicts some wounds on himself, by faking a scooter accident, in order to get his girlfriend's cooperation.

Mitulescu, who was the producer of Florin Șerban's *Dacă vreau să fluier...*, uses as main narrative engine the "chemistry" between the two main actors from that film. If the duo George Piștereanu / Ada Condeescu seemed to function very well as the eternal impossible lovers in the previous movie, here the two actors don't seem to be able to overcome the Romeo and Juliet "made in Romania" look. Their relationship is fractured and impossible to follow and the film fails to be convincing mainly due to Piștereanu's inability to support a complex and ambivalent role. Luca, the hero of *Loverboy*, is portrayed by Piștereanu, who managed to work with Florin Șerban towards one of the most memorable roles in recent cinema, does not have sufficient resources to be more than one of the "hottest" young actors. Playing the role of a local deceiver of minor girls and gang member, Piștereanu portrays a character in a blend and unstable manner. His character construction is nothing but a mix of clichés, he is either James Dean with scooter, slum dog Elvis Presley or

Marlon Brandon with a local twist - but fails to maintain a long-term character unity. Hence his actions, which are not always justified in terms of the central plot, do not allow us to understand his social dynamics. For example, it is not clear what is Luca's position in the hierarchy of traffickers, which are his deep motivation for all his actions, and which is the boundary between consciousness and immorality. Without taking the viewer into the depths of the emotional mechanisms that make boys accept that it is "cool" to sell you girlfriend, the woman you love, as a slave, the movie gives a primitive depiction of woman sexuality, as conditioned by of passion "of the heart" and dependent of male fulfillment. When asked by Luca: "Why do you fuck", she answers "Because I like it, and because you taught me to", and even worse, when later Luca's best friend, Zvori, has the first intercourse with Veli, she is portrayed in a stereotypical manner, as getting sexually aroused by this non-emotional sex. Piștereanu tries hard to bring forward a "double faced" character - half bad, half good, a little of both, but is none of these together. The man without scruples, who only wants to get money, from the opening scene, which presents Luca in a police lineup, where he is supposed to be recognized by one of the girls he previously sold in sexual slavery, and when the girl fails to turn him in he manages to get away from the police, and asks his fellow recruiters to "get rid" of the girl, who later shows up dead in the morgue, becomes in love, and then gets back to his initial behavior.

The best performance belongs to Ada Condeescu – who is very mature for the role she has been distributed in, and proves not only an undeniable acting talent, but it also shows the weak point of Mitulescu’s approach. Instead of going the distance and telling the story from a woman’s point of view, it remains fixed and focused on the male character. Under these circumstances, Ada Condeescu manages to foray deep into the psychology of the character, presenting us with great finesse and human understanding, the drama of Veli, a girl who falls in love and than accepts to prostitute herself for her lover. With this natural insight into the character, worthy of a dedicated actor, Condeescu presents Veli’s transformation from an initially reluctant girl, then a woman in love, and then a prostitute completely overtaken by her own destiny, from which she cannot escape, by building it gradually into the story of all the girls seduced and sold for money. It is here that actually the main character builds, but regrettably the movie was not built around her and this proves to be fatal to the story.

In terms of cinematography there are several remarkable elements *Loverboy*. Marius Panduru’s camera works and the original music by Pablo Malaurie bring forward an atmosphere full of emotional images, each frame having a composition perfectly suited to the story. A desaturate Dobrogea, cold and sometimes sinister, sometimes hot to almost to suffocation, is the background on which we place the figures of Luca and Veli, often suggesting

better mood and sentiments than does the hero actor. Yet this indicates one of the bottlenecks that seems to be the downfall of the “new wave” in the Romanian cinema. This inability to make a believable and universal character and the inability to follow a complex story, with multiple plot points and characters. The secondary characters in *Loverboy* are suffocated by their own sketchiness and are incompletely developed, almost to the limit where we do not understand the dynamics between them and the central story. And this becomes bothersome in the secondary plot point, built around another female character, “Mrs. Savu”, who is a waitress in the bar at the shores of the Danube river (played by Clara Voda in the mother in “*Eu când vreau...*”), who does not have any status or contact with the main action, it is just an accessory in staging of the principal plot point. Still, the movie manages to push Romanian cinema beyond chauvinistic depictions of sexual exploitation as an acceptable phenomenon.

