

Reflected bodies: women's perspective on marital experience and corporeal transformation within motherhood in Florești, Romania

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Abstract

Even if the concept of marriage and motherhood is subject to continuous changes and reinterpretations, women and men still marry and have children in a more traditional or alternative manner. Starting with this assumption, my major interest in this thesis is to unveil particularities from women's narratives regarding their perception over their own bodies and identities, by focusing my analysis on lived experiences, intimate scenes, daily practices and activities within marriage and motherhood. Thus, my research is constituted by a qualitative empirical work conducted in post-socialist neighborhood Florești, Romania known as a place mostly inhabited by middle-class families. The structure of this thesis is centered on the analysis of interviewed women's middle-classness along with their class affinities and dispositions, their perception on marital experience on identity and corporeal transformation, and their reflections on maternity as a transformative stage in terms of subjectivity, agency and body.

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Introduction

“The wager is that all the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject’s corporeality as a framework (...). All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject’s corporeal surface. Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds” (Grosz, 1994:vii)

The purpose of this thesis is to offer a detailed perspective on women’s narratives and self-perception regarding their own bodies and identities, by focusing my interest on their lived experiences, intimate scenes, daily practices and activities from their lives as mothers and married women. More particularly, I want to discover the way middle-class women from post-socialist neighborhood Florești, Romania reflect on possible changes regarding their bodies, sexuality and emotions, firstly after they got married, and secondly after they become mothers. Thus, the main question is; do these women perceive marriage and motherhood as strong or absolute indicators for bodily, identity and subjectivity transformation?

Consulting various types of literature that are directly connected to my thesis’s subject, I noticed that the complex relationship between women’s body, identity and emotions within marriage and motherhood is very often analyzed separately. When it comes to focusing on women’s bodies within motherhood along with its emotions, this section usually occupies little space in the literature I identified. Women’s corporeal transformations during maternity are not centered only on aesthetics, overweight and slimness or breastfeeding as most of the literature seems to engage with, but at the same time I do not argue that these aspects are not essential.

However, I claim that an analysis on maternal body should ask for more in-depth observations and should emphasize women's narrative and self-perception regarding their experiences. More than this, I also noticed that certain types of literature relate to marriage only as a sexist or as a patriarchal institution, and their attempt is to identify multiple ways to deconstruct it. Although this statement gains its validity in the realm of quotidian, I argue that marriage and motherhood as well, does not have to be studied only from a social, institutional, cultural or financial perspective.

In this respect, I argue that marriage and motherhood, widely known as important episodes in people's lives, imply possible collisions between the actor's involved subjectivities and agency, disruptive and disordered bodies, desires, shame, emotions, networks, complex experiences, mirrors, recognition, rejection or sexuality. Nevertheless, all the aspects mentioned above are socially, politically and culturally situated and constructed. Moreover, I consider that in order to better understand women's experiences as married and mothers, a great interest and attention should be paid to those micro-aspects and practices, feelings and changes that are equally important in the way individuals are conducting their lives, constructing their opinions, the way they reject certain discourses, or on the contrary they reinforce them.

Therefore, my aim in this thesis is to propose a different approach to existent theory, by constructing an analysis that manages to keep women's voices and their marital and maternal experiences to the surface, and to offer a more detailed picture of post-socialist Romania's middle-class women that includes a different perspective on gender, sexuality, family organization and bodily practices. In doing so, each Chapter is constituted by an intertwined analysis derived from my empirical work's data with continuous theoretical support and analysis.

In this sense, the first Chapter is centered on the Methods and the Methodology of this thesis. The Methods subchapter reveals the location of my fieldwork, a few essential demographic characteristics, the background of my empirical subjects, and the research instruments that I used. The Methodology section brings to light the way in which I refer to the concept of the ‘body’ mainly drawn from new-materialists such as Bordo (2003), Grosz (1994) or Barad (2003), and the significance of women’s ‘experience’ in order to produce scientific knowledge widely discussed by Haraway (1988) and Harding (1993, 2004).

The second Chapter’s purpose is to offer a clear perspective on the background and the context of the location where I conducted my fieldwork, namely the post-socialist suburban neighborhood Florești, Romania. My decision to choose this site for research purposes comes from the potentiality offered due to its distinct massive urbanization process that took place particularly in the last eight to ten years. This phenomenon was a subject of analysis for Romanian sociologists and anthropologists that I also engaged with, such as Troc (2012) and Petrovici (2011).

In close relation to this urbanization, a significant number of middle-class families chose to relocate to Florești and from this point, the second section of this Chapter is dedicated to an analysis that situates the interviewed middle-class women within a socio-economical context by revealing specific characteristics regarding their class, family organization and dynamics, patterns of consumptions, affinities and dispositions or ways of raising children. My analysis on middle-class women’s dispositions and ways of raising children is based on Lareau (2002), and the reflections on the importance of education is drawn from Vincent and Ball (2007) and their interpretation of Bourdieu (1984, 1979).

Following this, in Chapter 3 my main interest is to discover the way women perceive their body within marriage, and if there's a clear (re)construction of a marital identity. In this regard I will draw on Brook's (2002) critical engagement with feminist's such as Astell (1986), or Pateman (1988) debate around marriage as a sexist and a patriarchal institution. Moreover, I will pay attention to my subject's narrative on the notion of independence and subjectivity within marriage in relation to Svendsen's (1996) case studies on Romanian middle-class women, and I will emphasize ways in which my interviewees relate to possible changes regarding their physical body and emotions after marriage.

The fourth Chapter shifts its focus to maternity stage and its purpose is to reveal those particular, personal and intimate aspects of women's lives as mothers, and the way they perceive their own body in close relation to their emotions, anxieties, fears, or happiness within motherhood. My aim is to dedicate a section to an analysis centered on the reconceptualization of women's subjectivity and agency during maternity, process that is highly debated in scholar's such as Haynes (2008), Bailey (1999) or Stone (2014) work, by focusing on the notion of responsibility and sacrifice.

Continuing this, I will unfold mother's narrative regarding post-birth body control and discipline where I devise the concept of 'restrictive body' and 'restricted body'. Furthermore I will emphasize the relationship between affects such as shame and mother's corporeal aesthetics, framing my analysis between Bordo's (2003) great work on women's corporeality and image and Biddle's (1997) and Sedgwick's (2003) interpretation of shame.

Chapter 1. Methods and Methodology

1.1 Research Methods

My interest in this subject is composed by two separate, yet complementary reasons; one comes from a personal ongoing curiosity and unanswered questions, and the other one derives from my attempt to seek for answers and convert all my knowledge regarding this topic into an academic work. In doing so, I conducted my fieldwork research in the suburban neighborhood Florești, situated in proximity of Cluj-Napoca, the biggest and most important economical, educational and cultural city of Romanian's region, Transylvania. I consider Florești to be a fruitful 'space' for such interests, first due a presence of a large number of families with children, and second because this neighborhood offers so little when it comes to talking about spaces for leisure and activities outside the domestic sphere. As a consequence, many women in early mothering have no choice, but to restrict their activities into home's private space or to take long walks with their children on the alleys that surround the buildings.

Therefore, identifying a few mothers willing to share some of their life experiences with me was not a difficult task considering that, as some of them said, 'we are here all day with our children having nobody to talk to' (paraphrasing B. 29 years old and I. 34 years old). Taking into consideration certain types of situations women face while being on maternity leave, they have the capacity to create different contexts for discussions, and can radically transform their entire narrative when they have in front of them another person who expresses a great interest regarding their issues and troubles, their joy and happiness or their transformations and discontents that can be rarely uttered in front on a doctor or counselor. As one mother says: 'the

inside problems, family problems remain inside, from outside they are perceived differently' (G. 37 years old).

From this point it's essential to emphasize more particular characteristics in order to create a general portrait of women I interviewed. Thus, all of them are currently living in Florești with their nuclear families, they own the apartment they live in, but the time they moved in Florești varies for each of them. In this regard, by using semi-structured interview and open discussions, I managed to interview ten Romanian middle-class women, in their late 20s and mid 30s with an average age of 32. Nine of them are married, one of them is in a long-term relationship with the father of her child, and the distribution of the number of children is approximately equal; three families have three children, two families have two children and five families have one child with serious plans for at least another one.

Their education and current occupation is also important when it comes to creating portraits of my empirical work's subjects. Five of them attended university and have at least a BA degree for example in Theology, Economic Studies, or Computer Science, and the other five have a high-school degree in economics, or various profiles. Most of them are at the moment on maternity leave, and before this they worked in fields such as accountancy, teaching, administration, office jobs, I.T. or food service. We carried our discussions in their house when the weather wasn't friendly and outside while taking long walks along with their children. All of the interviews were recorded, partially transcribed and translated from Romanian into English by me. Their duration varies from one hour to two and a half hours, with an average of one hour and twenty minutes.

My qualitative research inquiry mirrored two essential periods in their lives; marriage and motherhood with a constant reference to their corporeal transformations, to the embodiment of marriage and motherhood, and their emotions in connection to the internalized experience of change or stability. Drawing on Miller (2007), Bailey (1997) and many other feminists, I consider as well that there's a need to continue such endeavors by bringing women's discourses and personal narratives to light, by transmitting their biographies and private experiences into the hands of the reader, and to make their own voices and bodies heard.

In Massumi's words, 'change is something that 'includes rupture, but is nevertheless continuous, but only with itself, without complement'' (Massumi, 2002:57 cited in Lambevski 2005:581). In the realm of quotidian, marriage and motherhood is seen as an essential step, an abidance because it manages to synthesize the powerful desire of excluding the others by invoking a clear cluster of restrictions, and opening another cluster or permissions. Starting from here, I centralized a part of my interview questions around the idea of what women 'should/should not' and 'have to/don't have to' be or do after each 'ceremonial' moment takes place i.e. marriage and maternity.

More precisely, do they have to change the way they dress, the way they act, or the way they talk once the child is present; should they wear their bodies differently after marriage and birth, or should they confirm in front of others the fact that they're married and mothers? Do they have to start doing certain things as married women or mother and stop doing other things that characterized them before? How each of them relates to these changes in their lives, how was the transition to motherhood and how they feel about all the changes that inevitably occur?

It can be easily seen that my questions aim towards the personal and intimate aspects of their lives, towards their emotions and difficulties faced in relation to themselves, their partner and their children. It is not an easy task to offer confidence and reciprocity during discussions like these, but all of them realized that we can create safe spaces for them to move beyond timidity and reticence and start opening great chapters from their lives and experiences. Being simultaneously situated and perceived from an exterior position (as an unmarried and childless woman), position that cannot offer me the possibility of ‘knowing’ and ‘experiencing’ marriage and motherhood, I wanted through this empirical work to unveil and grasp moments from their life’s episodes and to present them in this thesis.

