

Empowering Roma women in Romania – gender or/and ethnicity

Diana Elena NEAGA
Nicolae Titulescu University
diana_elena_neaga@yahoo.com

Abstract

The condition of Roma women in Romania can be well summarized as one that brings together, in a strengthened way, all inequalities based on gender, starting from low access to education, to labor, to social and health services, early marriages and ending with almost no access to decision making. The intersection between gender and ethnicity generated for Roma women a position of impossibility:

- denying/ hiding their ethnic identity and trying to integrate in order to reduce gender inequalities by adopting “the Romanian model of emancipated women”. This way of positioning oneself is also coming together with the risk of losing the power of representation – they became “Romanian” women (“românizare”) that could not substantially stand for “Roma women”;

- denying/ neglecting gender identity and thus taking upon themselves the burden of a patriarchal ethnic construction that can deprive women of any power of effecting change from inside. “How can Roma women’s empowerment be possible in the context of intersectional representation of inequalities?”, this is the question I will try to answer in this paper. In answering my question I will underline the fine line between empowerment, essentialism and paternalism which arise in an intersectional context and which should be kept in mind in order to minimize the aforementioned risks.

Keywords: empowerment, Roma women, Romania, gender inequalities

Introduction

This work will focus on a topic that’s still very controversial: that of intersectionality and the multifaceted discrimination facing Roma women. This phenomenon is amplified within the Romanian society by the high level of open displays of racism and xenophobia, while the feminist movement is still a fragile force facing the already well-known stereotypes and prejudices. The structural constraints thus generated (racism and patriarchy) have a direct impact on the lives of Roma women who end up caught in a spiral that perpetuates inequality, one that is difficult to dismantle. Before showing the method through which this spiral is built and the possible solutions, I would like to start with a brief discussion of the situation of Roma men and women living in Romania. As we will see for the figures presented above, the condition of Roma women in Romania can be well summarized as one that brings together, in a strengthened way, almost all

inequalities based on gender and ethnicity, starting from low access to education, labor, social and health services, and ending with almost no access to decision making.¹

According to Roma Inclusion Index 2015²:

- the situation of Roma in education shows trends of improvement and a reduction of the gap between Roma and non-Roma in most areas, but not in secondary and tertiary education where the trends are negative:
 - o 26% fewer Roma attend preschool, and the gap for Romani women is 24%;
 - o 17% fewer Roma complete primary school, and for Romani women the gap is 20%;
 - o 46% fewer Roma complete secondary school, and for Romani women the gap is 48%;
 - o 14% fewer Roma complete tertiary school, and for Romani women the gap is the same;
 - o 13% fewer Roma are literate, and for Romani women the gap is 16%;
 - o 27% of Roma receive education in segregated schools.
- while the gap in unemployment decreased, the gap in employment increased. The unemployment rate is still high, and employment remains low. At the same time, compared to the total population, Roma are longer unemployed, more of them have no employment experience and more young Roma are not in employment, education or training;
 - o 29% fewer Roma are employed than others, and for Romani women the gap is 40%;
 - o 41% fewer Roma are employed in the informal sector than others, and for Romani women the gap is 28%;
 - o 26% fewer Roma are unemployed than others, and for Romani women the gap is 36%;
 - o 25% fewer Roma have no employed experience than others, and for Romani women the gap is 29%;
- data are not available on homelessness. Available data show that the situation of Roma is worsening and the gap is increasing in access to electricity and overcrowding. For the rest of the indicators baseline data are not available and recent data show significant gaps between Roma and the total population.
 - o 59% of Roma live in segregated neighborhoods.
- the gap between Roma and the total population in access to health insurance remains very significant. Half of the Roma lack health insurance. Infant mortality of Roma is almost three times higher than for non-Roma, but the gap has been reduced. Roma life expectancy is seven years lower than total population;
 - o 29% fewer Roma have access to health insurance, for Romani women the gap is 28%;
- Three-fourths of the Roma live at risk of poverty, which is a high percentage although the situation is improved and the gap reduced. The same is

¹ Even though, this kind of approach can be definitely a contested one due to the simplifying categorization of Roma women and their problems, I am still using this rhetoric in order to underline difficulties that categories of citizens are confronted with and that could be solved by political actions.

