



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Tale of Two Cities: Engendering Urbanity in Romania after Communism

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Abstract

The end of communism and the abolishment of egalitarian policies upon use of public spaces challenged women's visibility, autonomy and emancipation in most of the transitional playgrounds. Mythology of urban moral corruption fostered also millennialist echoes, transitional societies confronting with new formulas of foundational violence, targeting women and minority groups. The article presents the preliminary findings of an extended research project, dedicated to the engendering phenomena in post-communist Bucharest, following topics as: mechanisms for spatial production of gender discrimination, recrudescence of oppressive gender spatiality (forbidden spaces vs asylum spaces, M. Foucault) or role of semio-spatial devices (G. Sonesson) as squares and boulevards, in reinforcing gender borders.

Keywords: *engendering urbanity; post-communism; Romania; women's narratives; fragmented modernity.*

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Gender and the City. Translations of modernity after Communism

Urbanization could be considered a key factor of modernization triggered by communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the 4th decade. Accompanied by an influential industrialization dogma, nascent vernacular urbanity was however paying a significant tribute to a hybrid legacy. Urban mutation did not fully sanctified the departure from patriarchal bounds and narrative identities of the village, communist cities becoming the embodiment of a cultural syncretism. Artificial implantation of the former rural inhabitants into new spatial and temporal orders of the city did not contribute to establishment of a new urban conscience. Moreover, cultural landmarks of the rurality continued to exert a silent influence, one of the most disputed topics remaining gender. The rise of modernity inside communist world was celebrating in fact the tale of two cities. Birth of communist version of urbanity implied the presence of a mirrored architecture, the private and public spaces hosting parallel cultural pacts. Women's narratives, discourses and representations were exposed to contradictory semiotic processes, their identity crisis being soon aggravated by the double burden of productive and reproductive duty (Kligman, 1998). Forced to play the part of the new liberated working class, benefiting apparently by equal economic rights, but still compelled to accept the domestic burdens and the vestigial traditional duties, communist heroines-mothers were trapped between two ages of modernity.

After communism's fall, the socialist model of "amorphous public ownership" (Sonne, 2017: 186) was replaced by a multi-modal urban geography, wherein women's place(s) made the subject of multiple inquiries. Post-socialist landscapes were thus engraved by contradictory urban trends, the reigniting privatization and enclavisation of space fostering new symbolic borders. Most of the post-communist cities were experiencing two key tendencies: the rediscovery of public communion places, as squares and boulevards (long time controlled by state's pervasive authority) and the reconstruction of the private space. Previously, within great majority of the communist cities, the border amid territories of private and public life were intentionally diminish, the autonomy of the individuals, even within their personal sphere, being placed under unwitnessed tutelage of the state. The very presence of leaders' portraits immersed within apparently benign sceneries as schools or hospitals were the sign of a spatial oppression, while the suspicions of political treachery often distorted the relations with family members, neighbours or friends. Geographies of suspicion nurtured by communist regimes became the ground for a silent separation of the experience of both urbanity and modernity. The heritage of the post-socialist cities remained linked by a hypothesis of restitution, the clash of oppressive regimes giving the chance for a reconstruction of the private identities and spaces. The reinvention of the private life after communism was influenced however by an unexpected return of the traditional imageries. The sources of this inverted cycle, which opposed former liberation and emancipation narratives to patriarchal mythologies of return to origins, were still unclear. Nonetheless, the revival of a countrified and bucolic imaginary may be explained by intervention of a cultivation mechanism (Gerbner et. alia., 2002). In this context, communist regimes propensity for nationalist discourses in the late '80 prefigured the future ascent of neo-traditionalist gender ideologies (Johnson and Robinson, 2006:130), all across the transitional realms.

