1. Introducing the issue

The legacy of the socialist gender equality politics and the post-socialist trends of inequality underlie the need for investigating and rethinking gender equality in the post-socialist Romania from a feminist perspective. A complex socio-cultural analysis of this issue needs to be able to approach the production and performance of gender identities and relations both at the level of ideologies and policies, and that of the experiences of everyday life, acknowledging also the modalities in which these are shaping each other reciprocally. It also has to be insightful towards the ways in which the intertwined systems of power are creating inequalities across ethnic and gender boundaries, more precisely are locating women and men of different ethnicity in unequal social and economic positions. However, this paper undertakes from this broad picture only one fragment: that of the experiences of the gendered power relations as lived by Romanian, Hungarian and Roma women and men from the city of Cluj under the conditions of post-socialist changes. It is mostly an actor-centered view on how gender works in everyday life. Nevertheless, beside the small stories on our issue, the paper also offers a view on the socialist and post-socialist Grand Narratives on gender equality. That is why the fragments of the interviews that I am going to reproduce in the sixth paragraph should be interpreted within the broader political context, within which – as everywhere and always – institutions and public discourses were and are imposing some normative patterns of femininity, masculinity and appropriate gender order. But, as we know, these norms would not function if it would not be sustained from below, while, at the same time, the social regimes within which people live their lives always structure their positions and representations. Yet, people not only adjust their expectations and performances to these norms, they do not automatically take up certain roles, but also interpret, negotiate and act out them within their personal relations with the “significant others”. I am arguing that identifications and social positionings are always shaped by gender and ethnicity, and of course by other markers of differences. More properly said, they are shaped by the lived experiences and interpretations of femininity and masculinity which, at their turn, are shaped by experiences and
representations of ethnicity and ethnic relations, and/or other belongings to certain economic positions, and vice versa. This is why I am considering that gender – both as subject position and lived experience – is a central mechanism which organizes social life in each of its domains and at each of its levels.

2. Understanding gender (in)equality – a theoretical background

The analyses of “gender equality” exposes the nature and dynamics of the gender regimes or gender orders, understood at their turn as the states of play in gender relations in different institutions (R.W. Connell, 1995), i.e. displaying the gendered division of labor and power structure, but as well as the underlying notions of gender identities and relations accepted as “normal” within certain social settings. It reveals how power is related to gender, how people recreate and resist inequalities in everyday life, how women and men construct and negotiate gendered power relations within the domestic and public sphere, accommodating to the normative patterns of femininity and masculinity, but also changing them. By addressing “gender equality” as a social and cultural construct, ultimately one may highlight important characteristics of the broader social order in which the gender regimes under scrutiny are embedded.

2.1. Gender (in)equality in the context of social differentiation and stratification

Gender (in)equality is a phenomena composed of material and social practices, mechanisms and processes, but as well as of classificatory systems and underlying cultural concepts. As such it is part of the broader fabric of differentiations and stratifications that shape the social and cultural order we live in, prescribe our identities and positions, and hierarchically distributes economic, social and symbolic resources by gender intersected with other axes of differences.

2.2. Gender (in)equalities and the overlapping systems of power

Gender (in)equality should be viewed in the context of the ways in which race, ethnicity, class and gender as systems of power interact in the processes of the constitution of social hierarchies. The ethnic and gender orders that create and naturalize certain power relations within and between women and men of different ethnicity and class are affecting unequally their opportunities and abilities to have access to and control on material and symbolic resources.

2.3. Gender (in)equality at the junction of structure/ system/ gender order and agency/ practice/ personal experience
The gender order of private and public institutions is characterized by a certain division of labor and power arrangements between the occupants of the roles and positions defined as masculine and as feminine, but also by the classification systems and cultural categories of femininity, masculinity and their “proper” relationships. It is a structure of material and symbolic power, a system of economic and ideological relations that identifies women and men through certain features, duties and rights, locates them in different positions of the social hierarchies and legitimizes the such created orders transforming culture into nature. Gender order is embodied in subjects, whose identities and related social locations are produced at the junction of the system in which they live and of their everyday practices of femaleness and maleness. Inequalities are also embodied in subjects, producing arrangements of personal experiences as performances of the prescribed normative roles, but as well as strategies of an agency who resists to and silently transfigures the dominant gender order.

2.4. Gender (in)equality as a social and cultural construct

Gender (in)equality as a social and cultural construct has diverse but as well as shared meanings for different people at various walks of a particular society at certain moments of their life. As such, it talks about the changing material and social practices related to and about the symbolic/ cultural concepts of the subject positions of women and men in several realms of societal life. Its sociological and anthropological investigation exposes the nature and dynamics of the gender regimes, but also the gendered assumptions that guide people’s life both in the private and public sphere. Eventually it reveals the ways in which material and symbolic power is linked to gendered roles and the ways in which people understand, (re)create and resist inequalities in everyday life.

3. The research

The fragments of the interviews that I am going to present in the sixth paragraph resulted from a multidisciplinary research made in Cluj in the year 2000 on the condition of women and men in this multiethnic setting. The investigation included a sociological survey on samples representative for the population of the city and for the Romanian, Hungarian and Roma communities, 65 in-depth interviews with women and men of different ethnicity on their gendered life experiences, an analysis of the media representations of femininity, and a focus group on the ways in which different local public institutions are dealing with “women’s issues” and with the topic of (un)equal opportunities. Beside these methods it also explored the material collected with the occasion of a discussion usually not considered among the scientific endeavors,
that is a “talk show” on women’s role in transgressing ethnic boundaries, which involved representatives of the academic and non-governmental sphere working on inter-ethnic relations and/or on gender issues.