1.2 Methodological approach: accounting for women’s experiences and bodies

The socio-demographic characteristics presented in the Methods Chapter have their own significance in order to create a more specific picture regarding the subjects I interviewed. From this point, my purpose is to highlight the way the ‘body’ concept is accounted in this work and to reveal the importance of women’s ‘voice’ and ‘grounded experience’ in knowledge production. An analysis centered on the methodology approached in my thesis comes in close relationship with the way feminist literature engages with the concept of the ‘body’ and with feminists debates over the importance of emphasizing women’s experience in the way knowledge is generated.

In this respect, Miller’s (2007) opinion is that there’s a broad tradition in feminist scholarship that managed to critically engage with “unrealistic assumptions embedded in gendered discourses that pattern women’s lives’ most often present ‘in relation to reproduction, mothering, and experiences of motherhood” (Miller, 2007:337). Furthermore, a study centered on women’s

transition to motherhood can offer the possibility to test “a number of theoretical claims pertaining to identity, including gendered corporeality and the construction of self-identity in contemporary society” (Bailey, 1997:337).

More than this, there’s a need to bring the analysis on motherhood and pregnancy back on the list of priorities in feminist and gender studies, as it does not have to be perceived as something strange or unusual, because it is “after all an experience which the overwhelming majority of women can expect at least once in their lives to undergo” (Bailey, 1997:337). There’s no possibility to combat this statement as its validity and fidelity can be observed in our proximity, truly in a different manner for every particular social and cultural setting. However, I consider this to be only a starting point into such inquiry, and a more in-depth, situated and contextualized exploration is needed. Then, how the concept of ‘body’ and ‘experience’ can be conceptualized in this case?

An analysis that is centered on bodies has a complex history and roughly in the last three decades, the issue of body started to be reconsidered. Briefly described, on one hand, there’s a linguistic turn, where Butler (1993) argues that bodies are discursively created and mediated, and the matter of the body needs to be perceived as an “effect of a dynamic of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (Butler, 1993:2).

In this sense, an essential condition for these norms to have an effect upon the process of materialization is for them to be constantly reiterated and reinforced. The fact that there’s an ongoing need for norms to be reiterated, shows the fact that the process of materialization ‘is never quite complete’ and the bodies never fully “comply with the norms by which their

materialization is impelled” (Butler, 1993:2). Although Butler (1993) agrees that the very contours and fixity of the body are fully material, the materialization itself is power’s most productive effect (Butler, 1993:2).

On the other hand, new-materialism asks a slightly different question and tries to rethink the position of bodies within discourse. Barad (2003) argues that, in this respect, language gained too much power, and matter was turned into language along with Nature and Culture. Thus, her main argument is centered on the lack of actual matter of the body within discourse by invoking its agency and its constitutive ability to be an active participant in the world’s constant process of becoming¹ and transformation (Barad, 2003:801-3).

In other words, as Bordo (2003) eloquently points out, bodies are not just “tabula rasa, awaiting inscription by culture. When bodies are made into mere *products* (author’s italics) of social discourse, they remain bodies in name only” (Bordo, 2003:35). According to what has been said so far, I do not consider that we should perceive the matter and the discourse as being totally opposed or separated, but rather we should create a viable link between them in order to gain further understandings of body issues and its lived experiences. Then, how can we make sense of the concept of ‘experience’?

For Harding (1993) rationality and objectivity that emerged from the dominant group proves that the knowledge that is produced is not always highly objective. The knowledge is socially situated or located (Harding, 1993:49-60), and from this perspective, standpoint theory tries to deconstruct the whole idea of truth, objectivity and good practice integrated in positivist

¹ According to this, the world (Nature and Culture) is never fixed, crystallized nor separated, but rather it’s intertwined and undergoes a constant process of change and transformation by invoking the principle of differentiation.

paradigm, offering by this alternative trajectories for 'voiceless' individuals. This process is constituted simultaneously by explicit and implicit history, and at the same time, it manages to create oppressed individuals as collective 'subjects' (Harding, 2004:3).

The role of standpoint theory in my thesis is to empower and highlight women's experience by taking into consideration their values, emotions, perceptions, ways of living and thinking about their bodies, sexuality, desires, discontents or pleasures. In this case, building new forms of knowledge from women's experiences by women becomes another legitimate way within the process of knowledge production, especially in terms of human experience, thoughts, labor, visions or various positions regarding marriage or motherhood.

The problem of objectivity is also emphasized by Haraway (1988) when she argues that the absolute objectivity found in the late-industrial, racist, militarized, male-dominant and male-centered '80s American society, is subject to change. More than this, Haraway is resignifying the entire way of knowledge production claiming that by situated knowledges we understand what feminist objectivity is (Haraway, 1988:581). This new conceptualization emerges from empirical circumstance, by transcending the general character of absolute objectivity.

Standpoint theory and situated knowledges is trying to offer a few answers regarding aspects of social world that have never been the center to research attention. One might correlate this theoretical framework to the process of deconstruction of meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1984)² that dominated the humanities field of research during modernity, by opting for a more fragmented

² Lyotard, Jean-Francois. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester University Press. U.K.

and focused analysis on particular groups or communities in their close relationship to the social, cultural, political or economical environment.

Chapter 2. Background and Context: Chaotic spatiality and transitory temporality

The purpose of this Chapter is to formulate an analysis on the relationship between the new Romanian middle-class families and the post-socialist suburban neighborhood constructed in order to adapt the needs and desires of these newly constituted families. Drawing on Troc's (2012) and Petrovici's (2011) socio-anthropological analysis on Florești case, I argue that there's a discrepancy between the Western ideals and fantasies that surround middle-class's imaginary around certain standards of living, daily activities and practices, visions on community and family, marriage and ways of raising children, and the conditions offered by the new post-socialist peripheral neighborhoods envisioned as an escape from crowded and noisy cities.

2.1 Situating Florești between post-socialist urbanization and the relocation of the middle-class families

My purpose in this section is to make a brief inquiry into the decision of choosing Florești as a research site, followed by a descriptive analysis of this post-socialist suburban neighborhood. A brief intertwined inquiry into *space* and *time* proves itself to be necessary in order to facilitate the reading of the following sections. Space and time are two abstract concepts that gain a specific meaning when they are contextualized into a social setting and a confined period. In this sense, Castells (2010) postulates that space is an expression of society and since societies are subject to continuous structural change, it is legitimate to say that new spatial transformative processes emerge simultaneously with the changed societies.

Following this argument, Castells (2010) points out that the relationship between space and society has a complex foundation, “because space is not a picture of society, is the society itself and space is not a reflection of society, is the expression of it” (Castells, 2010:441). Although the purpose of this paper is not to formulate an analysis on space and spatiality, it is essential to emphasize that, as the author also mentions, space becomes intelligible only when society reflects it and vice versa.

Narrowing down the understandings of space to the suburban neighborhood Florești situated in proximity of Cluj-Napoca, the concept of temporality in this work unfolds a political and historical sequence, i.e. post-socialism. Although a few Romanian scholars, such as Troc (2012) and Petrovici (2011) discovered the potentiality that an analysis on this neighborhood can offer to a broader inquiry into urban studies, sociology or anthropology of space in relation to economy and politics, a project that comes from a gender perspective is missing in order to complete this analytical puzzle.

Therefore, through providing an analysis of this neighborhood and its complex relations to its inhabitants, this work can reveal yet another perspective on post-socialist Romanian families, their (re)construction and transformation, their social and financial background, their daily practices, dynamics, opinions on marriage, motherhood or child raising. Another reason behind my decision to choose the suburban neighborhood Florești as a research site comes from the potentiality offered due to its distinct massive urbanization process that took place particularly in the last eight to ten years.

Over the last years, it became visible that the young middle-class couples had no choice but to purchase an apartment in Florești if they “wanted to embark on the predictable conformist ideal

path of the middle-class: to form a family, to buy their own house, their own car, have children and educate them in a meritocratic spirit” (Troc, 2012:3), to have a distinct social status or to establish a certain pattern of consumption. Along with new types of urbanization, promises, ideals and major changes that filled the public discourses after 1989 and 1990, a new class slowly started to form and to distinguish itself from older, socialist generations.

This phenomenon was not visible or automatically consequential only because one regime – socialism - was replaced with another – capitalism -, but especially after 2000, it became more safe to claim for the formation of a new middle-class, as new work sectors such as IT, advertising, marketing, P.R. or H.R. emerged in Romania’s labor market, and privatization pervaded almost every socialist reminiscence creating and destroying with this new and old jobs and professions. Therefore, how Florești fits into this intricate picture of post-socialist Romania? Florești is not typical of what one can imagine a suburban neighborhood might ‘look’ like. Expecting to see an extended row of similar houses with enough space in front for a garden and a car, Florești comes to be quite the opposite.

Envisioned as a ‘oasis’ for the new professionals, this expending community turned out to be a small crowded space with limited parking spots, no places for *loisir* and still no parks for children. More than this, it is a chaotic urbanization and development that defines the construction and the logic of this neighborhood (Petrovici, 2012:1-2). Going beyond an inquiry into the architectural plan characteristic to this neighborhood, Troc (2012) offers a very good radiography of the relationship between the construction of a new residential area outside the borders of Cluj-Napoca and the emergence of the new Romanian middle-class.

The immediate period after 1989 came with a discourse centered on the ‘liberation’ and the alignment with the Western standards on every level; from salaries to life-style, from mobility and freedom to welfare. Thus, an ideal aimed especially towards the new middle-class started to emerge and to promote achievement through education and meritocracy, open labor market and consumerism beyond necessity (Troc, 2012:2). The second decade of post-socialism started with a considerable economic improvement with Romania joining E.U. and foreign capital flow entering and investing in Romania’s big cities (Petrovici, 2012:3). Paradoxically, saved by the economical crises, the young middle-class families found themselves in a relatively good position when they faced the possibility of purchasing their own house and to stimulate the expansion of the city beyond its borders (Petrovici, 2012:1-2).

This discourse is strongly internalized by every family that I interacted with and even if living in an extended family proves out to be more facile when it comes to talking about the material support (sharing the household incomes, land, bills or domestic labor) or the care and affective work (for elders or children), they all decided that once they established their own family, a separation and a form of autonomy is highly requested. B. is one on my interviewees that together with her husband and their daughter shared the same household with her mother. Although they were in good relations, she felt that once she had her own family it was time to move out and form their own household gaining by this independence from her mother on every aspect; from financial, to responsibility towards her family, from privacy regarding their sexual relations to her own way of raising their daughter.