Taking into the account the peculiar historical trajectory of the modernization theme at the Eastern border of the Communist Bloc, whereto the constitutive clauses of activism, mobilisation and emancipation of the rural (Lerner, 1964: 59) were not fully

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accomplished, genesis of the urban life was marked by complex antinomies. Even if the industrialization and rise of a small-scale urban culture had started in Eastern Europe at the end of the previous century, some countries, as new created Greater Romania, were dominantly agrarian and patrimonial societies (Aslanbeigui, Pressman and Summerfield, 1994: 41). The assertion of communist rule triggered here a forced modernization wave, which however did not succeed in eliminating the influential cleavages amid the centre and peripheries. In this context, the age of the urban started in Romania at the middle of the '50, due to massive and often forced expansion of the cities. Communist regime interest in shaping a new working class, connected to performative and lucrative identities, encountered however a solid resistance, especially as concerns the "woman question". For the communist project of modernization, gender emancipation was seen as necessary step in decomposing the traditional economic and social architecture, the liberation of women remaining strongly dependent by new spatial meaningfulness of the urban. Yet, the new inhabitants of the cities did not fully severed the bounds with their native communities, the intersections of the urban with the heritage of the rural fostering provocative trajectories of modernity. For instance, the city vocation in promoting anonymity of individuals and the chance to play multiple social and cultural roles, was in Romania's case replaced by a hybrid paradigm. Women's condition as keepers of the cultural memory and as vectors of communication within the familial clans transformed the city experience in a dual cultural endeavour. Women's perception upon the city was gradually segregated from the masculine perspective, silent cultural orders emerging within the new landscapes of Romanian towns. Genuine rural rituals, as sitting outside on a bench during rest days, in front of new concrete apartment blocks or the compelling force of the family in matters as marriage or deviant behaviours, were acting as a living proofs of the reluctance of village culture.

Women's condition was isolated under formula of an adjoined modernity, their lucrative emancipation and new depictions as bread-winners, citizens and comrades being accompanied by discrete servitudes well-hidden into the fabric of new cultural narratives. The Soviet stage of emancipation, militating for complete liberation from the household, lucrative autonomy and state's support in topics as education, health or childcare, brutally ended in 1966. The anti-abortion legislation inaugurated an era of reigniting gender traditionalism, Romanian experience of modernity engaging on an inverted trajectory. Thus, women's cultural, political and economic roles were reinterpreted in a patriarchal equation (good mothers or wives and cheerful peasant girls, Massino, 2007: 52), the image of the barn shadowing once again the one of the factory. Gender identities were gliding back into an edenic rurality, the vivid nationalism of Ceaușescu's rule being followed by isolation of feminine workforce within inefficient economic branches as education, light industry and health. In the same time, the vernacularization of Romanian communism under formula of a sultanistic drift (Linz and Stepan, 1996), added supplementary burdens for women, now exposed to stigma (due to unwanted pregnancies), poverty (as a result of economic vulnerability) and dependence (the return under tutelage and moral censorship of the origin family). The story of Romanian communism remains intrinsically shaped by the forgery of two capital landmarks of modernity, gender liberation and establishment of urban culture. The separation move instituted at the middle of the 6th decade conserved the village within the city, more than twenty years after the fall, the semiotics of the rural still influencing the identities and urban conscience of women.

The retreat of the communist state from its ubiquitous sphere of authority let the city's streets, squares and boulevards empty. Still, the spectrum of the inner village, preserved within the imaginary of the inhabitants, filled this semiotic void, the life and civilization of post-communist towns being engraved by new countrified nostalgia. The clash of communist discourses upon women's political, maternal and productive duties let the feminine identities at crossroads. The city map, elusory pacified after the revolutionary convulsion which transformed the central squares and boulevards in identity production devices, remained fractured and hostile. Ascent of symbolic aggressions based on implicit cultural scripts (women's bodies seen as territories of male authority) and reigniting foundational violence raised complex questions concerning the true colours of Romanian modernity. The study presents the preliminary findings of an extended research project, dedicated to the topic of engendering urbanity within nowadays Bucharest. The research is grounded on a central hypothesis which claims that the spatial order and cultural narratives of the city create emotional geographies, women's performative identities within the urban frame revealing the genuine configurations of both modernity and democracy. The methodological design favoured a two-step approach: first stage employed focus group sessions (three meetings, carried between December 2018 and March 2019), while the last stage concentrated on in-depth interviews (target group including five subjects, age between 20 and 65 years old) with women experiencing trauma and exclusion within their everyday urban experience.