4. The Grand Narratives on women and gender equality in the socialist Romania

As known, the Romanian socialist regime created a subject position for women from where they were supposed to act as double heroes, i.e. as heroine workers and heroine mothers. Both roles were conceived from above as the condition of their “emancipation”, but actually were a set of duties through which women were supposed to serve the paternalist state that coordinated the ethno-nationalist project of socialist modernization.

4.1. Women as workers equal with men, or working-women-as-desexualized-heroes

In the context of the socialist industrialization and extensive economic development, on the part of the state, women were viewed first of all in their productive potentials. At the same time, on the part of the households, their work for wages in the state-owned economy was a necessary element of the family income. Socialism promised to empower women by considering them as workers and citizens equal with men, as long as they contributed to economic production – as reflected in the following quote:

“If we speak about the creation of conditions of full equality between the sexes, this means that we must treat all people not as men and women, but in their qualities as party members, as citizens, for which they are exclusively judged according to their work contribution.” Fragment from the Address of Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu to the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, June 18-19 1973, with Regard to the Role of Women in the Political, Economic, and Social Life of the Country, as translated by Gail Kligman (1998).

The ideological dedication to the “equality between the sexes in a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'” actually "meant that proletarians, regardless of gender, were socially and economically defined through their lack of private property” (Gail Kligman 1998, 27).

As Mary Ellen Fischer and Doina Pasca Harsanyi observed (1994) the sectorial segregation typical of noncommunist societies continued under Communist Party rule. The gender gap was increased by drawing a line between on the one hand the easy work “suitable” for women (in sectors such textile and food processing industries, services, education, health care). And, on the other hand, between the hard, better paid work (metal
processing, building and mining industries) “proper” for men. The sectors where women worked (the feminized domains of the economy) received less investment and remuneration than more “masculine” areas, and usually women were positioned at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. One of the greatest paradoxes experienced by women under socialism was that they became “emancipated” without being valued as such, and more than that, experienced this emancipation as a kind of “punishment” to carry on a triple-burden as workers-mothers-housekeepers. As Barbara Einhorn (1993) observes, from the linkage between socialist revolution and women’s emancipation there emerged the conceptually reductive notion that labor force participation was not only a necessary, but also the sufficient condition for women’s emancipation. In proclaiming women’s equality with men, the early Constitutions of state socialist societies granted women’s legal rights. But there was a lack in recognizing broader gender issues, such as the domestic division of labor and discrimination on the grounds of sex.

4.2. Women as mothers of the nation, or women-as-heroine-mothers

As the result of the recognition of the potential labor shortage (which endangered the Communist Party’s long term plans for economic development) an intensive pro-natalist campaign in Romania (since October 1966) made abortions and divorces almost impossible to obtain and increased taxes on childless, married or unmarried adults (see Mary Ellen Fischer, 1985). On the other hand, as Gail Kligman puts it, fertility control and reproduction was "fundamentally associated with identity: that of 'the nation' as the 'imagined community' that the state serves and protects, and over which it exercises authority" (Kligman, 1998: 5) – as reflected in the following quote:

“There is no obligation more noble, more honorable for families, for women, than that of raising and giving to the country as many children as possible”. Fragment from Ceaușescu, 1986, Mesajul adresat femeilor din Republica Socialista Romania cu prilejul Zilei internationale a femeii (Message to women from the Socialist Republic of Romania with the occasion of Women’s International Day), as translated by Gail Kligman (1998, 113).

The pro-natalist policy, implying fertility control and criminalisation of abortion on the part of the state gained significance not only in the context of labour force policy, but as well as within the framework of the Romanian nationalist ideology which – at its turn – had an important role in the legitimisation of the socialist project as a whole. The socialist nation was defined as a huge family with the Communist Party at its centre. As Katherine Verdery (1994) puts it, in this
context women were viewed as “mothers of the nation” subordinated to the socialist "parent-state". The state “took upon itself some of the more 'traditional' nurturing and care-giving roles that were the responsibility of women in the patriarchal family”, and at the same time "it expropriated men’s patrilinial 'rights' to the sexual and reproductive lives of their wives" (Kligman 1998, 26).

5. Gender equality under the conditions of post-socialist changes

5.1. Silences and rejection

If one takes only a brief look at what it means today to talk in public about Romania and the "major issues" that shape this discussion – reflecting the hierarchy of urgencies and priorities – it might be easy to observe that problems relating to women and feminism are hardly on the agenda. That's why, regarding Romania, the main question to ask is not how gender continues to be a public issue after the collapse of socialism, but why and how it became a non-issue of transition. Instead of being surprised by the lack of feminist consciousness, and by the silence on and/or the rejection of feminism, we should rather try to identify those structural and cultural factors that have contributed to the emergence of this lack, silencing and rejection.

One of the most important phenomena to observe is how the “anti-socialist” rhetoric and practice affects, at least in the first stage of transition, the way in which gender identities and differences are treated by post-socialist politics and the state. In this context one may see how the conviction that socialism constructed a gender order contrary to “nature”, leads to the belief that the end of socialism should mean the restoration of the “natural order of things” also in this domain of life. In Romania this suggests the “need” to restore men’s autonomy and authority in public and private life, to drive back women into their “natural”/domestic roles, but as well to "re-give" them reproductive rights, including the right to decide on abortion. The rejection of socialism sometimes goes hand-in-hand with the romanticization of the remote, pre-socialist past, including the recall of the traditional (“normal”) family. But to the extent to which decades of socialism have shaped peoples’ experiences and mentalities, one might observe that the picture of options concerning the “proper” gender order today is much more complex and complicated.