Rape and social abuse in cinema-making

As Sarah Projansky has demonstrated so eloquently in her study on the relationship between popular culture and the representations of rape, that sexual violence against women is often depicted as acceptable and even desirable in the history of cinema, starting with the famous scene in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), by G. W. Griffith and continuing with *Gone with the Wind* (1939), because there

is a narrative functionality to it, rape and violence help the story to move forward (Projanksi 2001). Rape is also one of the most pervasive themes and narratives about women in, both in mainstream cinema and in experimental moviemaking, as it conveys multiple significations, from questions of control, manipulation, power relations, morality, character and so on, with a very easy transfer into social and political issues.

For instance Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1956) posits the question of how rape is viewed, assumed and relevant for the social dynamics, while in Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (Last Year at Marienbad 1961) rape is used to represent the delicate power balance in society, not only in the relations between the sexes. Obviously, the rape narratives have strong bonds with ideological references and one of the most relevant contexts can be found in the Spanish cinema, where social changes (from dictatorship to democracy) have transparent symbolical connections with the violent relationship between men and women. Almodovar's movies, who depict several cases of rape and violence against women (*Kika* 1994; *Atome* 1999; *Hable con ella* 2002), although are brutal portrayals of coercive sexual acts, they are also forms of representation for the lack of independence and of social freedom of women. The rape is linked with powerful political relevance, since it puts forward some of the key issue in feminist criticism, like the vulnerability of women in their relationship with institutional oppression, or, as Dominique Russell suggests (5)

sexual violence is an instrument for the moviemakers to criticize political power.

The cinematic representation of rape (Wolfthal, 1999) was one of the most important topics in the feminist critique of all cultural products, and the cinema is no exception. The depiction of violence against women, which is not described in a derogatory, allows us to say in this context that we can find signs in the Romanian cinema showing that it integrated elements from the women's cinema. For example one of the Romanian directors who was perceived by the young generation of moviemakers as their model, Lucian Pintilie, used in his first film made after 1989, *Balanța* (The Oak 1992), the rape as symbolically charged social criticism. Surrounded by violent and abusive men, and trying to escape the void of a missing father, Nela (played by Maia Morgenstern), is raped by some unknown workers on an industrial facility. This rape, never solved by the Militia, is only a reference to the social rape made acceptable by the Communist regime.

This use of the rape as symbolically charged plot point is recurrent in the new Romanian cinema. One of the most relevant of these movies is *4 luni, 3 săptămâni...*, where the continuous masculine verbal abuse is used as an external representation of the mechanisms of fear designed by the regime, meant to put both women and men under its control. The repressive regime of Ceaușescu, never present in an explicit way in Mungiu's movie, becomes an absent presence by the repressive instruments of the males on screen. The

violence, verbal (and soon physical) put into place by “Mr. Bebe”, is silently accepted by the two young women, in a similar way that the social violence of the regime was accepted by women and men alike throughout society. The most cruel sequence of the movie, its narrative climax, is marked by the request Mr. Bebe makes to the two girls – a demands to make sex with him, besides the regular payment for the illicit abortion. The innocent and naive woman, Otilia, and the voluntary and independent woman, Găbița, are both victims to the brutal exploitation of a man who is beyond their social status and personality traits. Although tacitly accepting the violent act, and, of course being the strongest of the two characters, Găbița, who is raped only for being there for her friend, is an visual/ cinematic extension for the same type of relationship that the Communist leadership had with society: enforcing on the body of the social group, the Communist leadership considered the silent acceptance as an act of submission, yet was confronted with a silent disgust, manifested by the tacit resistance.

Other movies make this connection too explicit, and do not manage to provide more than a reversed propaganda. This is the case with Titus Muntean’s *Caravana cinematografică* (Kino Caravan 2009), where, in the final scene, after a terrible anti-Communist discursive elaboration, the young teacher of the village where the Communist movie caravan arrived, is raped by the Party activist, until then in love with her and trying to develop a

relationship with her. This becomes an over statement, since the rape of the “old world” was explicit from the very moment the Soviet truck carrying Communist made movies arrived in the remote Romanian village, which moves by other rhythms and other reasons.