What is like to be a Woman? Untold stories from Bucharest, now and yesterday

Engendering space in post-communist Romania stays connected to a hypothesis of restitution. Contradictory echoes of woman's place within the urban universe recollects an influential patrimonial legacy, so much the more the symbolic denotations of the space tend to govern the language. To decide (*a hotări*) derive from the term of land border (*hotar*). There is a culture patronized by locative identities, wherein gender represents a troubled constructed, placed at intersection of successive cultural layers. In today's Romania we may speak of a residual remembrance, rooted in communism infantile pedagogy and cultural propaganda, mixing the feminine with the mythology of the nation, and a new imaginary of gender, colligating a nexus of themes concerning citizenship, civic action and discourses of autonomy. The rising tide amid a glocal substratum and the global trends of liberalisation promoted however contradictory reflections. Giving the fact that popular culture, new media and even art productions disclose those days antagonistic discourses upon women, represented in heterogeneous hypostases as glamorous housewives, stay-at-home and anti-vax mothers or *stahanovite* business women, the research project aimed to explore the role of spatial meaningfulness in reconstructing the gender identity in contemporary Bucharest. First stage of the research intended to highlight the role of familial model in shaping feminine experiences of guilt, duty and shame, while the second part of the research concentrated on women's individual experiences of trauma and discrimination, as users of the public places.

The focus groups discussed following themes: the recollections of gender founding narratives, experienced by women in relations with family, authority figures or education and media sphere, the personal interpretations of space, connected to women's place and roles within the city (asylum vs. forbidden spaces), the place-identity connection (Taylor, 2009: 40) and the prolongation of invented traditions (Hobsbawm

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and Ranger, 1992). The in-depth interviews analysed the perceptions upon spatial production of gender discrimination and intended to disclose the role of semi-spatial devices, as squares and boulevards, in reshaping feminine identities.

The theoretical frame is inspired by Göran Sonesson's perspective on public space, which propose a resignification of the subject, transformed into a topological construct. The individual is seen as a succession of concentric circles, separating the public, social, personal and intimate levels, the last layer being identified with the "body envelop" (Sonesson, 2003: 7). Despite the fact that all cultures tend to design their public, social, personal and intimate spheres in a coherent manner, the semiotic architecture of the feminine body may offer a distinctive translation of the spatial orders. Feminine body continues to be perceived in many traditional or pseudo-modern cultures as it is naturally bound to the territory of the private, the transgression of women in open arenas of the social (boulevards, squares, leisure places), being frequently sanctioned. The free movement of the feminine body in space nurtured new formulas of violence, the reigniting rampancy of post-communist societies being connected to phenomena such as masculine appropriation of public places (Ostermann, 2009: 30). The authority of the deceased parent-state was gradually replaced by spectre of masculine hegemony, the coercion against feminine bodies being made as part of a confirmation ritual. The case of the "Women in blue dress" aggressed and carried as trophy along Bucharest's central square during one of the miners' violent uprisings in June 1990, stays as a graphic evidence of the disruptive interpretations of the feminine autonomy in relation with space.

In this context, a great part of the testimonies concerning the founding feminine narratives are marked by presence of a traumatic episode, confirming a separation move. Young girls are extracted from the group and taught to assume a preventive condition of shame and guilt. The segregation has beyond all a spatial meaning, the establishment of borders and limits of women autonomy being considered as capital for the so called native equilibriums of the community. In this context one the subjects recounts: "I was maybe 12 or 13 years old. I went to school wearing a yellow skirt. Not too short, but it was bright yellow. I was home alone most of the time. I could choose what to wear. At school an old teacher called me in front of the class and told me that I was improper dressed. I felt humiliated, just sitting there. The parents were notified that I had an insolent behaviour and the boys in the class could not concentrate because of my bright, to elegant outfits. Still, it was after communism and we were living in Bucharest. When I came back home I was crying. Mother said nothing. In the end just asked me to dress just like the other girls and never stand out" (Female, 29).