We are very pleased. First of all because we have this house and we don’t have to pay anymore for it, we have now everything we wanted. We managed. We stayed with my mother, me and my husband and my daughter, and we never fought, but

we wanted to move out and have our own house. It is better to be alone. And I think everybody is trying, especially young couples, to move and to have their own house (B. 29 years old).

Same as B.'s case, the representatives of the new middle-class that produced a massive wave of migration from Cluj-Napoca to Florești especially after 2008, created two major interconnected directions of interpretation. On one hand, they wanted to leave the small, expensive and gray socialist apartments and neighborhoods (Troc, 2012:3) that did not offer enough space to raise children. Therefore, "the possibility of buying a new house became for the new middle-class a strong indicator of achievement brought by new capitalistic opportunities" (Troc, 2012:3). On the other hand, they wanted a separation from the extended family (if young couples shared the same dwelling with in-laws or parents) and create their autonomy and self-management aimed towards the formation of their own nuclear family.

Although it is not possible to claim for the presence of homogeneity in terms of family structure in Florești, it is without doubt safe to claim from observations, studies made and inhabitant's discourse, for a majority of nuclear families with small children. Also, the notion of family has its own specific characteristic often encountered in women's discourse. G. is her late 30s and for her, a 'proper' or 'real' family means two partners with at least one child, otherwise 'a family without a child it's a partnership, a couple, but it's not a family. Your kinship relation with your husband can be clarified in court, with your child nothing can happen (as the relationship cannot be dissolved)' (G. 37 years old).

Furthermore, I consider that a brief inquiry into the historical and socio-economical perspective on the construction of the nuclear family is necessary in order to better understand its massive

presence not only in Romanian landscape, but in many other global regions as well. Therefore, the idea of nuclear family and the dissolution of the extended family as we know it today is not an ahistorical process, and the configuration of today's family is slightly recent in history. This new type of family organization is not the 'natural' or 'obvious' way of creating spaces for living and raising children, as Industrial capitalism envisioned it³.

An analysis on the formation of the nuclear family is important in order to understand family rearrangements that took place simultaneously with the Industrial Revolution in Europe at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, and which continues to be the most representative form of family organization in Western societies. Briefly unfolding the process that characterized the emergence of the nuclear family, it was crucial for capitalism to dissolve the extended family and to reduce the number of the members in order to reconfigure and 'naturalize' the 'traditional' gender roles (Fraser, 1994). One gendered entity needed to produce and the other one to reproduce in order for capitalism to accumulate and develop.

³ First, because it is a capitalist construct formulated in order to validate the process of 'housewifization' (c.f. Mies, Maria. 1986. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale. Women in the International Division of Labour*. Zed Books: London) and second because there are non-occidental forms of matrilinear family organization such as; Trobrianders (in New Guinea) and Tetum (Timor) that has real marriage, Nayar (India) with fictive marriage, or Na/Mosuo (in China) that has no marriage at all (Godelier, 2011). For more information regarding the lack of marriage in the Mosuo culture please consult an extraordinary work by Stacey, Judith. 2009. *UNHITCHING THE HORSE FROM THE CARRIAGE: LOVE AND MARRIAGE AMONG THE MOSUO*. In *Journal of Law and Family Studies*. 11(2):287-321 or 239-273.

Focusing in his work on the westernized families, Godelier (2011) makes a complex inquiry into the problematic of kinship, marriage, family and lineage. Therefore, the same author argues that until the 19th century, kinship played an important role in family construction, in general being an extended one. Thus, the 19th century brought the institutionalization of marriage and by this the legitimization of the nuclear heterosexual couples. By this, progressively, the importance of kinship, especially in Western society, begins to diminish.

The new institutionalized form of marriage, besides that it was the only socially accepted and in terms of religious act, this form was an indissoluble bond of union between man and woman, marriage was the only legal form of recognition of a child born within a couple (Godelier, 2011: 4). The deconstruction of the extended family has also a great impact on the way gendered roles are internalized by the members of the new nuclear family. In some cases we can easily argue that the entire notion of work – from employment, to household and child care is now shared and disputed between husband and wife. The effects of these mechanisms are still visible in contemporary family's arrangements.

Taking the case of Florești, the separation from the extended family and the persistent wage gap between women and men⁴ (although I am referring now to Romania's case, this issue is global

⁴ For more information please consult Eurostat: Gender Pay Gap Statistics at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics#Gender_pay_gap_levels

Also, for more information about wage gap, gender and (in)equality, and family organization please consult: Okin, Susan Moller. 1999. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. pp. 313-331. In *Feminist Philosophies (2nd edition)*. Eds. Janet, Kourany; James, Sterba; Rosemary, Tong. Prentice Hall.

and varies), will leave women with no choice, but to take maternity leave and to be the primary caregiver for the child. The general household income will be less affected if women give up on employment. On one hand, the domestic and care work continues to be women's attribution and these types of activities will continue to be feminized. On the other hand, this mechanism is reinforced when men have no choice, but to be the main provider for the family and to perform the outside of domestic sphere work.

2.2 The middle-class family: from autonomous rhythms of life to women's bodily practices

The purpose of the previous section was to reveal the reason behind my choice regarding the empirical research, while at the same time, emphasizing the transformative process that engaged the members of the community I interviewed. In order to create an analytical connection between women's body with its possible changes within marriage and motherhood, I consider that an essential step is to situate these women within a socio-economical context, by trying to reveal specific characteristics regarding their class, family organization and dynamics, affinities and dispositions.

Starting with an analysis centered on class, all of my interviewees identified themselves as being part of the middle-class without any further explanation from me. Although they managed to identify themselves and their family as being part of the middle-class, it became more difficult for them to conceptualize a few specific characteristics of their own position within a wide range of particularities and distinctions between classes.

Thus, self-reflexivity was not a strong indicator in order to be able to describe themselves and their families from inside, but rather it became much easier when I asked them to make a

comparisons between and those who are impoverished, and respectively those who are extremely wealthy. For G. and for the majority of women I interviewed as well, their middle-classness is mostly characterized by their ability to face unknown or sudden situations and not to be extremely preoccupied when it comes to minimizing the costs of living.

We can't say we're poor. We have a house, we have a car and some money saved in a bank. But you need to have some expectations from life, to afford a holiday, to make the decisions in front of the shelf when you buy something. (G. 37 years old)

In this regard, I consider that class identification, financial status and autonomous nuclear family organization brings to light distinctive ways of perceiving marriage, creates certain frames of bodily practices for both men and women, and maternity, the entire period of motherhood, the medicalization of pregnancy and sexuality are conceptualized in a very specific manner. Therefore, I managed to identify two major characteristics in relation to their status of being a middle-class family.

On one hand, education in this case undergoes a resignification in a sense that there's no direct correlation between education and profession or income, but rather education in their opinion is closer to the notion of intergenerational social reproduction. In his complex analysis on class distinction, tastes and affinities, Bourdieu (1986) argues that the education system is not sufficient when it comes to making differences between class dispositions, and academic capital gains its relevance only when results from the combination of family cultural transmission's effects and those transmitted through school (Bourdieu, 1986:23 cited in Vincent; Ball, 2007:1067).

Bourdieu's (1986) narrative on education is visible in my subject's discourse when a proper education means that certain morals, values, ways of behaving and acting are taught and transmitted (in some cases) in a gendered way, from mother to daughter and father to son during childhood. F. was raised in a religious family where morality and conduct were strongly internalized and perpetuated by her parents. For her, a good education develops a certain way of knowing one's place in society and of being aware that there's a norm to follow, a pattern to fit and a standard to achieve.

For example education, I think it's really important. And I don't mean school education, but that one that you get at home, from family, regarding you behavior, your attitude regarding the others, life in general. And I don't mean your income necessarily, you can meet a family with very low income, but very educated. So I think the place is occupied by education. (F. 37 years old)

On the other hand, the financial status is a strong variable for a middle-class family identification when it comes to inscribing themselves into a certain frame of consumption. After a child is born, he/she became the main agent that parents focusing on and, as a consequence, they restrain from certain practices that were present in their lives before having children such as: eating in a restaurant at least once a week, having more than one vacation per year, buying clothes more often or going to hair, manicure and massage salons.

In terms financial background, E. comes from a modest family where everything was acquired through hard work and sacrifice. She experienced restrictions throughout her childhood and adolescence, and even though now she's a senior developer as her husband and their salaries are substantial, she relates to money in a very specific manner.

You know, they either manage to live with this money or not, they have to. Those who can, were taught to have very little (*sic!*). For us, it never happened for children to want something and for us not to be able to offer them. What is specific for our family is that we spend less than we earn. This is us. I remember when I was a child and I got some money, I never liked to spend it on a juice or chocolate. I always liked to save, and at the end of the month or three months I could buy a book, a piece of clothing. I tried not to spend money on trivial things, but to save and buy something that I thought I need (E. 33 years old).

But is there something specific related to middle-class family's structure and dynamic, especially after the child is born? Lareau's (2002) answer is yes, by arguing that there's a tight relation between class influences and 'rhythms of family life' when it comes to bringing into discussion daily practices and considerations on childcare and education (Lareau, 2002:761). Most middle-class parents are concerned about their financial future and possible decline and because of this, they're trying to provide a good and broad education to their children (Newman, 1993 cited in Lareau, 2002:771). In this case, P. says:

Look, for example we have our own apartment we don't have instalments like other people. We both have cars, but our salaries together, mine and my husband's is around 800 Euros. Considering that we have 2 children that need to go to school and kindergarten it is not enough (P. 37 years old).

Expanding this argument along with many other empirical observations, Lareau (2002) analyzes this phenomenon as being a form of 'concerted cultivation' of children from middle-class families (Lareau, 2002:771). The same author concludes that even if it's not possible to make a clear cut distinction between classes, there are certain affinities, leisure activities and dispositions

that are highly classed, starting from patterns of consumptions and tastes, and ending with parent's projection upon children's education (Lareau, 2002:1061).

Continuing the idea centered on consumption and moving the object of interest from children and parents to something more particular such as middle-class women's bodies within marriage and motherhood, it is known that a certain financial status and autonomy offers the possibility to 'turn back to the body' immediately after giving birth. In this regard, Nicoalescu (1996), points out the diversity in media that started to emerge after 1989 in Romania by showing how printed press tried to remodel "old political, moral and social identities and constitutes new subjectivities" (Nicoalescu, 1996:144).