That’s why men and women have to deal with the parallel existence of different kinds of gender orders at different sites of everyday life, while observing as well the general trends emerging under the impact of changing state politics.

To the extent to which during “transition” everything is in flux and there is a negotiation around the importance of the social problems, women are not supposed to consider their
particular interests as a priority, but to understand the need of reconstructing social solidarities around more "critical" and "urgent" concerns. Previously being subordinated to the major cause of building the "Romanian socialist nation," today they became supposed to be subsumed to the (otherwise confused and strongly contested) ideals of post-socialist "reform". That’s how, structurally and culturally, women’s particular problems are not having the chance to become an issue –not even discursively – at this stage of “transition” and they hardly attract women’s and men’s will as issues to organize around, to uncover social injustice and inequality, and to claim rights. That’s how the way in which the socialist gender regime constructed gender differences and the commonly shared view according to which the socialist gender order was an un-natural one, is shaping today the means by which both women and men understand to struggle for, and to claim rights from the post-socialist state as citizens.

Another aspect in the political environment that made gender a non-issue during Romanian transition is that politics was reinvented as the space of the politics of national identity. Since 1996, the political priorities are in the space of economic and administrative reform, battles over corruption, European integration, and other topics considered to be "more serious" ones. In terms of rebuilding a collective identity, political discourses are concerned with the Europeanness of Romania, or, on the contrary, with its national “uniqueness,” and the problem of the internal social inequalities is either missing from their agenda, or is debated in ethnic terms. That’s how identity comes to be nationalized and so does difference as well. As a result other types of identity politics –such as feminism – might not be represented with credibility in a context where "liberalism and nationalism remain the dominant visions of the post-communist condition" (Kennedy, 1994: 44). Feminism might hardly become an issue that mobilizes women’s, and men's efforts of reconstructing communities after the collapse of the socialist ties of belonging.

5.2. Women’s organizing

Nevertheless, important steps towards gender awareness that considers women’s perspectives on several domains of life have been made. There are several civil organizations in Romania¹ and women have begun to organize within political parties.² In addition, a few

---

¹ According to some estimates, there are about 60 women NGOs in Romania. Here I will name a few which are ready to identify themselves as feminists: “ANA” – Society for Feminist Analysis from Bucharest, Foundation DESIRE for Social Reflection and Openness in Cluj, Centre ARTEMIS against Sexual Abuse and Violence Against Women in Cluj, Foundation for Equal Opportunities from Iași, Women’s Forum in Târgu-Mureș, Association for the Emancipation of Roma Women from Cluj, Association of Gypsy Women for Our Children in Timișoara.
initiatives have arisen to introduce gender and feminist studies into the university curricula. Women have also participated at international women-related initiatives. The National Campaign for Reproductive Health “Women Choose Health” organized in 2000 and the Gender Barometer made in 2000 reflects as well the increase of the interest towards women and gender issues. Furthermore, there have appeared national and legal mechanisms with the incentive to promote interests of women. But, as several observers affirm, there is still much work to be done before women’s rights become conceived as human rights and before women become treated as autonomous individuals. There is also a serious need for considering the gender mainstreaming policy of the European Union as an integral part of the integration process in Romania. Unless steps in this direction are made, there remain two main terrains where activism is incipient, or rather absent. This concerns the political and economic empowerment of women.

2. More and more parties are setting up women’s organizations within their structure. Besides the Democrat Party, the Romanian Social Democracy Party, and Greater Romania Party, the National Liberal Party has recently laid foundations of a woman’s organization. The Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania, and the National Peasant Christian-Democrat Party still do not seem to conceive the issue of political empowerment of women as important.

3. The M.A. program in gender studies at the National School of Political and Administrative Sciences in Bucharest, and the development of the undergraduate program “Gender, Society and Culture” at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj should be mentioned here.

4. One should consider here the following: the Fourth World Conference on Women’s Rights in Beijing in 1995; 2000 Reasons to March; NGO Working Session Prior to the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting: NGOs as Partners. On the Way to Accelerate Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2000); Women 2000 – a report resulted from the work of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (the Report on Romania was done by Roxana Teșiu); Women and Men in Romania, 2000 – coming out of a program of UNDP for Gendering Statistics.

5. The following initiatives should be mentioned: The Governmental Ordinance on Preventing and Punishing All Forms of Discrimination, 2000; Law on Paternal Leave, 1999; Draft Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (including some remarks regarding sexual harassment), 1998; The modification of some articles concerning the punishment of sexual violence, 2000. However, no significant progress beyond the setting up phase was made, as in the case of a national mechanism for the promotion of women, it has to be mentioned that this mechanism was established after the Fourth World Conference on Women’s Rights in Beijing in 1995. The mechanism has the following institutional components: the Department for the Advancement of Women and Family Policies (set up within the Ministry for Labor and Social Protection in October 1995); the Sub-Commission for Equal Opportunities, which functions in the Parliament since June 1997; a Department for Child, Woman and Family Policies, which exists within the Ombudsperson institution since February 1998; the Consultative Inter-Ministerial Commission on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, that was set up in November 1999.