Women's degree of mobility and spatial autonomy was conceived in relation with a heliocentric model, the centre being represented by the masculine authority within the family, promoting the community's specific rules or cultural credo. The asymmetries amid the masculine and feminine syntax of space was visible, even within infantile groups, the prescriptive behaviours in use of space being transmitted as intergenerational memory, often surpassing the distances amid the city and the village. The absent parents were replaced during transition years by the grandparents' voices, children's education in the '90 being paradoxically more traditional than the one of their parents, full time residents of the post-communist Bucharest.

Furthermore, a powerful testimony unfolds the grounds of feminine isolation: "I was raised by grandparents in the countryside. They always taught me to be submissive, diligent and hardworking. I was not allowed to talk back, just because I was a girl. Once

I wanted to go swimming with the other children, during summer break. They didn't allowed me, because I was almost 14 years old. At that time I didn't understood the meaning of this forbiddance. It was like my body wasn't my property anymore. In Bucharest I felt better, because there were no such blatant rules. Yet, I was told not to chat with strangers and not even go to park or to movie unfollowed. My brother was doing that all the time. I was educated to come straight home. No wandering in the city. I even had a tight time frame to arrive. Less than a half an hour." (Female, 37). Moreover, the symbolic coercion was sometimes exerted by unknown individuals, as the public space was transformed into a sphere of masculine control: „We were playing in front of the communist blocs, in the '90. A stranger approached me and the other girls. He verbally aggressed us, because we were playing alone there, with no adults of brothers. We didn't have the courage to reply or to tell the parents. We felt the shame, the guilt and the fear. We were educated that it was our fault. We knew that, although we were only 7." (Female, 32).

Women learned the prohibited geographies of the city very early, the restrictions being justified by arguments such as the need to protect the family honor and the urge to conserve future social capital of the young girls. The environment was divided in well-structured semiotic landscapes, the autonomy of women being limited to three major social frames: childcare, house-hold and religious space. The narratives confirm the role of the media in cultivation of fear: "At the news we heard about young girls being kidnapped or worse. Always the headlines were about Bucharest. Parents were treating us differently, like they're afraid that we, the girls, would embarrass them with our behaviour. I grew up with this deficit of self-respect and with recurrent catch-phrases as "don't talk unasked", "you have to know your place", "you have to look decent". I wasn't allowed to play with the girl living next door, because her mother was divorced and she had no father. Because of that my parents called her stray." (Female 38). Another testimony recalls very similar facts: "We were playing in a small yard, in front of my parents flat. I wasn't allowed to visit my friends or school mates. Not even to overpass the bloc's corner, despite the fact that in the late '80 Bucharest was seen as a safe place. It was like it's promiscuous to enter someone's house or to go anywhere unattended by a grown-up. I never heard my mother about going out alone or with her friends. It was only about work and groceries. During the holydays we were paying visits to the grandparents and the other relatives and the women were always accompanied by their husbands. I was educated that a single mother or a divorced women represents a disgrace to the family. As well as walking alone to restaurants or coffee shops." (Female, 38).

On a deeper level, the focus group series revealed the existence of a semiotic map dominated by rigorous feminine narratives. Moreover, the transgressing of the personal space towards places of uncontrolled interactions was limited due to punitive measures, the masculine authority following the female body as a hallow effect. If during the early '90, women living in Bucharest were enjoying a more liberal city map, their presence at theatres, movie halls or sports events being labelled as natural, later years disclosed the rise of new exclusion circles.

The triggering vectors for this negative perspective were linked to a plethora of facts: feminization of poverty during transition years and growing dependence of women, reclusion of state support in topics as childcare and maternity benefits (privatization of motherhood can be seen as an asymmetric economic burden, which made women less competitive employees) and not at least, by growing violence in

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public spaces (gradually transformed in prohibited spheres for women, children, minorities and other individuals, defying the traditional masculine hegemony). Concomitantly, the cultural memory of women favoured a prolongation of invented traditions, the emancipation steps gained during communist epoch being cancelled by a succession rite, as following testimony proves: “When I moved to the city I felt safe. I had a job and I didn’t care too much about the family opinions on my behaviour. I could wear whatever I want and go to amusement places. Because I earned some money at the time, I was quite respected. Things changed dramatically during revolution days of 1989. I just remember that the families living in the same bloc were reuniting in the evenings to guard the entrance. It was almost absurd, because the men were not sure who was our enemy. The city was perceived as an alien space. The women couldn’t find their place. Today theoretically you can go anywhere, but you are less free. Young girl or mother or older women, you have to avoid the parks in the evening, the sports matches, the concerts, the pools. Of course, in the expensive areas of the city you may be safe. But that is not the real life. Real life it’s on the streets of poor neighbourhoods, where you are not allowed to walk even in day light, as single women.” (In-depth interview, Female, 65).