Even though the analysis on Romania's media section was made a few years after the Revolution and by this the mediascape⁵ was flooded with Western ideals regarding women's bodies, desires, sexuality or a good family life, many women continue to adopt these models and relate to imagines and patterns that rarely find correspondent in the realm of quotidian. But then again, how exactly middle-class women relate to their bodies and identity within marriage and during motherhood in a post-socialist state where in the last 25 years so many influences and discourses converged?

⁵ Mediascapes refer to the information flow. This term is used by Appdurai, Arjun, 1996 in *Modernity at Large*. pp. 27-48. University of Minnesota Press: USA.

Chapter 3. Women's marital experience and the embodiment of marriage

The main interest of this Chapter is to discover how the interviewed women perceive their body after marriage, and if there's a clear (re)construction of a marital identity. In the following sections I will engage with Brook's (2002) critical perspective on feminist's debate around marriage as a sexist and a patriarchal institution which limits women's experience of independence and subjectivity, I will pay attention to my subject's narrative on the notion of independence and subjectivity within marriage, and I will emphasize in which ways they relate to possible changes regarding their physical body and emotions after marriage.

3.1 Reflections upon marriage as a sexist and patriarchal institution

In this regard, I consider that an inquiry into the politics of marriage from a feminist perspective is necessary in order to better understand the social and political implications that marriage has upon the (de)construction of gender, bodily perceptions and conjugal dynamics. Brook (2002) makes an interesting point by saying that in most of the Western societies, marrying and marriage started be reconceptualized differently from what is stated to be conventional, and many women 'seem less inclined these days to view marriage as an especially feminine "trade or career" (Brook, 2002:45). It becomes more evident now, that wives are no longer under the direct rule of their husband or "incorporated into their husband's being. The subjects of marriage are not quite the (innately masculine) autonomous individuals of liberal political theory either. Conjugal subjects are neither entirely individual nor wholly incorporated" (Brook, 2002:58).

Brook (2002) also claims for a return to an analysis on contemporary marriage, by shifting the traditional trajectory under which marriage was subjected to criticism especially in the '70s and the '80s, and proposes a change of perspective when it comes to 'revitalizing' the subject of marriage within current feminist debates (Brook, 2002:45-6). It is argued that the subject of

marriage was mostly analyzed from two perspectives; one that envisions marriage as a sexist institution and the other one that envisions marriage as a patriarchal institution (Brook, 2002:47-8).

Therefore, regardless of the perspective under which marriage was perceived and analyzed, the entire discourse upon it was a totalizing one and more attentive to its social implications instead to men's and women's lived experience and personal relations to the notion of marriage, (Brook, 2002:47-50) and the effects of 'being married'. Thus, according to Brook (2002), feminists such as Astell (1986), Greer (1970) or Pateman (1988), deal with the question of marriage more as an institution and less as a grounded experience, and by this, these feminists envision marriage as a fixed space, a social structure and a given (Brook, 2002:47) rather than a space that is gradually (re)constructed and constantly reconsidered by those who are involved in it.

Then, is marriage still a sexist and a patriarchal institution, or these categories are no longer fully concordant with current societies and realities? We can assume that marriage is a sexist institution when most women are changing their names after their husbands as a consequence of the marital contract that takes place (Brook, 2002:47), but this is only a part of the complex story that marriage is suppose to be. For example N. who's in her mid 20s, is not married to her partner, but they are in a relationship. They will have a wedding when they will feel the moment is right. This is how she relates to the idea of 'married woman' for this perspective.

Romanians in general, they are changing their names after they got married. This is killing me. If I want to continue to be 'Pop' it doesn't mean that I'm married or not married (N. 24 years old).

Furthermore, is marriage still a patriarchal institution in a sense that the man rules over woman's body, sexuality, labor and money? More than this, is the notion of marriage strongly internalized

by these women in a sense that they have to perform their marital status in a visible manner for the *others*⁶?

Almost all of the answers that I received from the interviewed women in this respect, were *no*, but my inquiry into this subject didn't have to end up at this point. Throughout my interviewee's narrative upon marital identity, most of these women claimed for keeping the integrity of their subjectivity as women and much less for a transformation into a 'veritable' housewife. But when it came to exemplifying their perception on women's role within a family, a different narrative surfaced. F. is in her late 30s, she's married with her husband for eleven years after six months of relationship, and she has a BA in Greco-Catholic Theology. Her vision upon married women, femininity and feminism reveals a contradictory discourse that often puts her in difficulties when it comes to making sense of marriage in contemporary societies.

I don't necessarily agree with this exaggerated feminism and this type of education where women are careerist, nobody leads us, and 'no, my body is my body'. This led women to a rigidity towards their femininity, and a masculinization of their femininity. I like a smart woman, that knows how to deal with things, but only if she stays a woman, that has a family, a husband, that cooks for him, and takes care of him. (F. 37 years old)

For F. a 'perfect' woman manages to combine work and family life without falling into one extreme, and having a career while keeping one's femininity is an extremely rare phenomenon in F's opinion. Through this statement, it became visible that these women tend to subvert the old patriarchal rules where women are entirely financially and emotionally dependent on their husbands, while at the same time they claim for a hyper-internalization of what it means to be a feminine woman by the virtue of being able to encompass everything; from having a job and a

⁶ In this case the 'other' is the outside of marriage 'presence', the general 'third'.

family, to being financially independent, feminine and a respectable wife and mother at the same time.

Then how their discourse on marital relations can be conceptualized? On one hand, from their narrative it became visible that they internalize a nuanced liberal perspective, where parenting must be as equal as possible, government should support child's care and education, and where is a higher degree of independence for women in terms of labor, payment or marital arrangements (Okin, 1999:320-5). On the other hand, their perspective is centered against the principles of radical feminism and their concept of patriarchy, where women are oppressed by men on every level, from their labor power to their sexuality and reproduction, often reinforced by physical violence and verbal abuse within monogamous heterosexual marriage (Hartmann, 1981:101-4).

Although Svendsen (1996) made her research on Romanian women from post-socialist generation almost two decades ago, her conclusions are still present among women's narrative on marriage, sexuality and bodies. Thus, Svendsen (1996) argues that "the ideal of the 'beautiful woman' exists alongside ideals of 'the traditional married woman' who is a good wife, a responsible mother, and a hard working woman. It is not about internalizing one identity over another, it's about reconciling them. This is because identities are never homogenous or coherent entities" (Svendsen, 1996:141).

This statement can be easily applied to Romanian current middle-class women as well, as it became visible from their narratives that marriage is not longer perceived as a patriarchal or sexist institution where women need to adopt a clear conduct in order to reveal their 'new' status in the eyes of the others. The 'popular' discourse centered on the idea of 'married woman' is not fully internalized by my interviewees. What I found interesting in this sense is that even if they acknowledge the fact that marriage means leaving aside forms of individuation and 'I' becomes

‘we’, their subjectivity as women and their independence should not be entirely absorbed by their husbands.

3.2 Resignifying the notion of independence within marriage: compromise and resistance

Then, how both partners manage to negotiate, reconcile and perform their marital identity? More precisely how the concept of independence finds its place in this complex picture represented by marriage? Drawing on women’s narrative upon their identity within marriage, this section is dedicated to an analysis that correlates the notion of independence to the idea of marriage, negotiations, compromise and resistance to conservative or traditional mechanisms of control.

As Svendsen (1996) argues, women’s bodies becomes a mean in showing how “independence is not only a question of spending time and money on one’s own body (...) and is not only about being conscious of one’s own worth, but it is about exposing this consciousness in relation to others (...)” (Svendsen, 1996:140). Expending this idea, it is essential to mention that along body practices, every aspect in a subject’s life, from money to decisions, from public actions to resisting the norm can be a potential factor in constructing women’s independence, subjectivity and agency.

E. has an interesting story centered on the idea of independence, security and autonomy. Throughout her life, she saw her father as a model not to follow within a marriage. He had problems with alcohol and he never truly cared about her and her mother. More than this, in many cases he claimed things that E. considered at that time not to be fair or right to claim, as he never saved money for them, nor showed love or affection towards them. During her adolescence she tried to take care of herself and her mother by managing, when she was around 18, to move to Cluj-Napoca and to follow ‘Technical University of Cluj-Napoca’ graduating with a BA and

an MA in Computers Science. Same as her husband, she is a senior developer, but currently on maternity leave with their third child. Regarding this subject, she says:

When I was young I was very independent in a sense that I never let anyone to help me. I wanted to everything by myself. But I started to see that I can count on him for so many things and as years passed and we had some issues to resolve, I let him help me and deal alone with different things. The car it's his responsibility. Before him, I never thought that I could be like this. I wanted everything to be under my name. Now the electricity, the gas is under his name. And I was like this because I saw that my father was not capable to do anything, not even to put the food into his mouth by himself. And I imagined that all men are like this, and I never wanted to end up without anything like him. (E. 33 years old)

From this point, it becomes visible the difficulty for E. to combine her independence with the duty of being a 'good' and 'respectable' wife. The question is the following: why is this independence usually never clearly uttered by my other subjects when it comes to talking about marriage, but so often insinuated? One answer can be centered on the notion of ambivalence when it comes to talking about independence within marriage. On one hand, they all claimed for a non-alteration of their subjectivity as women, for a rejection of the status of being a full-time housewife, while at the same time being aware that is not longer possible to claim for independence⁷ in its own right after they got married.

In order to highlight the dynamics between spouses within marriage, I devised the notion of "co-independence". Even though they have to justify their daily actions or decisions to one another,

⁷ I am using 'independence' here in terms of freedom of movement, decision making and individuality.

marriage in this case is not a strong indicator of restrictions. In my interpretation, “co-independence” refers to a continuation of performing the same cluster of practices that transcends the boundaries often imposed by the virtue of being married. Furthermore, co-independence is a form of embodiment of consent or approved freedom. For example N. is still a student and this thing makes her want more from a married life.

When you decide to get married and be with that person, everybody should still have that freedom...I mean we have out moments when I’m out with a friend having coffee. Every Thursday, for the past five years we have coffee. When I’m getting married I want to have the same possibility to have my coffee with my friends. You are not going to restrict the things that I was doing before I met you. You are going with your guys to play football, and I’m going to have my coffee with my girlfriends (N. 24 years old).

Thus, the relationship between spouses results in a refusal to create a closed space and an institution out of marriage where women and men are ‘institutionalized’. I am referring in this case only to marriage envisioned by most of my interviewees as a more open space, and where, at least at a discursive level, their subjectivities and body practices are not fully altered or alienated.

