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PRODUCING SPACE(S) THROUGH POETRY: GEOFEMINISM IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN POETRY

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyse recent tendencies in contemporary Romanian poetry from a geofeminist perspective. This specific form of feminism emerged within humanistic geography and socio-spatial theories as a response towards the “masculinist particularism” (Michèle Le Dœuff) of western geography as an academic discipline. By denouncing the postulated exhaustive nature of geographical knowledge, geofeminism’s programme is to rearticulate the traditional social space from the perspective of a cartography produced by flexible gender relations and performances. For its geopolitical position within the globalising phenomenon powered by uneven influences, the Romanian literary scene appears to be urging to consolidate the post-communist void regarding feminist theory through manifesto-texts and queer poetry. I rely my study specifically on poetic works from the frACTalia publishing house, due to their affirmed left-wing feminist consciousness. By following the factors involved in producing a space for the post-socialist Romanian queer experience, I undertake an analysis of the specific methods through which geofeminism is rendered in accordance with the need of a new poetic vocabulary and praxis.

Keywords: geofeminism, contemporary Romanian poetry, geocriticism, post-socialist.

The background of the *multi-marginalisation condition*

When analysing Romanian contemporary poetry, one is faced with the challenge of pinpointing its course of action and inscribing it in a transnational network. The difficulty in framing local feminist discourse within this context arises from the historical delay enforced by the totalitarian system, which has caused an obsession with synchronising with Western feminism and fostered an inferiority complex leading to the emergence of conservative zones. However, in the last ten years, there has been a growing concern among feminist authors to depict local social realities in literature, often from an engaged left-wing position. With a well-structured and coherent program, *frACTalia* publishing house withstands the mainstream “synchronized” feminist trend, rejecting what Mihaela Miroiu terms “room-service feminism” (Miroiu 82). The aim of this paper is to highlight that the need for a specific and local form of feminism represents an urgent matter manifested through concrete projects (platforms, workshops, lectures) and imaginative ideas emerging from literary discourse. By acknowledging poetry’s theoretical and visionary capacities to imagine alternative spaces, we can unravel new spatial configurations and reconfigurations. I argue that the geofeminist lens, although mostly applied to architecture and urban planning, could provide a productive socio-political reading of Romanian contemporary poetry. This is grounded in the idea that “sharing thought-images may be the nearest possible practice to thinking-in-common ... thinking through shared experiences and shared questions” (Stavrides 215). Furthermore, the geofeminist perspective operates with flexible and non-objective tools that could bolster Romanian feminism and queer identities while calling attention to the politically subversive representations of spaces and spatial relations. Geofeminism’s program is to reformulate and rethink the prior canonical positivist geography on the grounds that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 18).

Audre Lorde’s quote is monumental for the Anglo-American feminist climate of the 1980s when the need for an intersectional feminism, known as “difference feminism” (Iancu et al. 23), was immediate as a reaction to liberal equality feminism. Unfortunately, this demand reverberates only after thirty years in Romanian culture and remains entrenched in a multi-marginalized position as follows:

i. Depreciating poetry's agency over prose by associating poetry "almost solely with the expressive Romantic lyric" (Newcomer 218) and reducing it to a very personal and sentimental experience;

ii. The misconceptions and distrust about leftist ideology and theory caused by the previous totalitarian regime;

iii. Confining the Romanian queer community not only to a minority but also to subrepresentation in the public and cultural scene;

iv. The (semi)peripheral geopolitical position within the capitalist world-system.

There are a wide set of considerations that support my choice for using a geofeminist framework in surveying poetry's recent tendencies. Starting from the very acceptance of the denomination, *geofeminism* appears to lack recognition among academic works, whereas the field of cultural geographies mostly employs the adjacent formula of "feminist" or "gender geography." The fact that "the term 'geofeminism' has fallen out of favour among cultural geographers for being delimited and conscriptive" (Mulligan 4) is notable because it displays the failure to be acknowledged as an interdisciplinary method of analysis, specifically as an alternative discourse that can augment and further articulate the geocentered approach to literature known as geocriticism.