Still, both scenes described are in clear opposition with the women defined as sexuality tempting and naturally alluring, inciting men to sexual acts. In these movies women are nothing if sexually “perverse”, or requiring violence. In *4 luni, 3 săptămâni...*, one of the women is raped while going through an abortion while in *Kino Caravan* the school teacher is raped by the Party activist when she gets ready to elope with him, with no sexual innuendo and no stimulus for the male characters. Just like in Almodovar’s movie, *Kika*, male violence becomes equivalent with the institutional “rape”, the male’s power over the woman is symbolically equivocated with the power of Party institutions over the individuals, since imposing Communism on the Romanian society was often described as a rape.

One of the first movies to deal explicitly with these issues, and the single movie made by a female director, is *Ryna*. The movie, produced by the film production company started by Mitulescu, Strada Film, deals with clear feminist themes: subjectivity, identity, aggression and social oppression. Ryna (played by Dorotheea Petre) is raised by her father as a boy, and this false identity bears heavily on the young girls. Still, even so, her father uses “the boy” as helper from early childhood,

since he cannot let go of his patriarchal need for a boy heir, and is more concerned with his need for having a working hand in the garage. Poverty, social depression and exploitation relations are the deeply emotional backdrop for Ruxandra Zenide's film, dealing with complex psychological traumas produced by the mentality of a father who wants to change the life of his child. Ryna is story about sexual identity linked with the problem of social identity, because discovering the place of a woman in society coincides with discovering the power relations, and overcoming the identity crisis coincides with discovering the moral crisis of society. She is essentially a captive of a world where women are not the equals of men, even if they behave and act like men. Her only way out is the power of the gaze, and this is why, suggestively enough, Ryna is portrayed as being preoccupied with photography. Her passion for making photos coincides with the

In one of the most symbolically charged scenes of rape in contemporary Romanian cinema, Ryna is being abused by the Mayor of the village while her father lays drunk outside the van he was supposed to drive her home with. When Ryna is brought to the hospital, everybody around her tries to cover up what happened, while the Mayor starts to buy her father's silence by offering him social rewards. Here Zenide finds an very much feminist solution to the narrative, when Ryna offers them all an excuse, inventing a false rapist, and then leaves the patriarchal world behind, walking away with the photo camera on her shoulder.

There are also movies dealing with rape in contexts where women's sexuality is reduced to objectified manifestation of dependence on men. For example the rape scene from *Loverboy*, when Luca forces himself onto Veli, in order to gain control over her, is presented in a sexist manner, since she is seen as wanting the sex act, besides the fact that immediately after we discover that she was a virgin, which is the only fact bringing into Luca a somewhat human attitude towards the girl. Her virginity is what makes her "special" for him, and this also her acceptance of the violent sex act transforms her into a docile emotional partner.

Another example comes from the movie made by a British director who worked his way into the "Romanian new-wave", writer of the screenplay, producer and director of *Katalin Varga* (2009).

Katalin Varga is the typical "rape story", where a "young wife", from the rural Transylvania, is chased away by her husband, together with her teenage boy, due to the discovery of a terrible secret. The secret which pushes Katalin to kill is that ten years ago two rapists traumatized her, and she has a child procreated after this aggression. Insufficiently treated, the drama of the main character in does not justify in any way her actions, who are inconsistent with of the situation. Together with Orban, her young boy, Katalin starts a long voyage in order to find those who assaulted her, yet the motivation is not profound enough to generate emotional connections with the character.

While Katalin Varga is played by the excellent theater actress, Hilda Peter, who has made outstanding roles at the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj, the other characters are caricature-like figures. The secondary actors have very poorly developed roles, while the rapist who left Katalin pregnant, played by Tibor Palffy, another very good stage actor, has the look of a Leonardo da Vinci from the Balkans. Some scenes are unparalleled by their frightening artificiality, as is the scene in which Antal lies naked in bed, then stands naked in the kitchen, as if he is an actor in a movie and not a peasant in the country side. Katalin herself is placed in a very uncertain space, she is neither in the rural environment, nor in the urban world. Katalin and Orban are most of the time sleeping, rather than developing relationship, and are portrayed arriving in various hamlets in Transylvania, rather than interacting.