In this case, N. is 24 and she’s not married to her partner. She wants to be sure about the decision of getting married ‘instead of taking a foolish decision, only because everybody’s doing it. I’m not doing what everybody does, I do what I feel’. N. 24 years old. This is how she relates to their relationship:

He makes me feel me, he doesn’t change me. I am exactly who I am with my good side and my bad side. When you want to change somebody it means that

you don't want him or her anymore. If you want an improved version or...a different one...it means that you want something else. He accepts me together with my dog, although he doesn't like it (N. 24 years old).

As Svendsen (1996) also argues, Romanian women's bodies and identities find themselves caught between their imaginary on Western's ideals of beauty and independence, and socialist reminiscence of hard working woman, a sole role model for her children, and a 'proper' wife who's duty is to offer the affective and emotional work (Svendsen, 1996:141-2). Thus, for the women I interviewed, marriage is not perceived as a condition for transition from a 'free' adolescent to a 'proper', 'real', or 'serious' woman, and they relate to marriage not as a common space where bodies and identities are invited towards crystallization, but rather as a space where bodies perform their multiple forms of identity in an unfixed manner. In other words, women consider that their maturity and development comes from experience and age, from the fact that they were in difficult situations on their own, and not necessarily from conditions imposed by marriage.

3.3 Women's body within marriage: sexuality and the embodiment of emotions

Even if so far I focused on women's narrative upon marital identity and the difficulties of self-reflexivity regarding clear or visible changes that marriage brought in relation to their selves and their subjectivity, with it came to discussing bodies and emotions, they all agreed that a woman should not consciously change at all only because an act united them with a man. But after a few more questions and examples, they realized that actually they started to change, not only physically, but emotionally as well.

The next story will present an episode centered on husband's attempt to appropriate his wife's sexuality and body, and she refuses his empowerment in a subversive manner by making her

voice heard. I. is in her mid 30s and she and her husband got married when they were very young after a short period of relationship. She has now three children, but she became mother right after marriage knowing that her husband will leave soon. Hence, for long periods of time she was alone with her children, while her husband was in Afghanistan for many interrupted years.

She describes her marriage as being more dynamic comparing to her friend's marriage, but this did not mean it was always pleasant for her. Her marriage was a long process of readjustments with her husband while he was leaving for six months and returning home to visit. After she got used living without him, she has to try to accommodate him again within the family and to reconnect the relationships between them as a couple and between him and their daughters. Thus, how this reconnection with her husband worked in terms of her sexuality and their sexual relations?

He was coming home, and he was tired, I was tired and I felt used. I was just ironing, and cooking all day and all he needed was ...*(she didn't make it explicit but she referred to sex)* and I told him that I can't...that's it. (I. 34 years old)

Through '*and I told him that I can't...that's it*' she reacted, she said no and he needed to step back. She didn't comply with his desires and by this she managed to control her sexuality. The fact that some of these women are questioning their role in this partnership regarding the type of work they are supposed to offer and perform, leads to various forms of subversions in terms of normative frames of relating to one's sexuality and body. By this, they are questioning the entire spectrum of elements that compose a conjugal life. Sexual intercourse does not have to be a proof that the marriage is 'consumed', and does not have to be activated only if results in reproduction. On the contrary, it has to be liberated by the constraints that marital law brings, often perceived as a package with multiple gendered obligations and duties.

Furthermore, in most of my interviewee's opinion, partners do not have to change in any way after they marry, and they don't have to impose certain ways of being, looking or acting after this contract takes place, on one another. In this case, a woman in her mid 30s, married with her partner after one and half month of relationship describes her marriage in a very positive note:

We have two wonderful children, five and half years passed since we got married, and I want to say now that we still tell each other 'I love you' countless times in a day, we still holding hands, we still tell each other 'good night', and this things disappear in most of the families. We have friends that got married two years ago, and they don't have that sweetness from the beginning. We have problems too, so? I am a happy person and I'm 99% convinced that my husband is not cheating on me. That 1% is half doubt. And I would never cheat on him (S. 36 years old).

For S. marriage is composed by a set of actions that need to be present and invoked after they marry as well. More than this, from her discourse it becomes visible that marriage does not imply settling down and routine, but rather she argues that marriage needs to be supported by performing some specific acts of validation and confirmation in order for the relationship between them to persist.

Along various scenes of love expressions that ultimately led to a construction of complex invitations towards recognition and confirmation for both partners, for the interviewed women, marriage is an assemblage, a totality that constantly requests validation and assurance. On a micro-level for most of them action takes utterance's place, but for others, the words themselves are enough when it comes to confirming the relationship between them. Paraphrasing B., she said that for her the most important thing is the husband to tell them (her and their daughter)

every day that he loves them. According with J.L. Austin (1962) *by* saying or *in* saying something, you are doing something (Austin, 1962:12). What does this mean exactly?

For Austin (1979) every utterance is a performative one because it indicates a constitutive action within. One fruitful example in this sense is the utterance “I do” which implies the linguistic part (by saying ‘I do’) and the action part when one is marrying somebody else (Austin, 1979:13). This is a good example of what one of my interviewee answered. For B., the simple utterance of ‘I love you’ that has to be performed by her husband every day, leads to an entire spectrum of actions arbitrary associated with this syntagm. More than this, this scenario is mentally prepared and expected, as while we were conducted the interview, I noticed the anxiety provoked by the fact that her husband was still not calling to check up on them.

Also, S. has a very interesting vision upon knowing ‘he’s the one’ and the fantasy around the other’s body is not limited only to appearance. In fact, this aspect is the least important when it comes to making sense of love and choosing one person. A very interesting answer in this regard is centered on smell and how one’s body somatizes to other’s scent. In this regard, S. continues:

You will think that I am a freak, but the smell is very important. Or the way they look, the similarities I mean. I read somewhere once, that metabolism needs to be similar, and the specific smell of that person...you need to like that to your partner. Who is not compatible in this sense, it’s an assured divorce. (S. 36 years old)

Drawing from S.’s answer, scent is about compatibility, attraction or fantasies about one’s presence. In this case my interviewee did not refer to the quality of smell, or specific perfumes, but going way back to oedipal phase, we can compare this phenomenon to moments when the child rejects certain objects according to their taste or smell, apparently without any reason.

Hence, in this case we can focus on the idea of rejection or attraction, internal objects and feelings or liberation and control.

Another interesting observation is centered on women's hair and the skin. Love within marriage somatizes with the body in a way that clear physical changes are starting to be visible. E., is in her early 30s, has three children and she's married for seven years to her first and only partner, while being together since the first year of university. When we started to talk about the possible changes regarding her body after marriage, she told me that at some point right before marriage and immediately after, she realized that emotions such as happiness, joy, and confidence had a great impact upon her hair and skin. Moreover, her hair started to grow, glow and regenerate.

Emotionally, yes, I've changed. I know that when I fell in love I was very very happy, and my hair was growing like crazy because of happiness. It had volume, and it was shining. And my friends were seeing me from far away and they were saying 'you look so happy!' I've never seen you so happy before. And I was making people happy around me only because I was that happy (E. 33 years old).

This wasn't just her observation, but she started to be recognized as such by the others. This is not a new discovery regarding the relationship between feelings or emotions and the way E.'s body responds to them. E. and S. were two examples through which I tried to reveal specific ways of how the marital body is (re)constructed and more than this, of how women relate and perceive their own corporeal transformations within marriage.

This ontological statement comes from the fact that all the emotional changes are perceived upon their body, their skin. It is important to mention that this is not a deterministic observation, because this phenomenon operates in reverse as well. Therefore, in this sense, the corporeal construction is never fixed, static, nor crystallized, as an individual faces multiple and constant

emotions. However, even if in their narrative they never claimed for a distance from their body, as ‘this is not my body, this is not me’, certain emotions started to surface and the body expressed them accordingly. While bringing into discussion the relationship between marriage and body with its possible changes, E. engaged herself into a long process of introspection and revisited by this her past, her emotional maze and her bodily transformations. For example, she says:

There is a very interesting thing that I cannot explain. Before meeting my husband I wasn’t able to cry. After I meet him, although I was so happy, if he upset me, I cried with so much sorrow. If he was not giving me attention, I started crying. Before I met him, I was never upset with people, never. They could have done everything, to curse me, to offend me, everything. I was detaching the act from the person. After this, I noticed that I can be upset with him (the husband), to actually be upset with him. Why did he do that or this? I was crying because he was saying something and he was doing something else. (E. 33 years old)

Although they all claimed for a lack of immediate bodily and identity changes within marriage, there are a few aspects that need to be taken into consideration. For example some of my subjects claimed that they started to gain little weight – not much, but enough to be able to make a distinction between them before and after marriage. Their upper arms and hips started to gain little proportions. This happened not because they stopped taking care of their body and appearance, but because they reconceptualized the practice of eating. During E.’s student years she lived in a dormitory with many other women the same age. Sharing the same living space, she became friends with her neighbors and by this, it was easier for her to notice how their bodies changed after they had stable relationship. In this sense, she says:

Yes, and I thought that I am the only one observing this. While leaving in the dorm, I was looking at other girls that I knew before, when they were girls. At that point I knew that they have a boyfriend and they live with them as husband and wife, together. And all of them started to have bigger hips. And I couldn't understand how and why. What I thought at that moment is that if you have somebody to cook for, you do it. Before being with my husband I was eating only soups and stuff like this. But you cannot just stay and watch somebody eating.

You eat as well. (E. 33 years old)

In this sense, the food, the act of cooking, the products they are buying, and the act of eating changes while being in a 'serious' relationship and living with your partner or after marriage. Also E. noticed that once women and men are married, they are more calm, tolerant and patient and they enjoy eating together. In a nuanced manner, my subjects are actually subverting Western discourse on gendered food quantities that is consumed. Interestingly, Bordo (2003) shows how extremely romanticized are Western ideals on beautiful, slim and feminine women's bodies especially in contemporary advertisement (Bordo, 2003:100). This does not mean that the message that is transmitted is centered on the idea of balance, but rather on the idea of control and repression of desires in terms of food and eating practices. Nevertheless, as the same author points out, in contemporary visual or printed media "women's appetites require containment and control, whereas male indulgence is legitimated and encouraged" (Bordo: 2003:14). Also, women that I interviewed told me that they have a different rhythm and their metabolism changed; it's slower. Partially their social life slowly moved from the outside world to the intimacy of their home.

