

## The Cognitive Transformation Potential of *Gender* in Political Science

### Summary

In this habilitation thesis I present my main research axes conducted after my doctoral studies in relation with the current theoretical and methodological issues and the related Romanian historiography, in order to highlight the innovative contribution of my research in the field of the political science. These directions are three and two of them are built around themes that I already approached within my PhD thesis. Within these two, the first one refers to the role of hygiene and hygienists, as well as of medicine and doctors for the ideological construction of nation and nation-building processes in 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania (Băluță, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2013d, 2014c). The second one is the socio-genesis of the feminist movement for the same period (Băluță, 2008, 2014, 2016). My third field of research interest, which I developed especially after my doctoral studies, is the political representation of women and the issue of equal opportunity policies in post-communist environments (Băluță 2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014b, 2015).

With the nuances brought by the specific theories and concepts for each of the subject under scrutiny, the same theoretical perspective on gender studies has been present across my entire research output. This could be largely referred to as the *cognitive transformation* approach. Briefly put, it advances the view that the debates on gender have a direct impact on how scientific knowledge is produced and incorporating gender into the (meta)theoretical reflection on scientific production has the potential to transform our social and political cognitive space and generate new types of questions for scientific investigations (Varikas 2006). In other words, this approach aims not only to contribute to developing knowledge on topics and subjects already identified as major in relation with gender within social sciences but also to investigate such topics, concepts and perspectives through the lenses of taxonomic deconstruction of social thinking and of the constructivist approaches to social categorizing.

Within this context, my first research axis has followed mainly two directions: 1) the way in which the modern scientific approach to medicine and the medical professional sphere have been established, with a focus on the socio-political role that medical doctors and especially hygienists played; 2) the role of medicine for nation-building processes, through the development of public health concerns, policies and infrastructures, with a focus on the

role of the normative dimension of the medical discourse in the formulation and the legitimation of some rules and models that were supposed to make the society embody the national ideology. My research has thus contributed to a better understanding of the scientific and political status of medicine and hygiene in nation-building processes, highlighting the role that these played for the ideological construction of the nation-state and modernization, as well as the relevance of the medical knowledge for the legitimation and functioning of modern political power. My studies were also among the first to analyze the political dimension of the medical and hygienist discourses, and the emergence of the *bio-politics* in 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania.

My investigations on the origins of Romanian feminism started from an epistemological and theoretical approach related to feminism as a research object. In this respect, my option was to draw an analysis of feminism conceived as a process that is intrinsically linked to the social, political and cultural phenomena of its time. Within this framework, feminism is not a subject *per se* but a part of the construction of the democratic regime, as well as of the social and political philosophy, and the history of the society. Consequently, studying the socio-genesis of the Romanian feminism cannot be pursued without analyzing the local modernization processes following the Western model, the political and legal construction of the democratic regime and the ideological production that can be observed at national level. Studying all these subjects without taking into account women's discourses and actions would produce narratives which would not only ignore an important part of the dynamics of the social relations but would also neglect an ideological perspective that is fundamental for fully understanding the ideological horizon of that time. Therefore, without being limited to a description (otherwise necessary) of the feminist discourses and actions, my explorations of the topic show that the emergence and the strengthening of the Romanian feminist ideas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a process that is influenced by the national ideological construction, while being also part of it. Furthermore, this process represents the beginning of the questioning related to the construction of citizenship and legal norms. Not least, the process influences and it is influenced back the educational doctrines, mass media and social activism practices and interests.

From the gender studies perspective, regardless of the chosen approach (i.e. political science, philosophy, history or political sociology), the analysis of the political representation of women is intrinsically linked to the analysis of democracy. Throughout the vast field of critiques that have been addressed to the relation between gender and the way democracy has been defined, a way considered responsible for all the exclusions (Collin 1996: 29) or the

interpretations according to which any exclusion is anti-democratic (Varikas & Pisier 1997: 129), one can easily follow a red thread, namely that the women's political representation is directly connected to (the quality of) democracy.

In the specific case of Romania, the analysis of women in politics also requires taking into consideration the nested relationship between the elements related to the institutional and ideological configurations of the communist regime, to the processes of reconfiguration of the political leadership and the strategies of access and success within the post-communist political sphere, as well as to the social construction of gender within the contemporary Romanian society. The analysis of the political trajectory of women in the Parliament in the 2004-2008 legislature, combined with an inquiry consisting of in-depth individual interviews, has an heuristic value for identifying the types of the political resources and the political actors' practices and behaviors related to entering into politics and having a successful career (the educational level, the access to managerial positions within the political party and the social capital are the particularly significant for this subject).

Two other important findings were obtained through a media discourse analysis. First, claiming equal opportunities between women and men, especially when it comes to affirmative action (i.e. gender quotas in political representation) is most frequently associated in the Romanian public space with neo-Marxism, communism, and in general with an exacerbated political left. This delegitimizes equality from both ideological and political viewpoints and makes it very difficult to formulate it and claim it within the public and political sphere. Second, outside periods of intense electoral activity or without special events, the political presence of women in print media (i.e. articles with or about political women) is insignificant. Within this context, the image of women as political actors derives from two processes that are both delegitimizing: *invisibility* (the restrained space that they occupy in contemporary political affairs) and *exoticism* (the overemphasized sexual dimension of the female body, or a focus on items such as fashion and feminine beauty).