Nevertheless, beginning in the early 1970s in the United States and the United Kingdom, feminist geographers initiated debates and criticisms about the underrepresentation of women in both the academic and non-academic geographical fields. This movement served as a delayed echo of the liberating feminist movements from the 1960s. As Zelinsky describes it, "the strange case of the missing female geographer" (1973) gives rise to major biassed implications within the geographical tradition focused around masculinism, more precisely, "the work which, while claiming to be exhaustive, forgets about women's existence and concerns itself only with the position of men" (Le Dœuff 42). As Gillian Rose argues in her study *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993):

Several have commented that, in the words of Liz Bondi and Mona Domosh, geographers too see themselves as 'detached explorers' who produce 'transcendent visions' of neutral truth untouched by the contexts in which they are produced. (...) they also desire a whole knowledge of the world. Geographical knowledge aims to be

exhaustive. (...) This project required just that rational, objective gaze at the world which so many feminists have associated with the dominant masculinities. (Rose 7)

The feminist discourse within geographical research was not fully accredited and this one-sided polemic was rather a set of “brush-offs” (Rose 3) than a dialogue from a position of equality. In her essay from 1991, *Flexible Sexism*, Doreen Massey draws attention to the undermining of feminism and feminist accomplishments in Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and in David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), anticipating that these two works will become the two pillars for geographical critical discourse.¹ Moreover, she holds this intentional omission responsible for disseminating and shaping the subsequent limited concepts and methods used in higher education and in the academe, in general. The main claim of geofeminism lays in its capacity to articulate “stretched out” (Massey 2) social interrelations in a constant regeneration because it is precisely this heterogeneity that is celebrated by contemporary feminists, as patriarchal power does not act monolithically, but on fluid and uneven levels, which offers the possibility of creating forms of resistance that empower themselves by cultivating a strategic mobility.

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¹ As the analysis undertaken in this chapter is inevitably chronological and general, it should be noted that the geographical debate in postmodernism is much more complex and is not limited to the issues I have outlined above, but to multiple responses and polemics over time. Edward W. Soja, for example, would revisit his socio-spatial project in 1996 with the work *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, which proposes a much more integrative methodology. Providing a productive response to the critique of feminist geographers, Soja integrates geofeminist discourse and further encourages constructive debates in critical human geography, understanding intersectionality and the gendered space as tools of resistance and transformation, as active factors in the construction of lived spatial experience - “thirdspace”. Moreover, the geofeminist position also accepts external influences and values them through recontextualisation, an evocative example being Doreen Massey herself who takes up Henri Lefebvre's theoretical model. Nevertheless, I will concentrate on the principal debates since they have shaped the geofeminist agenda.

interrelations in constant regeneration. It is precisely this heterogeneity that is celebrated by contemporary feminists, as patriarchal power does not act monolithically but on fluid and uneven levels, offering the possibility of creating forms of resistance that empower themselves by cultivating strategic mobility:

The shift in feminist theories from focusing on identity as women to differences between women has mostly come from critiques of existing feminist theory as replicating hierarchies of patriarchy. (...) Feminist questioning of assumed identity categories is characterised by a move from seeing identity as sameness, as recognition, to sexual identity as location, as something formed in relation to other identity variables. (Hemmings 39)

It is important to note that the historical course of feminist geography is characterised by unevenness, plurality, different subjects, and perspectives that challenge the construction of power relations and spatial dynamics. By acknowledging and exposing the place in which one's discourse is materialising, knowledge can become fertile and interconnected. This approach not only reveals the specific factors that lead to the formulation of theory but also contributes to the development of local communities, fostering dialogue and inciting direct action: "It is now widely acknowledged that knowledge is 'situated', reflecting its cultural, political and intellectual contexts as well as the personal values of those engaged in its creation" (Garcia Ramon & Monk 1).

Feminist Geography and Geofeminism in Romania

When it comes to defining the status of geographical research in Romania, it is no surprise that important stages have been missed, making the current development in this field come across as disjointed. The recent study by Romanian geographer and researcher Elena-Manuela Bîrsănuș, *Research Topics in Feminist and Gender Geography from 1975 to 2021: A Brief Assessment of Romania's Status* (2022), compiles data and topics to achieve a global perspective of this geographical subfield and an insight into the local research dynamics. Using quantitative methods and instruments, Bîrsănuș generates a statistical perspective by accessing and organising Web of Science's database. From this overview, she classifies three moments in Feminist and Gender Geography according to the main tendency and topics: the substantiation stage (1975-1989), the diversification stage (1990-2009), and the 'boom' stage (2010-2021). She correlates each stage with the feminist waves, the first

one being assigned to the second wave of feminism, which in Romania did not happen:

Thus, in trying to reach the ongoing status of international research in Feminist Geography, Romanian geographers skipped the general and extremely useful economic, social and political gender bias analysis (the path undertaken by international research before 2000, respectively) and stepped directly into current “popular” topics. (Bîrsănuț 15)

While “the cultural turn” (Bîrsănuț 12) in Western geography was initiated by social movements and activism and it gained ground into the present-day intersectionality, in Romania the “grassroots” feminism did not actually take place. Therefore, just as in the case of Feminist Geography, Romanian mainstream feminism is not a metabolised form, but mostly an imported neoliberal orientation whose origin could be traced from “the European integration process [that] brought with it a new brand of feminism: «room service political feminism»” (Iancu et al. 7). The lack of localised feminism is also felt in the reactions to implementing new topics in the higher education curricula initiated after integration into the EU: “In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the personal became political within the Romanian transition as a consequence of the room-service political feminism, brought on by the European ascension process” (Iancu et al. 26). Lacking a background and an extensive understanding of gender identities and social representation allows a hostile attitude towards the scientific credibility of these domains, emphasised by the EU’s forced regulations that are not based on a contextualising critique (Voiculescu). Aside from the imported discourse, a stigma is built on conservative views, increasing the vicious circle of “the anti-gender current in Eastern Europe which is culturally and politically a rebuttal of EU influence” (Voiculescu 41). Moreover, the antagonism also comes from a place of sceptical mythicizing, for “nationalists and social conservatives will inevitably assert that ‘feminism’ and ‘gender’ are part of a ‘Western plot’ to depopulate and weaken the East European nation-state” (Ghodsee 22).

Although scholarly literature on Feminist Geography in Romania began to reconstruct appropriate and efficient methods to address subjects such as sexuality, class, violence, queer communities, and different types of bodies (ill, pregnant, disabled, etc.) in the 2000s, intersectionality is yet to be fully developed. The direct implications between geography and literature have not been analysed in depth.

While geocritical readings of Romanian literature have been practised², a geofeminist approach could further uncover socio-political dynamics by using appropriate tools and contribute to the consolidation of a contextualised feminism. An example of literary analysis through a geofeminist framework is represented by the work of Romanian researcher Alina Bako. Her 2020 study, *Geofeminism in Romanian Fiction. An Introduction*, aims to trace the cartographies of literary works from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in accordance with the portrayal of women's status, power, and education, thus constructing female identities in spatial representations. She notes that "Geofeminism centralises precisely the manner in which 'the place' is mapped from the perspective of female characters/women in literary works" (Bako 113).

To address the non-Romanian perspective on spatial representations of gender and sexuality in Romania, the recently published research by Italian author Elisa Rolle, *Queer Places: Eastern Europe: Retracing the Steps of LGBTQ People Around the World* (2024), provides insight into how LGBTQ traditions are perceived from an outside point of view. The volume intends to inventory concrete LGBTQ-friendly places, such as hotels, bars, and restaurants, as well as LGBTQ symbolic representations in history, key figures, architectural projects, and museums hosting artists from the community. Under the umbrella term "Eastern Europe," Romania's chapter in Rolle's volume fails to present a realistic and accurate embodiment of queer places. It is confined to a rudimentary and romanticised nature, mostly presenting monasteries and fortified villages and churches. Only a few queer figures, such as Alexandru Bogdan-Pitești and Mișu Văcărescu (both from the 19th century), and public spaces are mentioned, but unfortunately, they are not actualized and do not function as landmarks for the current state of Romania's LGBTQ+ community.