The role of semio-spatial devices in promotion of gender discrimination in perceiving, accessing and habiting the city remains critical. For the primitive societies the forbidden places were linked to the sacred spatiality, the constitutive function of those heterotopias (Foucault, 1967: 4) following arguments as hieratic authority and separation of the individuals facing a state of crisis (elders, pregnant women) or change of status and autonomy (adolescents). The forbidden places were meant to assure a semiotic divide between the familiar geography and a new symbolic order, while the individuals were exposed to a ceremony of initiation or absolution. Modern turn upon heterotopias concern the isolation of deviance (Foucault, 1967: 5) and the function of punishment, new tensional maps of the cities being often connected to gender exclusion and marginality.

Women’s interactions with these ambivalent dimensions of asylum and forbidden places it is still difficult to frame. The hospital, the kindergarten and the grocery stores are in the same time heterotopias of crisis and isolation, while they can be interpreted also as heterotopias of deviation, women being treated as potential threats to the established norms of the group. The very presence of women in the city, playing unrestrained social roles, can be considered as a deviation from the norms (reigniting discourses on “nation’s purity”, “natural order”, “gender ideology”), this mutation changing the inner semantics of forbidden places. The original meaning of forbidden places was related to the concepts of retreat and sacred area. The median stage in interpreting the forbidden spatiality concerns the functions of exclusion and isolation of the deviants. A contemporary chapter in discussing the forbidden places symptomatology may bring in discussion a mirrored image. The society as a whole became a forbidden space, a *topos* of masculine hegemony and sacred authority, interpreted in the sense of the primitive communities. The alternative map of deviant and crisis heterotopias remains associated to the feminine.

Women are compelled to carceral geographies due to a reform in meaning and definition of the public landscape, rebuilt as masculine territory, while the crisis heterotopias are reinvented as feminine asylum spaces. Still, young generation perception revolves around fluid landmarks: “We have our places. I enjoy going to the cool coffee shops and music clubs in Bucharest. We are active citizens, we vote, we

protest. I still don't go out wearing a mini-skirt. Or with heavy make-up. That's ok. My mother had her place, I've got mine. I don't truly perceive the rest of the city. There are entire neighbourhoods that doesn't exist for me. I'm not a hypocrite. I know my place. What about equality? Gender values and so on. It doesn't make sense, because you can't change the things. (...) Want to stay safe? Don't go to ill-famed places, don't wear provocative outfits. That simple. Discrimination is such a puzzle word today. If you want to be well treated, my solution is just to fit in. The squares and boulevards are gender blind and with this new trends, a lot of men go to the groceries shops, to the kindergarten, to the kids' playground. The big difference is that they can go anywhere, you as a women, you need to see your limits." (In-depth interview, Female, 22).

The topic of modernization became the staple of nowadays debates on women's rights, social perception and economic autonomy. But rather than simplifying the perspectives towards women's practical emancipation and cultural liberation, the modernization argument created new shifts. For young girls and women living in contemporary Bucharest the founding narratives of femininity revolves around contradictory stimulus and parallel frames: you may go with your girlfriends and work mates to the popular coffee shops, hosted by Bucharest well famed Old City or you may enjoy your status as citizen in matters as vote or civic disobedience, but you're still compelled to accept silent prohibitions as not visiting alone night clubs or even the expensive restaurants. As in Potemkin village, women's autonomy decrease apparently from the centre to the peripheries, despite the fact that semiosis of space disclose sometimes surprisingly synergies between the two realms of modernity. As an interesting example, during major symbolic events, as marriage or funeral, many of the vestigial reminders of taboos reignite, women ceasing their body autonomy towards different hieratic or patriarchal authority figures. No matter what if you are assisting a wedding ceremony in Bucharest city or you meet a funeral procession in a traditional mountain village, women tend to keep their head covered in the sanctuary and to walk behind men. This sort of duality of feminine cultural orders it is rotten into a space-time semiotics.