6. The lack of activism and un-acknowledgment of the need for temporary solutions like affirmative action in regard to women’s presence in politics is more striking if one considers the following data, published in “Women and Men in Romania” (2000). After the 1996 elections there were twenty-seven women in Parliament (two senators, that is 1%, and twenty-five deputies, i.e. 7%), one woman state counselor to the president, four women state advisers at Romania’s Presidency, one woman minister, ten women secretaries of state, and one woman government spokesman. In 1997, there were two women presidents of parliamentary commissions (the Commission of Human Rights, and the Commission for European Integration), one women minister (the Ministry of Transport). Similarly, despite the fact that statistics about women’s economic position and poverty is also available by now, it is still no willingness to politicize such issues as: why do women represent the significant part of the labor force in poorly remunerated sectors, why are women present in the less paid positions, why is the income of women significantly under the
The appearance of the above-mentioned initiatives, of which some are commenced from below, and the multiplication of forms of organizing are the first signs of changing the socialist practices and discourses on women. This also signals a necessity to address the impact of post-socialist changes on women’s lives. Through these initiatives, women may begin to claim their rights as independent individuals and as responsible subjects aware of their interests. They may dare to face the uncertainties that result from resisting paternalist protection and subordination both in the domestic and extra-domestic sphere. By these actions women prove not to be powerless victims, losers or accidental winners who may only hope to win “The Father’s” indulgence to entitle them with rights. While claiming rights based on the recognition of gender discrimination, inequality and injustice in several fields, women cannot forget to occupy accountable positions in the public sphere. This demands their awareness of the patterns of power relations marked by “femininity” and “masculinity,” i.e. awareness that these relations are constituted through his/her discursive and material practices. As the time goes on, one may expect that more and more initiatives appear under the banner of “feminism.” Eventually, this discourse and practice prove to be instrumental and meaningful if constituted from below. It is my conviction that it has to be based on the rediscovery (but not reification) of difference, on reaffirming equality and on valorizing autonomy.

6. Small stories on gender equality and differences

The ideas from above give an overview on women’s condition and gender equality from Romania in macro-structural terms. Our further question is: how is this experienced and represented at micro-levels, how, for example, the former “women-as-worker-equal-with-men” position is negotiated by the actors in their everyday life under the current challenge of rediscovering gender differences. The narratives reproduced here also show the strategies of dealing with the memories of past and with the present changes. They are the “small facts that talk about large issues” (Marianne Gullestad).

6.1. Her stories

Some men say that they don’t have do anything at home, the job is enough for them. Their life is easier than women’s life. But as a retired person I may say that my life is not harder than theirs ... this is harder for men, as it is harder for them as widows. ... Because they are not able to average income, and why is their percentage as leaders almost four times lower than men’s. However, some analysis on the “feminization of poverty” started to discuss about these issues, for example in Magyari-Vincze (2001a).
survive alone, to take care of themselves ... a woman is more capable to find her one way. 54 years, retired, married, two children, Romanian

Women’s life is harder than men’s life, but it is only a minute difference between them. Of course it is good for a woman to have a job. I cannot imagine myself staying all-day long at home beside pots and pans. I don’t even know to cook properly. I need to be outside and to face as hard challenges as I can. This is what excites me, the competition. 23 years, not married, without children, employed at a private company, Romanian

Women’s life is difficult, much more difficult than men’s life, because very few men are helping their wives. I cannot accept this situation. To have a job, then go home and continue with the domestic activities, cooking, washing, doing the dishes, cleaning, and taking care of children, helping them in their homework, and serving everybody with everything. However, many women’s life looks like this. It is a hard cross to carry. 48 years, factory worker, divorced, one children, Romanian

Definitely, there is a clear difference between women and men, and it is not the case to make use of feminism or of misogynic ... but we have to recognize that men are more rational than women and have a more solid logic then women does. But women are superior to men due to their intuitive abilities. We should base our activities on this. We should explore the capabilities in which we are stronger instead of complaining permanently of the fact that we are exploited or undervalued in the domains dominated by men. There are so many professions, which might be performed more efficiently by women, and this should be exactly our power, to recognize our limits and to explore our possibilities. 30 years, school teacher, not married, without children, Romanian

I don’t think that it is harder for a man today than for a woman. And, of course, it is not the same for all women either. I think that women should take care for their families as a priority. There are some women, who do not care, and they just want to be all right, to have fun, to see after themselves. But I never was like this. I have to see that my family is all right, and if it is like that, I’m also feeling all right. If my children are happy, I am satisfied. But it is to say, that a woman’s life is very tiring because she is working a lot, and there is no money today, she has to struggle a lot for food ... a man does not taking care of what is he going to eat tomorrow. The woman was always under more burden than man. That’s how God made her. She has a job, and she does all the household works, and there is always something wrong in her life, the children, her husband, or something. 66 years, retired, widow, two children, Romanian

Anyway, a woman’s life is harder. For me at least it was, in good times and in bad times also. I was with everything. Everybody was waiting for me to serve them. But we, women are also stronger. We manage to deal with this. 52 years, retired, married, one child, Romanian

Globally my life is easier than my husband’s life, for he is the head of the family, and he has to assume more responsibilities. It is natural that his life is harder, his program is much more full, he has to make more money. It would be not acceptable if it would be other way around. A woman has to have more time to spend on her house, children, and on herself, too. The working women’s life would be easier if the salaries would be better, if they would have their own cars, if they could make shopping more easily, if they would have household equipment. And first of all if they could have a chance for better-paid jobs. 38 years, university assistant, married, one child, Romanian
I cannot say that my life is much more difficult than my husband’s life, because from the very beginning we used to help each other. We do that at home, too. So we have more time to be together. Nevertheless, maybe for me it is harder a little bit. Because I have to organize everything at home, to take initiatives regarding our child, to make him to be much more patient with the kid … this makes me more responsible for our family life as a whole. 34 years, physician, married, one child, Romanian

It is important for a woman to be strong. And I think that her power comes from those centuries during which she was staying at home and was accumulating a lot of energy that is erupting now when she needs so much strength. But that’s only one thing. The other thing would be to have at her disposal possibilities for saving time and energy. I am thinking about all those facilities in the West. Of eating at the restaurant, for example, of not being forced to cook daily, or of the developed household equipment… All these would take a burden off her. And it is important also to recognize her work. 47 years, museologist, unmarried, without children, Romanian

