

Chapter 1

In Need for More Tailored Feminist Stories in a Time of Crisis

Laura Roxana Grünberg

University of Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT

The chapter follows other attempts to explain the gender backlash within many of current societies. Revisiting some theoretical frames under circulation, and taking Romania as a lived case study, the author argues for the existence of two detached storytelling trends within feminism, which contribute to a crisis of communication, not of content. Academic feminism delivers sophisticated explanatory stories about the gender fatigues aspects, while activist feminism bets on more black and white, confrontational stories and practices. This communication crisis could be accountable for the gender backlash. It is not what feminists say, but how they say it that contributes to the impasse. Today there is a need for more inclusive feminist public stories targeting a wide-ranging society, adaptable to the new realities. Maybe, the author claims, with improved feminist storytellers, the activist feminism of the 21st century could be stronger and cool not only for feminists.

INTRODUCTION

The world has changed/Men have changed/Women have changed/It's a chaos!

In marketing practices if you want to sell a house to a family with children, you should not forget about the emotional experience involved in the decision. You should bring the potential buyers to visit it, offer the rational arguments in favor of the acquisition, but prepare also an apple pie in advance and allow the smell to spread all over the place, or bring some children to play in the backyard, creating an atmosphere of a perfect house for a family.

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Could this marketing story be useful for overcoming the paradox confronting feminism today? On one hand, feminism has valuable things to offer worldwide, for women and men alike in their multidimensional constituencies, in their different social, political, cultural, and economic contexts. The substance of feminist discourses and practices is solid and validated by extensive worldwide gender sensitive data. Many things have to be done in domains where gender gaps continue to exist and even increase. The improvements are at slow pace, and changes are necessary within laws, institutions, and practices in order to address, for the benefit of all, the gender inequalities and discriminations still prevailing in societies. On the other hand, a visible gender backlash, an increased resistance, and even hostility towards feminism exists in many countries, already documented and scrutinized in depth. How should feminist discourses and practices better adapt to this paradoxical situation?

Should feminism revise its public stories and practices and bring the smell of apple pie in the backyard of its discourses or, on the contrary, as Ahmed (2017) said, “feminism should insist on being a ‘killjoy project’” (p. 235), in order to succeed and overcome this tensioned context between the need for feminism and hostility towards feminism? Or are in-between solutions available?

The main premise of this chapter is that two different types of storytelling coexist, but do not work together, during this period of visible gender backlash worldwide. On one hand, the academic feminism storytelling is delivering various subtle and elaborated explanatory stories about the gender backlash, telling about intersectionality aspects, de-democratization context, new typology of sexism, transnational agenda, and intercultural or gender fatigues issues. On the other hand, the activist feminism bets on distributing more traditional stories in times of gender backlash. Usually there are monolithically, exclusivist, and confrontational narratives about the bad guys (men in general) and the bad social structure (patriarchy) not allowing faster promotion of the gender equality agenda.

The second derived premise is that a multilevel communication crisis, more than a content crisis, is occurring within the activist feminism. On one level, its public storytellers are not listening to the academic feminists’ data-based narratives in order to find ways to enlarge their audience. On another level, the activist feminism often promotes monologues instead of dialogues; thus, it provokes discomfort and cognitive dissonance, and slows down the implementation of still needed gender-sensitive agendas.

In this context, taking Romania, a European Union (EU) country, as a lived case study, this chapter pleads for more creative and inclusive communication strategies in the context of today’s neoconservative or neoliberal environments, in the actual economic and social global crisis due to the corona pandemic. It pleads and argues for more diplomatic friendly-based (but still substantial and powerful) public feminist discourses, more diversified and refined communication strategies able to reverberate to a wider audience that may include *others*—different types of ambiguous, modern, and neosexists identified already in the academic literature. The author argues that addressing only the conservative people (women and men alike) with radical confrontational feminist messages is inefficient, at this point in time. More tailored feminist narratives for the ones (more and more) having undecided, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory attitudes toward gender equality aspects could be much more useful. Last but not least important, the author considers that the academic and activist feminism should find ways to better communicate among each other.

If the hypothesis of the existence of a multilayered communication process proves to be a valid assumption for other countries beyond Romania, then, undoubtedly, there is a need for more tailored feminist stories and creative narratives. These new storytelling strategies should embrace the new vocabulary of concepts, theories, and social and political demands of today feminism, and help them gain a wider loyal

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