The urgency for a localised feminism

The "top-down" feminist model invested by neo-liberal capitalism remains the dominant logic of emancipation that shapes the mainstream feminist discourse, despite efforts by NGOs and academia to formulate arguments for a specific and

² Many other studies have been conducted on a geocritical analysis of Romanian literature. See Conkan, Marius, and Daiana Gârdan. "Space in Literature and Literature in Space. Introduction." *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 6.1 (2020); Modoc, Emanuel, Nicoleta Strugari, Mihnea Bălăci, Radu Vancu, Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga. "Geography of the Romanian novel (1933-1947): the national area". *Transylvania*, no. 9 (2021): 10-17; Susarenco, Teodora. "Geocriticism: pentru o interpretare a romanului românesc despre Revoluției de la 1989". *Transylvania*, no. 11 (2018): 65-69.

localised feminism. Even so, the 2000s represented an optimal moment for formulating feminist theories following the fall of the dictatorship in 1989. Mihaela Miroiu has been a key figure in humanistic and philosophical feminism:

Another particularity of the Romanian climate is the fact that academic feminism precedes and often inspires the existence of a female movement. (...) In general, in Romania, most of the modernisations have been realised through top-down strategy and have been rather intellectual inspired than from mass-requests. Feminism was no exception.³ (Miroiu 36)

However, I argue that the “top-down” model is not producing long-term effects for the realities of Romanian society. It is countered by radical feminist discourse from literary sources that produce a shift in the dynamics of influence, addressing both the large public and the intellectualised area through theoretically and philosophically based statements. The “feminism-by-design” (Ghodsee 20) appears to be a temporary solution for creating a European interface, as its program is not coherent and allows for grey zones where malpractice, corruption, and the “negatively absorbed” (Farmatu 123) feminist discourse are often present. As Mihaela Săsărman argued in an interview about a possible democratic backsliding:

‘backsliding’ suggests that the evaluation of «progress» needs to be done not only in comparison to other countries in Europe and to general benchmarks, but that «progress» should be seen as a more contingent process, through an examination of the local trajectory of gender equality as a public and a political issue. (Chirițoiu 166)

From an individualistic and economic point of view, liberal feminism is not addressing the large category of socially oppressed women and remains rigid in its “ivory tower,” achieving only a narrow focus on identity politics. According to *ec.europa.eu/eurostat*, the “At risk of poverty rate or social exclusion” recorded in Romania in 2022 was 34.4%, and for females, the same report indicated a percentage of 35.9%. This is representative of a post-socialist state like Romania because of its (semi)peripheral condition. As Ghodsee argues:

³ “O altă particularitate a mediului românesc este aceea că feminismul academic precede și adesea inspiră existența unei mișcări de femei.(...) În genere în România, multe modernizări au fost făcute prin strategia „de sus în jos” și au fost inspirate mai degrabă intelectual decât de solicitări de masă. Feminismul nu a făcut excepție. În perioada interbelică, de exemplu, feminismul politic românesc a fost reprezentat de femeile care aparțineau unei elite intelectuale.” (My translation)

Just as women's emancipation was conflated with communism and stridently rejected in the early 1990s, today that gender equality, reproductive rights, and anti-discrimination laws are too easily conflated with Western economic imperialism, and this is what has led to the growing gender backlash throughout the region, as well as the rise of new tropes of nationalist hypermasculinity. (Ghodsee 22)

I propose a geofeminist (close-)reading of Romanian contemporary poetry, specifically works from *frACTalia* publishing house, because of their extensive capacity to encapsulate and render both activism and theoretical support in response to the aggravating situation of the Romanian cultural and literary scene, "as macho and misogynistic attitudes intensify as militant feminism grows" (Farmatu 125). As a mutual understanding between Romanian left-wing authors and activists, the struggle for building and imagining an anti-corporate feminism is manifested as a common theme, similar to the "Feminism for the 99%" manifesto.

This feminism does not limit itself to «women's issues» as they are traditionally defined. Standing for all who are exploited, dominated, and oppressed, it aims to become a source of hope for the whole of humanity. That is why we call it *a feminism for the 99 percent*. (...) feminism of the 99 percent is emerging from the crucible of practical experience, as informed by theoretical reflection. (Arruzza et al. 14)

For the local literary scene, especially for poetry, the theoretical foundation is brought to the surface through the ideological agenda of militant feminist poetry. This has been occurring more noticeably since 2015, when the economic situation of the country began to recover after the economic crisis of 2008 (Farmatu 123). Ongoing debates about the theoretical/political versus the aesthetic value of contemporary poetry have become a focal point when discussing feminist poetry, often from a scandalised perspective: "Something in the configuration of the literary world has repressed such projects from happening. In fact, a literaturocentric conservatism still haunts the field today" ⁴ (Bâlici). However, we should aim to validate poetry as an anti-systemic and alternative theoretical discourse, opening possibilities for an awareness-raising development of literature that could consolidate local feminism, liberating it from the rigid criteria of aesthetic autonomy.