In our-days it is not easy for women because they are working. In the past there were not so many workingwomen. But they had families and they were living for the sake of their families. Today a woman has a job – and in some families the man is working at home as much as the woman. The harder part of the story is that there is no money today, excepting a few cases, and that is why everything is more difficult than it was in the past. And of course, in the past people were much more easily pleased. And they were undemanding. 80 years, retired, widow, Hungarian

The way in which her life goes on depends on the woman. For example there are some women who like to be alone, and like to have freedom. And in any case, today a woman is not so dependent of man as it was in the past. And this is good. I am not saying that it is good to be lonely, but definitely it’s great to be much more independent. Yet, today too, when a woman gets married, has to know that she might have two children. I mean a children-children, and a husband-as-children. Because some men today are taking advantage of the fact that women are having jobs, and make abuse of them. They can afford, probably not to work. In the past they had to work, if they had no jobs, they were taken to forced labor. And some women are weak and they just endure this situation instead of getting divorced. They are probably afraid of being condemned as divorced women. And there is the issue of the home as well. Who can afford to buy another apartment? You do not have where to go, so you stay…. 50 years, unemployed, widow/divorced, one child, Hungarian

I think that there is such a thing as women’s destiny. Yet, they are also shaping their lives depending of their priorities. Some of them are dedicated to their carriers, others to their families. I would say anyway that men’s life is easier. With some exceptions, probably. It depends on how much do they participate in the education of children. There are some men who are single parents, but this is very rare. One may see much more single mothers. Women’s destiny is harder. Because, beside their job they have more responsibilities at home. This is how our generation learnt to accept. There are, of course, many emancipated women, but the majority of them still think that this is the way in which responsibilities should be distributed. They still struggle with these burdens. Still want to be good mothers and good workers. 40 years, employed at state-owned company, not married, without children, Hungarian

I had no education. My parents were in a very bad material condition so they could not afford to send me to the school. But I was happy to go to work and earn money, to be able to buy to myself a cloth or something. When I was twenty, I enrolled to an evening school, but right after that I married and abandoned the school. Later I was sorry was that. I am convinced that it is always good for a woman to have a job, not to depend from that man. If your relation is not good, you
can afford to leave him. However, household work is my duty and I am doing it without hesitation. That is how it is. It’s not a big deal. I am doing it and that’s it. I know what my duty is. One has to eat, right. Then has to cook, isn’t it? Because there is no money for restaurants. Of course, it would be easier for a woman if her husband would help her in the household activities, children’s education, in everything. 58 years, retired, married, two children, Hungarian

I think that women’s life is changing from a generation to another. They get some rights, after all. It is true that feminism begins to be outdated, but in our country we still need it. Here people still have to learn that a woman is not the man’s slave – and to accept that if women work as much as men for money outside of home, than they cannot make so much housework as their grandmother did, who maybe was sitting home, cleaning, dishwashing, cooking and everything. Housework is an extra burden. It has to be divided among women and men. 24 years, researcher, living in a partnership, without children, Hungarian

It is much more difficult for a woman, but I would not like to change my life with a men. Because as a woman I can live with much more sensitivity all the changes of my life. A women’s energy is spent on the effort to always ponder, negotiate, decide, to be anxious about others. They are also very willing to prove that they as good as men as workers, and are able to make everything what men can. They fight to be accepted at their working place. If they are having help at home from their husband, then it is all right, but if not, this way of life could be extremely tiring. 44 years, employed at a company, unmarried, without children, Hungarian

My life goes on differently than my husband’s life, because we are different. He is much more successful, for example, on the professional level. We are both musicians, but he was advanced more promptly than I was. His salary is higher than mine. I mine this is no problem at home, he never mentions this, we spend the money together. But as far as I am concerned, I would like to earn more. He really helps me a lot at home, in housework, with children, and everything, I can always ask him for everything, but in very few cases he just makes something without being asked. There is one problem at the job also. Women should not be branded as unhelpful, and should not be judged according to the fact if they have children or not. Because this happens time to time. And it also happens that there is no social network that would help the mother’s in the education of their small children. You just have to stay home if you do not have money to hire a babysitter, if you do not have a flexible job, if you do not have your parents their to be helped by them. 32 years, musician, married, two children, Hungarian

I wish to have a small house with a garden, animals, and a big kitchen, and to work on the yard. But this never comes. We were living in an apartment and sold it. For that we could have buy a house in a village, but wanted to stay here to give the chance to children to go to school. I could not enroll my two bigger daughters, now I only hope that the smaller ones will be able to enter into the school. We were at the mayor, that’s how we received this apartment, but the owner is coming back and we will have to move. Nobody listens to us any more – our solution is the street. They say we have to many children. And we do not have any job. Before 1990 it was different. We had job, apartment, could pay for everything, children were clean, they could go to school. By then the poor but honest people could make a living. Nobody was yelling at us with “dirty gypsy” or you black” because they were afraid. Yet, we are still respected by our neighbors, we do not make noise, and the children are respectful. But the destiny is beaten us. 44 years, housewife, married, six children, Roma

I chosen to go to university to become a teacher, of religion, especially, that is what I would like to do. It fits my personality. I wish to be healthy, to find a job, to have a family and children. But
first of all I need a job. Maybe I’ll go abroad. 24 years, student, unmarried, without children, Roma

It is not enough for us what we earn, for everything is very expensive, the home, the food, the costs. We do not smoke, only drink coffee. I am working as a dressmaker, so make the dresses for myself. Before 1990 it was a little bit better, even if there were not so many goods in the store, the salaries had some value. People were receiving apartments from the state, we also did. But we wanted freedom, and now we have it. Before we were pleased easily, but now we are more demanding. Everybody is stressed and nervous, including children. 23 years, employed at a state-owned company, married, without children, Roma