The physical activity is slightly reduced due to long working hours and tiredness, and they have more static activities together later in the evening when they meet again. I noticed that it was more difficult for them to realize significant changes regarding their bodies, because marriage does not orchestrates directly their bodies, but their daily activities. From this point is essential to ask if women's narrative undergoes a different trajectory once they become mothers. Thus, do women relate to their bodies differently after they give birth? If so, how exactly they conceptualize their corporeal transformation and what types of emotions emerge simultaneously with possible changes regarding their bodies?

Chapter 4. Incorporating motherhood: (non)recognition, control and affects

The aim of this chapter is to reveal those particular, personal and intimate aspects of women's lives as mothers and the way they perceive their bodies in order to formulate an analysis that encompasses all these reflections over one's corporeality and emotions, anxieties, fears, or happiness within motherhood. More precisely, I want to offer an analysis on the close relationship between the individual maternal body, namely the intra-psychic dimension with its post-birth emotions, anxieties, fears and affects, and the constitutive part of this, namely the social body, by focusing on the corporeal aesthetics, temporality and (non)stability. I will dedicate each section to an analysis centered on the reconceptualization of women's subjectivity and agency during maternity by focusing on the notion of responsibility and sacrifice, I will unfold mother's narrative regarding post-birth body control and discipline, and I will end up emphasizing the relationship between affects such as shame and corporeal aesthetics.

4.1 Mother's transferred subjectivity and subordinated agency

Although women relate to marriage as being the validation of the relationship between two individuals, and it's perceived to be an intimate process that includes only two partners, motherhood changes the way women relate to themselves and becomes a more externalized process. Drawing from the discussions that I had with my research subjects, I argue that once a woman perceives herself as being a mother and engages in a complex set of practices that will validate her status according to her new identity, the sense of self, the integrity of her body and her personhood will gradually undergo several transformations.

The unity or the totality that defined her before giving birth and before being the primary tutor of her child, will start to reconfigure in a sense that her post-birth body, subjectivity and agency will be disputed differently. The main point is that this duality formed between herself and her child is not balanced and does not create a relation based on mutuality and reciprocity, but rather it's a disruptive process in which the mother is the one that transfers her subjectivity to the child perceived as being passive and lacking agency. But what is subjectivity in this sense? Bordo (2003) points out that "the body can never be regarded merely as a site of quantifiable processes that can be asserted objectively, but must be treated as invested with personal meaning, history, and value that are ultimately determinable only by the subject who lives 'within it'" (Bordo, 2003:74). Furthermore, when it comes to articulating different perspectives on maternal body, it becomes visible that during pregnancy and maternity, women are starting to have "little jurisdiction over their body's appearance and demeanour and which belies the modern Western conviction that we possess our own bodies and we are able to mould them accordingly" (Warren; Brewis, 2004 cited in Haynes, 2008:329). Continuing this argument, I consider that within motherhood women are starting to be more aware of their own body, its rapidly and sometimes radically changes and transformations as an effect of realizing that they ceased to have total control over it.

Bailey (1999) makes some very good remarks regarding the connection between mothering identity and the maternal body. The same author points out that to some degree, pregnancy and the process of becoming a mother improves women's "sense of self-worth and fulfillment" and the changes that constantly occur regarding their identity and body do not simply shift, but rather are subject to progress (Bailey, 1999:339). In this respect, I consider that progress does not have to be understood as a unidirectional trajectory, from bottom up, but more as a disruptive process,

a readjustment, a partial detachment from a unitary self that might lead to something different, or new.

As Bailey (1999) argues, women's bodily changes that occur during the transition to motherhood and after child's birth are relevant in order to reveal "embodied aspects of the self". Furthermore, a focus on the process of becoming a mother can reveal significant aspects of their private and intimate lives, (Bailey, 1999:336) relationships and emotions that can contribute to a need of bringing more female's voices, experiences and opinions to the surface. Stone (2014) makes a very interesting remark by emphasizing the fact that "often mothers feel that they have fallen into a formless realm that excludes meaning and agency: the agency to organize one's own life and to organize one's own experience into meaningful patterns" (Stone, 2014:236).

Revisiting the research argument and revealing the fact that women's narrative was centered on the idea of not completely altering one's subjectivity and body within marriage perceived as an open space, and more, this non-alteration is an essential component when it comes to deciding over the terms of being married, their discourse changed when it came to discussing the pregnant and post-birth body and identity. Moreover, it is essential to emphasize the fact that women relate differently to what marriage means and what motherhood means in terms of responsibility and self-significance.

The notion of responsibility and sacrifice is present in women's discourse as well as in P.'s who's in her late 30s and mother for the second time with her second husband. She experienced two marriages and two births and the way she envisions maternity now is mostly in opposition to the first one. This is the way P. relates to the status of being mother for the second time:

Many things changed, but not necessarily after I got married, but after I became a mother. I started to feel responsible, to give an example to my child (*her daughter*). I could not behave as I did before, like a teenager, flighty, and I stopped wearing long earrings, and started having much shorter nails. (P. 37 years old)

For P. the experience of the second marriage and second birth made her more responsible and aware of the way a ‘real’ mother should behave or wear herself around the child. Her imaginary around maternity and the right identification with her status is something that is widely shared and debated. But why having a child leads to sacrificing something on women’s behalf (cf. Svendsen, 1996)? And more than this, why is this sacrifice gendered and unequal between mother and father in most cases? Ruddick’s (1989) answer points out the fact that in general women are “mothers’ just because and to the degree that they are committed to meeting demands that define maternal work” (Ruddick, 1989:17). According to this, the terminological relationship between women and mothers is rather arbitrary, but nevertheless naturalized, culturally and socially constructed by the virtue of being the carrier of the child.

4.2 Restrictive and restricted body

The previous section was centered on showing how women’s subjectivity is fragmentized once she becomes a mother. In this sense, I don’t perceive this disordered subjectivity to be a sudden effect of a cause (the birth), but rather as an ongoing, disruptive process that it’s in some moments reinforced, felt, or hurtful, and in other moments more unsubstantial, loose and controllable. Thus, I argue that this phenomenon results from detailed aspects of mother’s life when she experiences a lack of control or certain restrictions regarding her pregnant and

maternal body, both interior and exterior envisioned as being fundamental in what it means to be ‘a mother’. Then how mothers experienced and reacted to this lack of control during their maternal life? Do they adopt mechanisms of restoring it?

A major aspect identified during my subject’s discussions is centered on the common experience conceptualized under the notion of discipline. One direction of an analysis centered on discipline can be drawn on Rabinow’s analysis on Foucault’s genealogy on discipline emerged at the dawn of modernity and Industrial capitalism. As Rabinow (1984) points out, the “political economy” of the body is centered on its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission even by using ‘lenient’ methods” (Rabinow, 1984:172).

Due to the fact that in their narrative they claimed for post-birth changes, it became clear that the notion of being a ‘good mother’ has a great impact on the way they dress, they communicate in front on the children, they act, on the way they make distinction between women with children and women without children, or the attention of the latter regarding their own bodies. For example P. who’s in her late 30s and mother for the second time said that the second period of motherhood made her see things differently. Thus, for her discipline does not mean coercion or control over her own body, but a change of interest and priorities. Then how exactly she perceived this difference?

I have friends that I met again after many years, and one of them came to our home and my first daughter was little. I didn’t know at that time if she has children or not, because I couldn’t ask her directly. The fact that she was keep moving her boots for my daughter not to step on them with her bicycle, and she

kept worrying not to scratch her purse, I immediately realized she does not have children because she didn't understand things like these (P. 37 years old).

In my attempt to unfold this lack of control when women face motherhood, I devised the concept of *restrictive body* and *restricted body* defined here as mechanisms imposed by and to women during their maternal life. Therefore, I envision the restrictive body as the material body that restricts a woman's activity, desires, agency, and the restricted body is the body that is restricted by social conventions and norms, collisions between discourses or social and intergenerational reproduction.

Adding to the fact that we talk about a post-socialist, religious state with certain views upon gender roles, femininity and masculinity, we can also bring into discussion the power that religion still has in shaping identities, behaviors, morals and gender roles. Although state socialism brought a new wave of atheism and a distance from religious practices, 'after the fall of the communist regimes, the post-socialist countries have shown an increasing interest towards religion, which reveals a so-called religious revival pattern that proves the secularization theory wrong' (Froese, 2001. 2003 cited in Gog, 2006:37). Despite of socialism's "'forced' atheization of the population" (Gog, 2006:39), it is easily noticeable in present day that "Romania is one of the most religious societies in both Eastern and Western Europe" (Müller, 2004, Pollack, 2001, 2004 cited in Gog, 2006:39) in terms of practices, believes, or moral and pious demenaour. Then, how this close relation to religion beliefs is embodied at the level of maternal practices?

B.'s case is a good example when it comes to correlate religion with the notion of restricted body and the impossibility of displaying the immediate post-birth body to the outside world. Although she has strong affinities towards the moral aspects of maternity, she decided together with her

husband to end her ‘molifta’ sooner, but not for her to continue her activities, but because it was more difficult for her husband to face every aspect of their lives that are carried outside the domestic sphere.

Before giving birth, we did everything together. After, I wasn’t able to leave the house for 40 days. Well, 20 because I did my ‘molifta’⁸ sooner than I was supposed to. My relationship with my husband suffered a little bit, as we were not able to continue our activities together. It was difficult for me and for him especially during the first month. (B. 29 years old)

E.’s case is the definition of what I mean by restrictive body, and how her body reacted to the changes produced by every pregnancy. Moreover, her body became rigid, uptight from inside, correlative to pain and turned against her will to give birth and carry the pregnancy without difficulties.

It means less how you look, but how you feel...there are all sorts of pain, all over your body. I got sick with these children, because I was vulnerable with my back.

⁸ Romanian word – it signifies a procedure done by a priest to the mother and the child in order for them to be able to leave the house. The orthodox canon promotes the idea that a woman who recently gave birth is ‘dirty’ and she should not reveal herself to the world. Therefore, the priest prays for the mother and the new born child, blesses them both and purifies her dirty body. In this sense, the body is dirty because the woman is not a virgin anymore, as she gave birth.

Source:

<http://www.crestinortodox.ro/forum/showthread.php?t=16080>

With the pregnancies and holding the babies in my arms I was paralyzed for awhile. I couldn't move at all. (E. 33 years old)

It is essential to emphasize the fact that these two concepts do not function on their own in an isolated form, but they need to be perceived as mutually constitutive and interchangeable. The materiality of the body cannot be conceptualized as a distinctive, separated entity from social and cultural settings. Therefore, discipline in this case is not a form of coercion that comes with giving birth of a child, but rather it is a conventional discourse internalized by women when they face motherhood.