Following Göran Sonesson argument, due to a building is an artefact, it could be assumed that this complex nature of buildings may be extended also to composite urban landscapes such as: social territories of passage (boulevards, subway stations, grocery stores or simply crowded streets), meeting places (squares, malls, coffee shops) and retreat and semi-private spaces (residential neighbourhoods). By sustaining the idea that urban sceneries as a whole can be treated as cohesive semiotic devices, they also may assume the attributes of the signs. (Sonesson, 2003: 5). Even if early debates on urban semiotics tended initially to favour the deconstruction of the buildings into smaller physical parts, containing a strong symbolism (stairs, meetings rooms, celebration or sacred spaces), further discussion upon meanings of space promoted alternative and fluid interpretations (Sonesson, 2003: 13). The functions and components of the buildings can be connected with multiple representational filters, their perception being dynamic and difficult to reduce to a unique set of connotations.

In this context, it may be considered the hypothesis of gendered semiotics of the space, the urban sceneries syntax being influenced by women's narratives upon their own place and identity. As a fact, Göran Sonesson highlights the role of pre-urban spatial devices as windows, bridges and roads in opening multiple interpretative paths (Sonesson, 2003: 14). The road may speak for change, instability, evasion or escape, as it may represent simultaneously the connection amid the stranger and the native

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community. Leaving behind the previous correlations between the function of the buildings and their semiotic potential, the gender landmark opened new ways in discussing the meaning and memory of space. For women the window usual had stood for contemplation, nostalgia, envision of a better future, but also represented a dividing artefact, separating the nascent private life from the public space. By comparison, for men the window was seen as a secondary spatial device, as their interactions with the outside world was governed by other artefacts as the house gate or even the village square. The ambivalence of space semiotics addressed in gender terms had survived multiple modernization waves, the cultural landscapes of Eastern Europe offering an interesting casuistry for gender declinations of urban symbolism. The post-communist cities became the host of reigniting traditionalism, militating for “privatisation of space” (Hammad, 1989: 102) as a belated response for former communist pressure towards “publication of space” (Sonesson, 2003: 20). The communist cities were established as communities sharing an immersive spatiality, whereto the limits amid the work place, the leisure sceneries and even the family home were dissolved under patronage of an omnipresent political project.

Factories and stadia, schools and crowded apartment blocks were crossed by a common semiotic axis, advocating for a collectivisation of identities and a unification of city’s symbolism and functions. Meantime, the configurations of communist cities were in fact reinforcing pre-modern segregations of feminine and masculine interpretations of space. In Romania’s case, the birth of the city at the beginning of the 5th decade was followed by a cryptic recovery of the spatial determination of the village community. The collectivisation of space promoted by communist dogma was gradually replaced by an atomised urban map, whereby the familial monad regained its power in matters as women’s duties and burdens (child raise, domestic work), feminine narratives of guilt and shame (enhanced by forced natalist policies) and most important, urban legends of asylum and forbidden spaces (double semiotics of social places, which are forbidden for unaccompanied women, but remain accessible for ones placed under patronage of masculine figures).

Conclusions

Exit from communism confused previous semiotic geographies of the post-socialist cities, Bucharest itself confronting with a plethora of invented cultural genealogies, false memories and ambivalent space interpretations. The life of dead semio-spatial bodies, in order to appeal Katherine Verdery famous metaphor, continued to exert a cryptic influence, women’s narrative upon use, meaning and accessibility of public space being still influenced by memory of queuing in front of grocery stores or the anonymity of communist mass celebration rituals. The following table analyses the meanings associated to three classical semio-spatial artefacts: the boulevard, the square and the flea market.

By using a gendered division in interpretation of space, it is intended to emphasize the ambivalence of Bucharest buildings and urban landscapes in relation with geographies of exclusion, as they were described within women’s recollections or public discourse.