I came to Cluj with my parents when I was ten. I was a poor servant, but felt good because could earn money. I was taking all kinds of dirty jobs everywhere. Worked honestly and have not had any troubles with anyone. Now I am making popcorns, to have a living, because my pension is not enough. Nobody says that I am a gypsy, because I am clean and I don’t cheat, and people already know me. This business is just for surviving, it is much to pay to the state. Till there were these coupons on the market I could live better. Before life was better. It was cheaper, but now everything is so expensive. It’s not enough however much we would work. I had a small apartment, but sold it and gave the money for my children. Now I live in lodgings. 66 years, retired, one children, Roma

Now I don’t work, I retired, but before I was working everywhere. I was a textile worker. Then had some problems in my family and transferred to another place. I have big difficulties, don’t have where to stay. Now moved to one of my sons, we are living seven in an apartment. And only he is working. All of us are having some illness. And the medicines are so expensive. Don’t have whom to complain. Nobody asks me ever how do I manage to live. I was working 32 years for the state. And now it is not helping me at all. God bless you for coming here and listening me. 58 years, retired, married, two children Roma

I was having very many unpleasant events in my life. The worth was when I divorced. It was because my job. I was working a lot, alternately, during nights as well, so I could not take care of housework properly. I haven’t had time. He was expecting more from me. Fortunately I don’t have children. Maybe I wish to have, but this is how it is. This is life. At my workplace I was having some problems at the beginning because I was a gypsy woman. But since then people started to be used with me and the doctors are treating me well. Before 1990 it was worth for us, gypsies. Now is better. Now I am working alongside others. They accepted me. 35 years, nurse, divorced, without children, Roma

I don’t like the work that I am doing, but this is … I am the breadwinner in the family. We have to pay rent and everything is very expensive. My husband is under arrest. It’s very hard. Under Ceausescu we could live. Now there are many goods in the shops, but for nothing. We cannot afford the. We eat bean and potatoes. I only hope that my child will go to school and make a better living. 31 years, worker at a private company, married, one children, Roma

Of course it is so good for a woman to work. She earns money, but she becomes more self-confident as well. She should be equal with the man. 36 years, school teacher, married, two children, Roma

I never worked because married at 17, and than had the children. I am ill. It is hard to find a job today even for the schooled healthy people, I have no chance. As a woman I suffered a lot. My
father was also beating us, and my mother. 30 years, house-worker, partnership, two children, Roma

All my life was about troubles and difficulties. I never had a job, haven’t had where. However, I would be ready to take any job, I work here and there for a change. Had to give my son to an orphanage, I don’t even have where to stay. My mother died when I was five. I have two brothers, but we always disagree. They don’t help me. Women’s life is more difficult than men’s life. If they drink and it comes out a trouble, there are always women who are suffering of that. Who could accept this? 26 years, unemployed, unmarried, one children, Roma

I divorced from my husband, he found another woman, left me alone with four children. We lost our home – gave it to an owner, who helped us with some money, then she lost the apartment and we had to help her, and that is how we arrived to live in a cellar. We don’t have water, go and ask people to offer us some water to cook and to wash our dresses time to time. What should we do? I go to the forest, pick flowers, sell it, to have money for a piece of bread for a children, a notebook for the school. I am ashamed to beg. God help me.... My parents have not spoken the gypsy language. Neither do I. I am gypsy ... I know that the Romanians are wither and we gypsies are black, they are gentlemen, and we stay in our bank, what should we do? Nobody help us because we are gypsies. They should not make this, because it would not have to matter if you are a gypsy. We all are people. We do not have protection because we are gypsy. Normally it should not be like this, because God made the world at once, and what eats the Romanian, eats the gypsy, too. There are Romanians who steal and are robbers, so why do they make us gypsies? Maybe gypsies are more gentlemen than they are ... After the revolution both Romanians and Gypsies are bad, they don’t even let you to stay in a cellar. 70 years, retired, divorced, four children, Roma

I am coming from a family with three children. My mother is half Romanian and half Gypsy, and my father half-gypsy and half-Italian. He was a severe man, was not doing anything at home, my mother, me and my sisters had to always serve him. By then I have started to be hostile with these kinds of men. I could not tolerate such a man as husband. I don’t know how many of my girl friends do accept this at home. In many Roma families women are staying behind men. Even in a bus he stays in the front, or sits down. Only in a few families they are considered equals. Gypsy girls should be educated in this idea at an early age. It is too late to change something when you are 30, and to become conscious of the fact that you are a person too as men are. Gypsy girls usually get married at an early age and follow their mother’s model and never will make a change in their life. One may observe that those families where things happen differently are not the happiest ones. 25 years, university graduate, social assistant, unmarried, without children, Roma

Before it was better, we could handle our life. Now food is very expensive. I am alone with my children since ten years ago, only God helps me to survive. But I am used to be silent and to endure. I am never arguing with anyone. I better don’t say anything... the world is bad enough, whichever way you take is not good. 40 years, worker, widow, three children, Roma

6.2. His stories

The carrier woman is a chance for the man as his partner. But only with the condition of not having a personality that dominates. If she is like that, she transforms her partner into an annex. The negotiation should not be very stressful and traumatic. Besides, in order to improve women’s life there should be made some changes in legislation, maybe positive discrimination should be
introduced in some spheres, and of course salaries should be better. 42 years, university professor, writer, divorced, two children, Romanian