⁴ "Ceva din configurația lumii literare a împiedicat realizarea unor astfel de proiecte. De fapt, un conservatorism literaturocentric bântuie și astăzi câmpul." (My translation)

In this direction, Caitlin Newcomer raises the question about the future development of feminist poetics in relation to producing and shaping emergent theories:

One of the things a focus on poetics can offer feminist theories is a space specifically dedicated to openness, to a perpetual state of becoming, a blurring of boundaries and lines that question arbitrary disciplinary, generic, and philosophical divides. (Newcomer 223)

This could be a feasible solution that allows us to survey the literary spatialities and spatial identities towards further investigation of social, political, and economic issues. Poetics, as a mediator between poetry and theory, thrives on stimulating the “questioning, investigating, testing, and changing writing praxis” (Newcomer 222). This type of literature has the power to reclaim its agency through “the opening of a possibility to be something else, a possibility of desalination that could raise questions about and to question the human nature and its potential”⁵ (Șerbănescu 11). Although it represents the introduction of speculative fiction, Șerbănescu’s statements work as an alternative medium that provides instruments for compiling theory and literary praxis: “a reconfiguration of montages for the purpose of an action that is undirected by the laws of bourgeois economy, an action that would be the result of the fully manifestation of the possible being”⁶ (Șerbănescu 9). The need for an emerging literary function as a “theoretical, political and even a therapeutical compass”⁷ (Bâlici) is enhanced by Caitlin Newcomer’s argument:

If we accept that poetics can produce theory (rather than simply enact it) then we necessarily give an increased validation to the need for poetry and poetics in the twenty-first-century feminist landscape. Poetics, then, does not just explain an already existent approach or theory; it can also open up new pathways for theory itself. (Newcomer 225)

By looking at two recent poetry volumes, both published in 2022, *Red Pilled Utopia* by Ada Eliane and *Orlando Postuman* by Nóra Ugron, I hope to document the manner in which queer feminist left-wing poetry revisits social concepts and personal histories to claim a personal and political identity manifested through

⁵ “Deschiderea unei posibilități de a fi altceva, o posibilitate de dezalienare care să trezească întrebări cu privire la (și să pună sub semnul întrebării) „natura umană” și potențialul ei”. (My translation)

⁶ “O reconfigurarea a asamblajelor în sensul unei acțiuni nedirecționate de legile economiei burgheze, o acțiune care să fie rezultatul unei manifestări depline a ființei posibile.” (My translation)

⁷ “Pe post de compas teoretic, politic și chiar terapeutic.” (My translation)

“common spaces (...) produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in” (Stavrides 54). Furthermore, considering the substantial number of radical works published in recent years, I contend that frACTalia achieved its most coherent program after 2020, when the publishing house clarified its political stance and established concrete publication standards. Similarly, in 2022, frACTalia initiated a public manifesto aimed at fostering solidarity among left-wing feminist writers, advocating for visibility, access, and recognition in the literary scene⁸. As announced in the title itself, *Red Pilled Utopia* by Ada Eliane retraces the steps of uncertain and lost dream territories that not only represent a queer future but also offer a questioning and open critique towards the existing political system, a synthesis that does not confine the utopia to a solely escapist and imaginary realm. The book opens with a foreword entitled “Queer,” inviting readers to discover the world of queer memory in unison with the poem:

When for the first time I realised that this world is created from ether

based on a system of universal and imperfectly defined values

of principles, rules, laws, concepts and ideas

I was left with little hope.