Table 1: Feminine perception of space in recent Bucharest

Semio-spatial device	Feminine translations of space
<p>The Boulevard</p> <p>Main cultural connotations: “epitome of urbanity” and modernity (Sonesson, 2003: 3), place of observation and meeting, intermediary space for accessing social life (coffee shops, theatres), potential space for promoting political or ideological values, as a Square related artefact, promenade landscape, where you may circulate and expose your social status.</p>	<p>Space of uncontrolled human interactions, placed under the spectrum of multiple symbolic threats. Women are defined as public bodies, since their own territoriality is transformed into a canvas of family honour, social capital or group identity.</p> <p>Subsidiary denotations in women’s testimonies concern danger of harassment in the street (fear to wear “very elegant clothing” or “expensive like outfits”) and the spectrum of vulnerability and moral control (you may become subject of unapproved interactions, as special as teenage girl or young women, if you dare to look or act provocative - “don’t laugh loud”, „don’t chat with strangers, “don’t walk alone at night”).</p>
<p>The Square</p> <p>General cultural meaning: Focus point of public life, since the Greek Agora, gathering place, potential communion place of individuals sharing same cultural, political or social agendas, a crowd place, where individuals can become part of broader identity or action group.</p>	<p>Dimension of masculine hegemony, mostly due to presence of political connotations (place of protest, of electoral celebration or civic activism). However, women living in Bucharest were often confronted with a “privatisation of public space” (Hammad, 1989: 102), the square being constantly described as a dangerous place.</p> <p>Female activists protesting in University’s Square during tumultuous days of 1990 were labelled as “homeless”, “easy virtue”, “addicts”. The key thesis was that those women do not appertain to a masculine power figure, they escape the definition of “mother”, “daughter” and “wife”, these sort of drifts being sometimes echoed although recent civic movements.</p> <p>Many testimonies support the idea that women “should stay invisible” in order to maintain their safety and social status, because in the square “you need to belong”, to be perceived as member of a group or at least not “to take the floor”. Even if many women were active during Romanian civic revival subsequent to 2013, their discourse and image was distorted by allegations as</p>

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	<p>“lack of moral probity”, “personal failure”, disruptive behaviour (they challenged the traditional values, so they are “morally corrupted”)</p>
<p>The Flea market</p> <p>Semiotics and general meaning: Defined as an exotic relative of the market place, hosting chaotic encounters of bodies in space, under rule of “polyphony of voices” (Pearce, 1994: 304), the flea market symbolism recalls also for metaphorical escape and playful recirculation or even reinvention of identities.</p>	<p>The flea market stands in feminine perception for subversive spatial behaviour, mostly because the small commerce represents sometimes a way to cope with feminine poverty, to avoid the masculine control and to regain autonomy (divorced or single women sell their cloths and goods in order to gain basic earnings). Also, the flea market may open the perspective of feminine evasion, since here the presence of the masculine tutelage is uncertain.</p> <p>There is no such thing as a prescriptive behaviour for women using the flea market as sellers or customers, but sometimes they are perceived as marginal and deviant individuals, mostly because the flea market dissolves many of the locative identities, so influential within the bounds of vernacular culture (where are you from? what is your social status? what is your basic role, as a women: mother, daughter, wife?)</p>

Source: Authors' own compilation.

This preliminary discussion on reinterpretation of space in contemporary Bucharest reveals the existence of an unsettled legacy. Many testimonies of women living on urban grounds are waiting to be told. Yet, an interesting conclusion tends to detach. Communist project did not genuinely changed the semiotic geographies of the nascent urban culture, transformed into a scaled image of the traditional, patriarchal village. The communist urbanity nourished spaces of counterfeit modernity, whereby women and men were sharing the same infantile condition, being placed under tutelage of the parent state. Absence of an authentic public sphere, hosting de-regulated interactions and free rhetoric interventions of the individuals, created the illusion of a more liberal and gender accessible urban geography. Exit from communism, determined however an adjourned maturation process. The engendering of urbanity may open nowadays multiple paths, because space tends to shape the experience of appertaining to modern cultural and political orders, deciding wheatear or not women are still outside(rs) of the citadel.

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Article Info

Received: April 19 2019

Accepted: May 15 2019