Maybe, indeed, women’s value in social life is growing as far as generations are changing. They will catch up men in some day. I do not make a difference between women and men, both of them are having equal chances to do what they want to do, so from my point of view there are no differences. 21 years, employed, unmarried, without children, Romanian

I think that there have been made a lot of important chances in the direction of equality between women and men. So this is improving in the good sense of the word. However, women’s life is harder than men’s life because they have some major responsibilities. They have the kids, they have to cook, clean and take care of the whole family. Some men haven’t changed at all – they are just with their jobs, with bringing money home. Look we divide everything equally. I do shopping sometimes, for example, and our daughters are doing it as well. But lately I had a smaller contribution to the housework, my wife’s contribution was bigger, and fortunately she transmitted this to our two daughters, to know that shoes have to be clean, socks have to be washed, the house should be clean, for a man is hardly able to accommodate to these works – to wipe up the dust, for example, to wash the curtain or so. 62 years, retired, married, two children, Romanian

I say that women are much more overburden than men. She has more responsibilities in a family, in our house my wife has a major role in organizing the whole life, I trust her. She has a job, too – kids are also in her care … I would like to keep her home, to afford to not to send her to work, in order to be able to dedicate her more strongly to us, and not to have this stressful life. At our school, for example there are more women than men, and hey smoke a lot. This is due to stress. I hear their stories about what to cook, what to buy, how to solve this or that. Since Eva they had all the responsibilities of the daily life. Men are much more neglectful, they wait to be served. 46 years, high school teacher, married, one child, Romanian

Today women are much more emancipated, they know more, they have more information, so this is a big change I say. But men’s life changed, too. Today the main problem is that of jobs. And this is going to be worth and worth. For the majority of women life is harder. She has to cook, to wash, and if no one helps her, that’s hard after coming home from the job. In many houses the man is coming home and asking for food, for clean and dried dresses. That’s not good. You should let her to rest a little bit, that’s my opinion and have to help her. 40 years, employed at the Army, married, one child, Romanian

I am divorced since a year, so can’t be so objective in my opinions. However, I consider that family is the essential part of a society. Have to admit that women’s life is more difficult. I’m talking about honest women. They have to be cook in the kitchen, ladies at the theater, hookers in the bad, laundress and everything. Woman should be respected, but she should show respect to her man, too. Generally we men are having the fault of misunderstanding them. I am divorced, so I should take men’s part, but this is how it is. And there are so few men who are helping their wife. They should not be like that because it is impossible for a woman to have all the family responsibilities on her back. 58 years, engineer, divorced, one child, Romanian

I think that we, men became weaker during the past years. I’m not talking here about getting old, but about sexuality. We are weaker in the sexual life, because of all this stress. And then, there is no money, so you cannot really make children. …. In or home my wife works harder – she is working at a private company, and there they are forced to work 10, 12 hours per day, so she should been paid better. It is difficult, very difficult ... when she comes home, she starts to cook,
sometimes I help her, but she does not really let me do that. 50 years, unemployed, married, one child, Hungarian

My wife is not working now, so it’s easier for her, she just stays home with the kid. I am the one who brings money in the house, so I have much more to be concerned about. But of course, there are other cases, when women do take on their shoulders all the men’s burdens. At the workplace, if you are diplomatic enough, you can much more easily fool a female boss, you can convince her, and you can divert her attention, and just make things in your way. But you cannot do this with a man. Yet again, if the woman is very educated, this strategy does not work any more. 25 years, employed at private firm, married, one child, Hungarian

If everybody makes decently her and his work, than is quite the same for women and men. Both should work hard, but should help each other. I am not against women priests, however many people from our congregation cannot imagine this, they think that this is only man’s vocation. There is a difference in the way in which women and men can fulfill their duties at the work place. Men, only if they not got ill, can perform his job without a break. But a woman might stop working if she marries, or if she has children. This makes a difference. 27 years, student on theology, married, one child, Hungarian

A woman, even if she is retired, has to work harder than a man, she always finds something to do. A retired man may go to trips, but the female has to stay home, to cook and clean the house, and so on. We have less money know. It was better when I was working, and I’m ill also, so cannot take any jobs. My wife takes care of me. Many people tell me that I should be happy about this. 56 years, retired, married, four children, Hungarian

I think that it is woman’s right to have a paid job, and no one can keep her home by force. For many women this alternative would be not acceptable. They would not accept to stay all day long near pots. Generally, women have the same chances as men. However, it looks like they have to prove more at the beginning, due to the prejudices according to which a woman cannot do this or that, but if she manages to prove the contrary, than it starts to be easier for her. Because a nice woman always remains a nice woman and there is no such a man who would not consider this. 25 years, employed at private firm, unmarried, without children, Hungarian

There are aspects of life regarding which it is harder for women and other aspects regarding which men’s burdens are higher. I think this is exactly why we are made differently – in this way everybody may do what is easier for him or her to accomplish. Carrier, breadwinning, education of children. Some women are choosing to make carrier instead of making children. Of course, ideally she should be possible to fulfill herself in both domains. But for that one needs to be educated, and also needs luck. Yet, one cannot be the best on both fields. It is like sports. You cannot be a winner if you are not dedicated to your activity in 100 percent. I think that those who are having aims, and a view on their life and their abilities, and know what to do, manage to progress in their life. Regardless of their gender. 39 years, owner, married, two children, Hungarian