The movie relies heavily on the shooting, which gives it a very presumptuous look of the "new wave style", only to become annoying, when some shots are repeated *ad nauseam* as we see, over and over Katalin and her son passing through the hills and forests of Transylvania in their cart, without any narrative support. In most situations the camera movements are unwarranted, and when Strikland's movie gets heavy on mythical-magical elements, such as trees whose presence is purely random, the narrative appears to be a mimicking of classic scenes from Andrei Tarkovsky's cinema, who were insufficiently processed by a director overly anxious to confirm.

The most important visual and narrative piece of the film, Katalin telling her story to Antal and his wife, while they are rowing on a boat, on a lake, when the rain pours on them out of the blue – has no narrative continuity. The plot just happens, there is no construction towards this point and we do not understand why the three get on that boat and why, suddenly, Katalin starts talking about the rape, and even why they do not react to any of her declarations in the sequence. The camera work is also aberrant, when Katalin is speaking the camera takes 380 degrees rotation, as if the boat would spin in a circle, and then we move to counter shots with her interlocutors, while the camera moves to the rhythm of the boat. Another insufficiently developed narrative is that of Orban's wife who commits suicide after she finds out what her husband has done in the past, without any tension, internal and external to lead us to this point. Also following Katalin's trail is a team of Romanian police officers who, ultimately kill her, or the family of Gergely kills her, the narrative is totally vague.

Without going deeper into the discussions about the narrative inconsistencies, there is an important monologue, where Katalin compares herself (and, implicitly, all the women going through a rape experience) with Christ, putting some fundamental questions: what is forgiveness and how can it be obtained in such trauma, where does an external act end and where the subjective, internal nature is modified by it, how are we defined by powerlessness in violent contexts?

Women and power – empowering women

The Romanian contemporary cinema shows very few instances where the women characters are socially strong in and of themselves, where they not pushed around and treated as objects of desire, or where they clearly assert their identity. In most of the movies, as is the case with *Cea mai fericită fată din lume* (The Happiest Girl in the World, 2009), directed by Radu Jude, women are represented in their vulnerability. “The Happiest Girl in the World” is supposed to be Delia, who wins a prize in juice labels contest, yet cannot enjoy her winning because everybody around her is trying to force her do something she does not want to. She is passively “resisting” to the power imposed on her by men, her father, the advertising director, the marketing managers and so on, while authority, manifested in the form of male authoritarianism, becomes explicitly comical and parodic.

Like the actions of Otilia and Găbița, who can be performed as forms of rebellion against an authoritarian regime, imposing on women a behavior (sexual and reproductive) that is considered unacceptable, there is another example for this type of woman’s resistance against male authority, in the most recent movie made by Radu Mihăileanu. *La source des*

femmes (The Source 2011) proves to be clearly constructed in the logic of women’s cinema. The story of the women in a North African village, demanding their husbands to provide for the water they use to be forced to bring, is clearly taking after Aristophanes’ play. Yet the retelling of “Lysistrata” in a modern context has a strong link to contemporary women issues. It was always a woman’s job to bring the water from the distant well, yet the women were able to impose a love strike, just as in Lysistrata, in order to force the men to decide to do this work themselves. The power of women – as they organize a sit-in – comes from their solidarity, a solidarity threatened by mindless violence (a husband is beating one of the strikers), or by brutal social conventions (another woman risks to be outcasted). This “battle of the sexes” has an ideological outcome, as Radu Mihăileanu is reportedly to have told Leïla Bekhti, the main character of *The Source*: ‘You are a contemporary Joan of Arc; you set off a revolutionary movement, about love and women’s place in the world’ (Dupont 2011). And this is clearly one of the most powerful statements about feminism and its influence on women’s cinema. Cinema-making must go beyond its entertainment purpose and fulfilling a social role of awareness and conscience raising.

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