.....

remembering that somewhere someone has the same experience as me⁹ (Eliane 5)

By exposing the metanarrative, Ada Eliane places the two worlds in material opposition – the ‘real’ world is a phantasmagoria, an artefact, whereas her utopia is tangible and true. The first set of poems falls under the section *Călătorii* [Travels] and includes two poems named *Viena* and *Berlin*. In both of these poems, the memory of a domestic childhood place overlaps the present-day metropolises through

⁸ See:

<https://www.facebook.com/fractaliagrup/posts/pfbido2HERfZDxQaBHRyNr9draDZwJu4svaQjbHL6M7k42cadMLVFw9CY1iqdNQECuJaHv7l> and <https://cutra.ro/catre-o-lume-literara-mai-blanda-neasuprtoare-manifestul-scriitoarelor-feministe-de-stanga/>

⁹ “Când pentru prima dată am realizat că această lume a fost zămisliță din eter/ pe baza unui set de valori primordiale și imperfect definite/ de principii, reguli, legi, concepte și idei/ nu am mai rămas cu prea multă speranță/ (...) / Amintindu-mi că undeva, cineva trece prin aceleași experiențe ca mine” (My translation)

the recurrent image of the grandparents. However, in the *Berlin* poem, a different attitude starts to materialise:

in dream, such as in reality, I ventured out
 in the most obscure bars
 and I drank my coffee in peace in a
 smoked corner¹⁰ (...) (Eliane 13)

In this poem, Ada Eliane challenges the common attitude towards the uncertainty of public space by finding comfort in hidden zones. Usually, from a geofeminist point of view “Women’s fear of men takes on a geographic logic. We figure out which places to avoid, rather than which people. (...) These spaces populate our personal mental maps of safety and fear” (Kern 127). However, in the poem *M de la Mitologica* [M from Mythological] the public streets represent a *topos* of anxiety:

That sometimes
 I will accomplish maybe to shine,
 As I wished from the very beginning,
 In front of Unirea store,
 In the middle of the street,
 In the skin of a being fallen from the moon¹¹ (Eliane 20).

The Unirea store, a commercial complex in Bucharest built during the communist regime, is representative of the spatial specificity of major Eastern-European cities. Between the epitome building of consumerism and opulence and the outsider or alien-esque identity emerges a contrasting image of representative social interaction, as Lefebvre affirmed that “(social) space is a (social) product” (26). Still, it is not a simple production of spatial meaning and experience, but an informational transfer between the two agents, expressing the repressed longing for a public gender-identity

¹⁰ “În vis, ca și în realitate, m-am aventurat/ în cele mai lăturalnice baruri/ și mi-am băut cafeaua liniștită într-un/ colț afumat” (My translation)

¹¹ “La un moment dat, că voi reuși poate să strălucesc./ Așa cum mi-am dorit de la început,/ În fața magazinului Unirea,/ În mijlocul străzii,/ În pielea unei ființe căzute de pe lună” (My translation)

performativity. It is a “way of thinking in terms of an ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations, and it forces into view the real multiplicities of space-time” (Massey 4).

Aside from the recurrent theme of the grandparents as symbols of childhood, past, memory, and loss, another recurrent image is constructed by the verse “at the horizon line”¹² (Eliane 17), which, through repetition, plays the role of a vital resort, a guide point for the queer world:

but in unison
with your own spirit
with the community spirit
with the revolutionary spirit
because, as I arrive at the horizon line
I glimpse
at a world exactly how I imagined it
when I was little
a world in which I will not be fearing¹³ (Eliane 17)

or in:

As an intergenerational rite
We dream as our great-grandmothers have dreamed
.....
As our great-grandmothers we will not hide from anything
That is sun-touched, we advance with conviction
To the spiritual horizon line, where we believe or feel¹⁴ (Eliane 33)

¹² “La linia orizontului” (My translation)

¹³ “ci în tandem/ cu spiritul propriu/ cu spiritul comunitar/ cu spiritul revoluționar/ pentru că ajunsă la linia orizontului/ întrezăresc/ o lume așa cum mi-o imaginam/ când eram mică/ o lume în care nu-mi va fi frică” (My translation)

These poems reconstruct a feeling of belonging to a community born through an alternative historical tradition, from generation to generation, from the female inheritance line. The discursive generation of autobiography is supported by the common factor of the “horizon line” that functions as an instrument of revendication and continuity, as Medeea Iancu expresses the need for identification:

There is someone like me in every school.

There is someone like me in every store.

There is someone like me at every public lecture.

There is someone like me in every bar & park.

There is someone like me every night walking down the street.

There is someone like me in every orphanage & village.¹⁵ (Iancu 49)

Medeea Iancu’s feminist agenda is well-known in the Romanian literary scene, as she has been one of the most vocal feminists since the early 2000s. It is not unexpected that many authors from *frACTalia* claim her as a major influence, as she addresses a wide range of issues regarding women’s rights as well as the struggles of writing in the male-dominated scene of the early 2000s.