My life changed a lot after 1990. It improved. I have a job, I can sustain my family, the four kids, I can send them to school and to educate them properly. I am also active in the Democratic Alliance Party of Roma, we are dealing, for example with the housing problems of our people…Today there is much more freedom even in marriage. Before a woman was not allowed to stay in the front of her man. Or to say a word or to have a comment. Then there was a dictatorship, and man was dictating. Woman had to stay home, to be housewife. I don’t know how many men would admit this, because they are afraid to analyze this too much, but their life is
You should take care today very much how do you behave at your job, not to be dismissed. If you are dismissed, you are ended – because people are looking at the color of your skin and refuse to hire you. At home is harder for a woman. She has to have an eye on the kids all day long, to wash the clothes, to think what to cook, to clean. But, you know, for us is more difficult at work. And it is very important to have a job, not to steal and not to beg. Whatever you would be, Romanian, or Roma or Hungarian, it is not a shame to do any job. A shame is to steal, or beg, or kill someone for money. 40 years, employed at private firm, married, two children, Roma

Before 1990 it was better. You had a job, it was a decent life, you had a home. Men were doing better then women, who had to look for food and for children all day long. But there was no freedom. Before everything was cheaper, you could afford to go out to a restaurant. My salary is very low know, I say that others are earning much more money much more easily. I was working in many places, but I never was paid decently. This is unjust. I like to work, but I would like to be appreciated, too according to the work that I am doing. 24 years, employed at state-owned company, married, without children, Roma

I am not married, always considered that school is much more important than marriage. Me and my brother were the only Roma children in the classroom. This did an effect on me negatively. On the surface everything was all right, but we were always having smaller grades. However, I kept working hard to enter into the university. When I was 17, I had to go to work to a factory, I was working approximately 8 years, but now I gave up to make these studies…I would like to understand why the majority of the Romanian society stigmatize Roma people as vagabonds, as dirty or as criminals. If one Roma persons stills a bread than you hear that the whole ethnic group is stigmatized. Nobody thinks that if he needs to give a piece of bread to his child than he has to go to obtain it. This happens because he does not have any job, nobody gives him a job. If he would have a job he would not steal any more, he would integrate into society. You many see many jobs are advertised with mentioning “Roma people excluded” – this is discrimination. This stigmatization has a negative effect on all of us. But we also are people and this hurts. 29 years, unmarried, without children, Roma

I don’t work, and my wife is not working either. We just live on the money received after our children. When I have something on the black market, I work, but is hard. I don’t have education and profession. I know very many craft, I learned a lot, but I do not have any diploma. I was dismissed, because there were reductions at the factory. It is very difficult as unemployed. You cannot pay your debts. At least if you would have for food that would be something already. Food is important. You have to have it for kids on a daily basis. Some men are neglectful, they just go to drink, to have fun, leave everything on their wife’s shoulder. 31 years, unemployed, partnership, four children, Roma

The company was ended so I remained without a job and now I have this small cart and I am on the market all day long to earn a piece of bread. My wife died since 16 years ago, and I remained with three children. Now I am staying with my daughter, she has three kids, and she is not working. So we have to make a living out of this carting. During summer is better. There is much to do. We also receive some vegetables ... But in winter is terrible. I had to not to pay any more for the gas, so we did not have gas, I had to make fire with wood. It would be better in the countryside. And it was better under Ceausescu. There were jobs, we received apartments, we Gypsies were working nearby others. But now there are no jobs. That’s the main problem. I
don’t want anything for me anymore, only for my children and grandchildren, to go to school, to have a job, to earn a piece of bread honestly and not to steal. You see, I am respected from anyone. The Policemen know me, and everybody knows me at the market and are looking for me. It counts very much to be honest. People do respect that. 64 years, retired, widow, three children, Roma

I have two daughters, I married when I was 21. My parents have chosen my wife, I just wake up with her by my side. She was all right, she was silent, and hardworking. My parents took care that she should be a gypsy, like us, not to poor, and to to rich, just like we were. That’s how it always works. A rich boy never takes a poor girl. Some of us are helping each other, but we are not all the same, some gypsies are very money-grubbing, some are very poor, cannot help others. Some people treat us very bad because we are gypsies, but I do not consider them, just go further and make my job. Before it was better. You were having a job, you got married, you were having a house, it was easier to make a family and to have a lot of kids. This poverty makes some to steal and to kill for food, but this not happens only among Gypsies. You think that Romanians or Hungarians do not make the same? We all are people. It is hard for everybody. 51 years, unemployed, married, two children, Roma

7. Role of feminism in re-addressing gender equality under post-socialist conditions

I consider that a feminist endeavor in Romania today might be concerned by the deconstruction – on the one hand – of the naturalized link between "socialism" and "gender equality". And – on the other hand – of the link that is under way to be considered as taken-for-granted between the post-socialist kind of justice making for women and the return to the traditional (pre-socialist) gender order. Consequently, I suggest that feminism should assume questioning issues like: how patriarchy was practiced by the means of the paternalist socialist state under the surface of gender equality; how the emancipation of women was equalized with their celebration as heroic workers; how their instrumentalization as heroic mothers produced inequality between women and men, however viewed as two de-sexualized categories of the "new socialist man". And to continue this effort with the analysis of how patriarchy is re-enforced today by the mechanisms of the transition from the centralized to the market economy; how the liberation of women is equalized with setting them free from the perplexities of double-burden; and how the "femininity" of women is re-conquered by their assimilation with the traditional roles of womanhood, while "masculinity" being regained through men's empowerment both in the private and public spheres. In this sense I subscribe to Susan Gal’s position, according to which our effort of constructing discursively the political category of “women” must be aware of the meanings attached previously to this category and try to define it as something else: “not as a worker-recipient of communist entitlements, nor as the naturalized, sexualized private being of civil society, nor as the sacred and inert mother of nationhood, but as an independent subject whose interests and issues can be publicly defined and debated”(Gal, 1997).
CITED REFERENCES