4.3 Unfolding the transformative maternal body

The purpose of this section is to discover the way women that I interviewed envision their own body and self within motherhood. Moreover, I am interested to see if they seek for a closure between their new identity and their maternal body. The latter statement is emphasized by the myth of the beautiful pregnant body deeply experienced by women during the entire process of pregnancy, or in relation to the physiological changes, the impact of the impersonal dimension of medicalization, and the difficulties faced when one comes to realize that bodily pain, fear, discontent, social isolation and emotional unavailability are superficially mentioned in books or forums.

Interest and preoccupation regarding bodies, especially among women, is not a recent issue and women and men as well, started to be aware of their own body, how it's shaped and how it looks like. This phenomenon often comes with actions and attentions in order to situate the body within a complex process of transformations and changes, some radical and some more subtle and specifically located upon the body. Many individuals who associate these transformations

with particular episodes in life, bodies in adolescence, marriage and motherhood (not necessarily implicit or deterministic) or middle-aged and elder's women bodies in their close relation with class, culture, social status, age and race, are starting to turn back to their bodies and raise a few questions about its appearance and well-being.

Inevitably the anatomical body undergoes several changes while pregnancy, but the transformations do not end here. Once the child is born, mother's body enters new stages of changes, from physical (gaining or losing weight) to emotional (post-birth trauma, fear, anxieties, body shame and tiredness). Very often and in very different ways, the responsibility that comes with taking care of a child situates the mother into chaotic temporalities paradoxically constituted by routine and repetition, day after day. I. has three children and for long periods of time she managed to raise them alone while her husband was in Afghanistan. In this sense, she felt that she's the only one who knows every aspect of motherhood with all its burdens and difficulties.

I have a very strong personality, but inevitably I got a feeling of invalidity (*after giving birth*), me being very active and doing all sorts of stuff. Being home with the child I was doing the same thing every day, monotony appeared and I felt that I am not appreciated by my husband (I. 34 years old)

An interesting way of coping with this chaotic episode that managed to engage most of the women that I talked to and many others that I observed before and during my fieldwork is the hair cut, and the reasons are mainly centered on the idea of practicality and time saving. A long hair asks for time and care and after the child is born the perception of time changes radically. But also, a short hair derives from a need to identify with the child it is a practice through which

these women can reveal the fact that they are mothers now. Even if they cut their hair short, their husbands did not fully agree with this. Being a mother often comes together with a desexualization of the body. A long hair in men's view indicates femininity, sexuality, eroticism whereas a short hair is correlative with the notion of passivity, pain or refusal of sexual activity.

It is true that I cut my hair without asking him. When I came back home he said that it doesn't suit me. But I said that I like it and that's it. It will grow back (F. 37 years old).

Another major aspect women focused in their narratives is the aesthetics and the shape of the body. P. and F. are both 37 with two respectively three children. In relation to their maternal body, this is what they said.

Except for the fact that I gained weight? Many years ago I was wearing short skirts, and I started to wear long shirts (P. 37 years old).

What I liked the most with three children is for the world (she meant the people) to see that I look good (F. 37 years old).

Along P. many other women were discontent regarding their post-birth bodies starting with the fact that they gained more weight than they initially thought they will, and ending up with physical pain or immobility. Although these bodily processes are widely experienced by women during their early maternity, I identified two reasons that lay behind these aesthetical dissatisfactions. Once they gave birth they realized that their bodies are functioning against their will and along with this, they realized that they cannot fully control it anymore. This aspect leads to the other reason. By trying to get back in shape right after birth, in cases where women considered that they gained too much weight during pregnancy, they engage themselves in a mirrored process.

Through this, many of them are struggling to look the same as they did before getting pregnant creating by this a mechanism of restoring the lack of control over their own bodies. In this regard, an important aspect raised by Bordo (2003) is the way diet and thinness became gendered by associating the slender body with the female one. It is widely argued that if men are virile and rational, women are more directly connected to their bodies, sexuality, hunger, emotions and desire in an androcentric culture⁹ (Bordo, 2003:204-6). In Grosz's (1994) words, "women have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body" (Grosz, 1994:xiv).

G. is in her late 30s and one year ago she gave birth to her only child, although after she and her partner got married they decided not to have children. Having a child after many years of marriage, made her realize the distinction between the way she was before and after becoming mother and how she conceptualized her body within these two temporalities. This is G.'s opinion regarding her relationship with her husband after she became mother.

In a couple, communication is good, but not too much. First of all, your husband has to be your lover (*as a boyfriend*), so with your lover you don't shave, you don't talk about your intimacies, you don't drag him after you while shopping, he doesn't have to dye your hair, you don't wear your hair-curler and facial mask in front of him, you don't use the toilet in front of him. You ruin your comfort as a couple. Love is maintained through continuous surprise. Otherwise one will be in one part, the other one in a different place. An act doesn't keep somebody

⁹ This subject is also accurately analyzed by Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press: U.S.A.

married, the fact that I have the key to my house and I'm married doesn't mean that that's it, I'm gaining weight, I curse and I scream all day (G. 37 years old).

(Even if) I'm married it doesn't mean that that's it, I'm gaining weight, I curse and I scream all day. But it happens, and her post-birth body underwent several transformations that preoccupy her deeply. Now she's trying to lose weight in order to go back to her pre-birth body, clothes and identity. In one word, she is struggling to go back to herself. She is very content that she managed to get pregnant without additional support, as she was saying that at her age it's more difficult, but in her opinion, maternity and motherhood means caring for a child without her body's shape and appearance showing this.

Moreover, from G.'s point of view, the relationship between having a child and women's bodies revealing the fact that they were pregnant should not be consequential or deterministic. In terms of Cartesian body-mind split, for G. the body and the identity are separate, as taking care of your body is to maintain a good sexual or erotic relationship with your husband, while taking care of your mind and conduct is to raise your child in the best way possible.

G.'s case is part of a phenomenon accurately emphasized by Benjamin (1988) when the author analyzes women's lack of subjectivity in terms of sexuality, i.e. "man expresses desire and the woman is the object of it" (Benjamin, 1988:86). Benjamin (1980) argues that what is actually problematic is that in Western culture is known and recognized only one type of individuality namely the masculine one, constituted by over differentiation, separation, denial and the rejection of similarity and fusion with the female individuality. In this false distinction, the other entity will gain the status of object (the woman) by not reproducing itself as an autonomous person i.e. as a subject. The way to establish and protect this type of individuality is convergent

to Western's perspective on rationality. Being a woman means being excluded from this rational status, or being constituted as an object. To be a man is to persist on maintaining dualism, separation and boundaries scored between the position of being a woman and being a man (Benjamin, 1980:148-150). However, I believe that desire can easily be outsourced within the sexuality matrix and relocated within all the mechanisms that have the potentiality to create women's subjectivity.

Also the issue of power is invested differently, women are internalizing power through their willing to be in shape and attractive in contrast to men who are externalizing power through their public actions (Bordo, 2003:204-6). In this regard, Brown (1993) emphasizes an interesting point, by saying that it is not possible to 'look' in an analytical way at, for example eating disorders as individual pathologies or diseases (for example anorexia or obesity), and isolate them from social circumstances, cultural settings, economic situation, patriarchy or ideal beauty standards promoted by media (Brown, 1993:54). For example, D is in her late 20s and she gave birth a few months ago. Throughout our discussion, she kept emphasizing the fact that her major issue with this new episode is the fact that she gained too much weight.

I didn't have a problem with my body immediately after birth. Now I start to realize that I'm fat, I'm looking in the mirror and I cry and I want to lose weight. Right after I gave birth I didn't have problems with me, I was too proud of her to care about me (D. 28 years old).

Thus, in direct relation to body appearance, self-esteem, confidence and happiness gain an important place, but continuing this argument, isn't self-esteem and the whole spectrum of feelings and emotions socially and politically constructed at the basis of trying to determine

women to 'work' on their bodies and avoid the crisis of feminine women especially during motherhood?

4.4 Body shame and the difficulties of 'being': embedded emotionality

This section's aim is to connect the maternal transformative body to post-birth emotions, anxieties and affects such as shame. Motherhood implies changes in women's life and the most visible ones are centered on women's body and the presence of the child. Bodily perception creates a wide range of emotions and it's impossible to track down a specific spectrum of feelings when it comes to talk about one's body experience, especially during motherhood. In this regard, many scholars already emphasized "the profound negative consequences of our culture's pervasive practice of sexually objectifying women's bodies" (Noll; Fredrickson, 1998:623).

One of the most powerful affect that occurs when it comes to experiencing one's post-birth body is shame. In analyzing shame from a broad perspective, Biddle (1997) starts from a position that situates shame at the intersection of psychoanalysis and social context by attaching the shame to the "so-called 'disgust/contempt response' that is surprisingly a punitive response often denied by parents" (Biddle, 1997:229). By this argument, Biddle (1997) implies that shame is learned by children in the pre-oedipal phase and then it is manifested and experienced almost uncontrollably in certain situations.

It seems then, that shame has an important cultural component, by the fact that individuals associate certain acts with shame as a constitutive part. As Sedgwick (2003), who is influenced in her inquiry into shame by Tomkin's (1962, 1963, 1991) complex work on affect theory argues, shame does not distance itself from identity, in my case the maternal one, but rather shame is part of identity construction and is always relational (Sedgwick, 2003:36-7). But one's

ashamed by something he/she is, not by something he/she does (in this case we talk about guilt). Therefore, shame is a totality, clearly exemplified with the syntagm "I am a bad person' rather than 'I did something bad'" (Noll; Fredrickson, 1998:624). In this case, shame is attributed to a failure that is centered on being and not on doing, and the result is always manifested through negative emotions. E. has three children and throughout her pregnancies she experienced only negative effects regarding her body. For her, the glowing and beautiful pregnant body is truly a myth considering that it was very difficult to adapt her mind and perceptions upon pregnancy to the continuous uncontrolled and transformative body.