Also published in 2022, the debut volume *Orlando Postuman* [*Posthuman Orlando*] by activist, editor, and author Nóra Ugron collects and organises the well-known author’s programme, previously manifested in public lectures, literary workshops, online platforms, community work, and in the literary circle of *Cenaclul X* [The X Cenacle], which forms an important non-institutional and non-hierarchical collective for the autochthonous literary and cultural scene. Nóra Ugron’s project explores the manifestations of love, death, and mourning from a fluid and empathetic point of view that builds: “For what does love mean after all, if not the transformation of change into new spaces of loving, keeping what was before”¹⁶

¹⁴ “Precum o cutumă transmisă intergenerațional/ Visăm așa cum visau și străbunicile noastre/ (...) Ca străbunicile noastre, noi nu ne ferecăm de tot/ Ce este atins de soare, noi mergem înainte cu îndârjire/ Spre linia orizontului spiritual, unde credem sau simțim” (My translation)

¹⁵ “Este cineva ca mine în fiecare școală./ Este cineva ca mine în fiecare magazin./ Este cineva ca mine la fiecare lectură publică./ Este cineva ca mine în fiecare bar & parc./ Este cineva ca mine în fiecare seară mergând pe stradă./ Este cineva ca mine în fiecare orfelinat & sat.” (My translation)

¹⁶ „Până la urmă ce este iubirea, dacă nu transformarea schimbării în spații noi de a iubi, păstrând ce a fost.” (My translation)

(Ugron 8). As Iovănel once affirmed in an interview addressing the queer novel *Dezrădăcinare* [*Displacement*] by Sașa Zare: “Simultaneously, it tries to provoke/ to preserve rather a reparative critique than a destructive one. A critique involved in the process of empathic understanding rather than in a violent evaluation”¹⁷ (Iovănel). Because of its evocative capacity to create literary geographies by imagining the death of the Capitalocene and alternative ways of existing-in-common, but also because of its construction of a specific poetic language, this collection of poems best reflects Newcomer’s hypothesis:

Poetry as a medium has a unique transformative potential. Poetry both studies and activates new potentialities in language – constantly attuned to the ways in which language makes material intersecting webs of history and power. Poetry – because of its close attention to the ways language makes meaning – has the power to reflect and form our frames of consciousness and perception. Poetry, therefore, (especially poetry that questions the sociocultural operations of tradition, that seeks to break down boundaries at the level of both form and content), has the potential to shape and reshape our very conceptions of reality. In a linguistically mediated world, poetry – perhaps the literary genre most attuned to the intricacies of language and linguistically created meaning—offers a theoretical space from which paradigms have the potential to be re-made. (Newcomer, 222)

Nóra Ugron is not only initiating a productive intersectional debate, but she is also trying to test possible solutions and alternatives placed in a post-apocalyptic setting: “resistance could be a fallen tear/ in the fire of deindustrialised and dead cities”¹⁸ (Ugron 16). The spatiality overpasses the mainstream and universalised geography, reconfiguring the specific post-industrial Romanian city, regarding which Iancu Alice, Oana Băluță, Alina Dragolea, and Bogdan Florian argue that:

this mono-industrial profile is a rather important element for describing Romanian cities, which have been developing around a single industrial giant employer. During the communist period, such cities were developed in an effort to quickly develop a national industry. Most of these cities have been the hardest hit by the fast economical changes which took place during the last twenty years, with the closure of

¹⁷ “Dar încearcă în același timp să provoace/întrețină și o critică mai degrabă reparativă decât distructivă. O critică mai interesată de procesul înțelegerii empatică decât de evaluarea violentă.” (My translation)

¹⁸ “Rezistența poate să fie o lacrimă căzută/ pe focul orașelor dezindustrializate și moarte” (My translation)

the entire or part of the industrial employer which was the only job provider for the entire city. Thus mass job losses happened almost overnight, with very little if any support from the state. Even though these events were not central to our research, their influence upon individual lives was evident in our interviews. (Iancu et al. 46n22)

Urgon continues:

resistance could be a lake

in which we bathe at full moon

that reflects our broken faces

resistance could be a lake

that covers our wounds with her dirty water

she covers us and heals us and she doesn't separate us

resistance could be the mirror of the hazy lake

which unites us, thousands of dishonoured exiles

and in which all emperors drown.¹⁹ (Urgon 17)

The “transposing into a transgressive poetic language” (Panait) functions towards creating a non-hierarchical network between human and non-human beings, a symbiotic network among ecosystems and sources of memory and commemoration. The fluid identities forge the depths of pain and suffering and achieve a communion outside the preexistent boundaries, creating multiple, interconnected, rhizomatic and porous places (Massey).

The “transposing into a transgressive poetic language”²⁰ (Panait) functions toward creating a non-hierarchical network between human and non-human beings, a symbiotic network among ecosystems, and sources of memory and commemoration. The fluid identities forge the depths of pain and suffering and

¹⁹ “rezistența poate să fie un lac/ în care ne scăldăm la lumina lunii pline/ care ne reflectă fețele noastre rupte/ rezistența poate să fie un lac/ care ne acoperă rănilor cu apa ei murdară/ ne acoperă și ne vindecă și nu ne separă/ rezistența poate să fie oglinda lacului tulburat/ care ne unește, mii de exilați și dezonoarați/ și-n care se scufundă toți împărații” (My translation)

²⁰ “transpunerea într-un limbaj poetic transgresiv” (My translation)

achieve a communion outside the preexisting boundaries, creating multiple, interconnected, rhizomatic, and porous places (Massey). By practices of translation, comparability, difference, and acceptance, the spatiality of the poems remains open to multiple interpretations, creating and expanding the “commoning” (Stavrídes). Personal space, micro details, vast forests, the open sky, and the memory of love all represent for these poems the definition of the term “home,” because “the worlds of commoning are worlds of movement” (Stavrídes 32), of hybridization and of systemic heterogeneity against the privatising logic of capitalism:

I felt at home in your gaze

that was meowing for attention and play in the door’s corner

that was constantly scratching my hands

and my hearts.

I was at home in your gaze that was reflecting the face of the green forest

so abundantly it was dripping in my lap

the moisture of the morning.

I felt at home in you,

glass-blade reaching for me

tree branch from which I gather the fruits

yarrow fading on the windowsill.

In you, raven that gathers the leftovers I left after me at the shore.

In you, person that sits next to me²¹ (Ugron 30-31)

²¹ “M-am simțit acasă în privirea ta/ care în colțul ușii mieuna după atenție și după joacă,/ care constant mă zgâria, pe mâini/ și pe inimi./ Eram acasă în privirea ta care reflecta chipul pădurii înverzite/ cu așa abundență că îmi picura pe poale/ umezeala de dimineață./ M-am simțit acasă în tine,/ fir de iarbă care se înclină spre mine,/ creangă de pe care culeg păduceii,/ coada șoricelului care se usucă pe pervaz./ În tine, cioară, care ia nucile rămase după mine pe mal./ În tine, persoană, care se așează lângă mine” (My translation)

Conclusion

Even if it is still marginalised and stigmatised, the Romanian left-wing feminist/queer discourse represents the only opponent to both the appropriation of feminism by the mainstream sphere characterised by neo-liberal and corporate rhetoric and also an opponent to conservative anti-genderism movements. The imported “feminism-by-design” (Ghodsee 20) only deepens the disjunction between social realities (the large number of Romanians at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with an even larger number for Romanian women) and the discourse present in media as a rising trend. This appropriation only gives rise to grey zones of malpractice and corruption that are even more difficult to tackle. However, after 2020, *frACTalia* publishing house’s programme began to focus more and more on depicting social realities and on providing a type of discourse that could fit into the larger category of public engagement. In the first part of this study, I defined the *multi-marginalized* condition of Romanian left-wing feminist poetry, taking into consideration the many layers and implications of uneven development. In the following part of this study, I chose to contextualise the origins of feminist discourse in geographical tradition, in order to achieve a better periodization in confirmation to the feminist waves. This classification served to identify and analyse the status of autochthonous academic geographic research. In the last part, I attempted to link all these implications together in order to highlight that the need for a contextualised form of feminism is implied in the way poetry, which contains a theoretical foundation, builds or reconfigures spatiality in relation to gender identity.

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