Physically there are so many transformations, only bad ones. I never had good one. You can't hold pee, but women are not saying this because of shame. People don't realize what this means. It's not a big deal, you don't pee yourself, but one drop it's enough, and if you're used to always be dry and clean, that drop is enough to drive you crazy and embarrass you, even if people don't know anything about this. (E. 33 years old)

For E. the major discontent does not necessarily derives from the fact that she urinated a little bit, because there's nobody there who can acknowledge and recognize that, but it's about the shame of knowing that she's not clean as she used to be before pregnancy. Along E., many other women associate the maternal body with the notion of cleanliness rather to the concept of beauty. Being aware of the impossibility of fully controlling the pregnant and maternal body, the ideal of beautiful body is resignified under the notion of 'natural' body, closer to pristine than artificial and closer to simplicity than exaggeration and 'plasticity' in their words. Hence, '*that drop is enough to drive you crazy and embarrass you*' is not about beauty and to some extent overpasses the culture of cleanliness and hygiene that most of the mothers that I talked to

embrace, but it's about the anxiety provoked by the fact that your body gains a sort of agency never conceptualized or experimented before by them.

Furthermore, women conclude that the exteriority, the shape of the body and its weight can be improved by controlling the emotional interior. Not only diet or beautification, but every form of bodily construction, appearance or transformation is mainly invoked as a restoring component through which the body shame will disappear. Pregnant body experiences a wide range of difficulties that women in general are ashamed to utter them in order not to make them 'real'. As I mentioned, a plurality of discourses that surround the maternal body are revealing forms of experiences that rarely touch pregnant bodies in the realm of quotidian and everyday life.

It is true that shame hurts. It is a somatic process that occurs when psychic distress turns into physical pain and illness or discomfort. Not being recognized as yourself, not being acknowledge for your controlled body might turn into depression and multiple forms of disorders. My question that rises from this perspective is the following; how can one internalize shame not through its blighter effect upon us, but from an affirmative and transitory viewpoint?

4.5 Disordered maternal body and the spectacle of intimacy

Post-birth body is transformed not in a sense that turns into another state, but rather it's volatile¹⁰ and subjected to continuous change. Thus, appearance and emotions are constitutive parts of bodily construction, when it comes to emphasizing the alteration of the maternal body. Then, how can we make more sense of maternal body and emotions? E.'s case is relevant in this respect, not only because her narrative was centered on the fear of her own genitals, but because

¹⁰ Term used by Elizabeth Grosz. 1994. In *Volatile Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. USA: Indiana University Press

the way she managed to conceptualize the image her own vagina is entirely a masculine discourse.

Thus, when it came to talking about the changes that occurred regarding her body after every child's birth, E. told me that she never had the courage to look 'down there' even before the birth of her first child, but she always wanted to know how it looks like. She knew how it feels, she felt the pain after every birth, but she wanted to connect these feelings to an image. The great fear that her vagina is not healing properly scared her deeply. Therefore, she asked her husband to look at her vagina and to make sure that everything is healing alright. Everytime after bath, her husband told her that her vagina is healing fine, but it looks like a 'red traumatized meat'.

As a consequence she created a whole fantasy of how a post-three births vagina should look like, how it should heal and when to reactivate their sexual life. This scenario is extremely interesting not only because she still has a fear of her own vagina, but the discourse upon it is entirely masculine, and her picture of the post-birth vagina is actually her husband's discourse upon it. But the question is; how an authentic image of a vagina came about? How a discourse about a proper vagina entered women's and men's fantasies?

Shifting the temporality and going back to pregnancy stage, Bailey's (1999) results of her qualitative research on pregnant and post-birth women's bodies, are centered on the idea that women perceived their bodies 'as being invaded', both from exterior by those who recognize their bodies as carrying a child, and from interior by the child. More than this, "for a pregnant woman, the edges of the self become blurred as the body no longer seems to operate as a physical marker of individuality" (Bailey, 1999:340). Therefore, for E. the fear of looking at her vagina might come from knowing that her vagina (envisioned here as a possession) alongside her uterus and her womb was invaded by others, and recognized as fertile and functional.

All the multiple faces of conjugal and maternal body and identity need to be joined into a certain time frame in order to make sense of the transformations women faced. It can be argued that my subjects were not fully aware of the changes they embodied after they got married and before they became mothers, because they relate to their marriage not as being a temporary stage in their lives or a transition towards something else. Therefore, when it comes to talking about marriage, temporality is not something that is subject to question or interrogate, whereas pregnancy and the first stages of motherhood are envisioned as having a time limited impact over corporeal transformations, but nonetheless indefinitely when it comes to internalizing and perform their identities as mothers. But how can time, body and maternity be connected?

Stone (2014) makes an interesting point by saying that “to become a mother is to enter a chaotic time, in which one is no longer recognized as a unified agent by others and can no longer easily regard oneself as a unified agent either” (Stone, 2014:325). But even if we acknowledge motherhood as a chaotic temporality and a new stage, that brings a form of dissolution in terms of women’s identity and unity, then where is the body? In this regard, I account for body not to be analyzed as an independent entity, but rather as a constitutive part of this unity’s dissolution.

I envision mother’s body as a vital extension for the child’s growth, and the child as playing an active role in women’s and men’s identity (re)construction as mothers and fathers. Nurturing, touching, playing, breast feeding or comforting the child requests a body and availability, and with this a series of complex processes occur, from transference and attachment, emotions and implications, to detachment and separation between mother and child and between their material bodies. All mothers that I interviewed argued for a seclusion of themselves, for a partial restriction of their autonomy in order to provide the best care and supervision for their children.

Their subjectivity as autonomous beings is compromised and reconfigured, but not necessarily because they have in care another being, a child, but because the modern Western idea on child raising situates women as the primary care givers (cf. Ruddick, 1989; Stone, 2014). More than this, I consider that women's subjectivity does not simply vanish as they give birth, but parts of their capacity to change, to constantly become, to be self-reflexive is transferred to the child.

Their energy, vitality and their subjective singularity is divided and invested into the child. Stone (2014) argues the same while saying that modern ideas on motherhood claim that "one must leave the maternal body behind to become an autonomous individual subject, a self-conscious and autonomous agent who is the source of normative authority and meaning" (Stone, 2014:326). Therefore, we cannot conceive an analysis on maternal body and emotions without bringing into discussion the relation between essential constitutive components; from culture, historical temporality and women's experience, to the role played by the husband, child and extended kinship.

Conclusions

Okin (1999) concluded that “marriage has become an increasingly peculiar contract, a complex and ambiguous combination of anachronism and present-day reality” (Okin, 1999:321). To this, we can add that along marriage, the concept of maternity is in a continuous state of transformation and reinterpretation. Thus, my major interest in this thesis was to approach these experiences in women’s life from a perspective that manages to unveil detailed, intimate and personal aspects derived directly from their narratives, perceptions and opinions. Therefore, drawing on Brook (2002) who critically engages with the idea of marriage being analyzed mainly as a sexist of patriarchal institution, I argue as well that marriage should be perceived more as a lived and grounded experience that is constantly reconceptualized by those who are involved in it.

In this regard, my subject’s narrative was centered on idea that within marriage, their subjectivity, agency and independence should not be completely altered. For them, marriage is not a closed space where their identity and their autonomy are invited towards crystallization and more than this, they do not relate to marriage as a strong indicator for restrictions. Even if they claim that they should not consciously relate differently to their bodies after they got married and more than this, there’s no clear form of marital embodiment, some of my subjects noticed that they started to gain little weight. The reason for this lays in the practice of eating. They argued that in general once women and men are married, they are more calm, tolerant and patient and they enjoy eating differently.

With a particular financial and educational background, middle-class family organization brings to light distinctive ways of perceiving marital relations, creates certain frames of bodily practices for both men and women, and maternity, the entire period of motherhood, the medicalization of

pregnancy and sexuality are conceptualized in a very specific and individualized manner. Drawing from their narrative, I discovered that women do not fully internalize the role of a ‘veritable’, or ‘proper’ ‘wife’ and marriage in this case is transformed into a space that is open for debates and negotiations, and that allows women to keep their subjectivity and bodily practices to some degree intact.

Hence, I argue that from a marriage perspective, the dynamics between spouses can be articulated under the notion of ‘co-independence’. In my interpretation, co-independence refers to a continuation of performing the same set of practices that transcend the boundaries often imposed by the fact that they are married. Thus, these women’s middle-classness derives from the fact that they are part of a nuclear family, and in this respect, by detaching themselves from their extended families they gain autonomy, a certain pattern of consumption and dispositions, and a specific form of understanding independence when it comes to talking about the intimate relation between spouses or ways of raising children. From this point, it is essential to emphasize how these women relate to motherhood, their corporeal transformations, their subjectivity and agency once they give birth.

Therefore, when it came to bringing into our discussions the episode of motherhood in its close relation to their bodies, emotions and subjectivity, women’s narrative changed. In this sense, I argue that the duality formed between the mother and the child is not balanced and does not create a relation based on mutuality and reciprocity, but rather it’s a disruptive process in which the mother is the one that transfers her subjectivity to her child perceived as being passive and lacking agency. Also, it is important to mention that women’s subjectivity does not simply vanish when they become mothers, but rather it’s disordered, fragmentized and it’s mainly

visible when they experience a lack of control or certain restrictions regarding their pregnant and maternal body.

Trying to conceptualize this lack of control regarding subjectivity and agency faced by mothers, I devised the concept of *restrictive body* and *restricted body* defined here as mechanisms imposed by and to women during their maternal life. Therefore, I envision the restrictive body as the material body that restricts a woman's activity, desires, agency, and the restricted body is the body that is restricted by social conventions and norms, collisions between discourses or social and intergenerational reproduction.

Their agency undergoes resignification in relation to their maternal body as well. Once they gave birth they realized that their bodies are functioning against their will and along with this, they realized that they cannot fully control it anymore. By trying to get back in shape right after birth, they engaged themselves in a mirrored process. Through this, many of them are struggling to look the same as they did before getting pregnant, creating by this a mechanism of restoring the lack of control over their own bodies.

Even if so far I focused on emphasizing the major points of my thesis, I consider that is also important to mention the limitations of this work, and possible directions for a further analysis. First of all, the empirical work of this thesis is not a representative one, and its findings and results cannot be generalized. In moments when I'm referring to 'all women' I am restricting my statements only to interviewed women. Rather, this thesis is an illustrative one, and its purpose was to emphasize my subject's voices, experiences and perceptions.

Moreover, this work does not include other forms of family construction or organization, from the extended one where its dynamics might be disputed differently, to families with a single

parent (mother or father). It would be also interesting to add a perspective that is centered on husband's or father's opinion regarding the subject of my thesis. This perspective can be ramified on parents who are divorced, who share custody of their children, who work abroad or just fathers who are on paternal leave.

Another different angle of this thesis can be reach by working with minorities, with Roma women and men, considering that I consulted over my academic years numerous papers on the medicalization of Roma women's bodies and reproductive functions, methods of contraception and abortion, and precarious attention given to them in terms of medical information, education for children or employment in Romania.

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