² Roma Inclusion Index, 2015, accessed in 15.11.2016, at http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9810_file1_roma-inclusion-index-2015-s.pdf;

true for absolute poverty in which around 40% of Roma live. They live on 60% less income than the total population. One-third of the Roma feels discriminated;

- 48% more Roma are at risk of poverty than others;
- Roma live on 59% less income than others;
- 41% more Roma live in absolute poverty.

Another aspect that deserves mentioning here is the controversies around early marriage. The 2011 FRA survey has shown “that across all (EU) member states surveyed, only around 2% of Roma girls aged 10-15 were reported as ‘traditionally married’ or cohabitating with a partner. With regards to Roma, aged 16 and 17, the results show that on average around 16% of Roma men and women aged 16-17 were legally or traditionally married or cohabiting. When looking at gender differences in this age group we find that it is mostly young women rather than young men who are married or live together at this age and that among the Member States surveyed, this was reported more frequently by women in Greece, Portugal, Romania and Bulgaria”³. Still, this phenomenon must be analyzed in its context, since it is also increased by the lack of viable alternatives regarding the access to a decent life. The traditional function of early marriage is husbanding the inherited wealth and also to climb out of poverty. We are talking about internal mechanisms that are strengthened by the rejection of Roma by the majority population.

Last but not least, Roma women are subject to violence within the community and in the family. Violence toward women is one of the problems that Romanian legislative initiatives and public policies have barely touched. The domestic violence law, which was passed in 2003, was a poor attempt to address the issue. The law was amended in 2012 through the introduction of new nuances, such as jealousy, neglect and the deprivation of the means of existence, while also introducing the protection order. When it comes to violence toward women within the Roma communities, we must take into account the special sensitivity of this issue. The EMPOW-AIR report (a comparative European report on the violence toward women within the Roma communities) notes that violence toward women within the Roma communities is a sensitive and taboo topic among Romani⁴, the result of the need for a collective identity construction that would challenge the inequality and the discriminatory mechanisms. Also, intra-ethnic problems have been marginalized or ignored as a way of dealing with such issues.

The minority-majority relationship creates hierarchies. A simple analysis proves uncontroversially that Roma women are at the bottom of the system, while Romanian men are at the top. Also, the relations between non-Roma and Roma women can be analyzed in two ways, both of which imply hierarchical relationships (valorizing dichotomous thinking). The first analysis is that non-Roma women may be associated rather with purity, non-sexuality, maternity and civilization, while Roma women are associated with loose sexual behavior, vulgarity and lack of civilization. Also, the sexuality of Roma men may be seen in opposition with that of white men, same as in the case of black people. Thus, the former are seen as violent, aggressive, with a deviant sexuality, while the latter are seen as civilized and protective. This type of thinking leads to the trivialization of violence toward Roma women, the normalization of abuse.

During her research into the causes that prevent the emancipation of Roma women, Carmen Gheorghe stressed the role of work as the generator of social status. She

³ Analysis of FRA Roma survey results by gender, June 2013;

⁴ Nuria Francoli Sanglas, Mar Camarasa Casals, “EMPOW-AIR European Comparative Report on Violence against Women within Romani Communities”, Daphane, 2012, p. 74;

noted that, unfortunately, “because of the low pay and the lack of growth opportunities, work is not seen as a human activity that Roma women join in order to develop their personality and self-awareness, but solely as the means of surviving. The «dirty» jobs that they do secure them only a precarious material support, that leads them to a continuous loss of morale, determined both by their inferior position and the lack of professional success”⁵. However, as the author herself notes, Roma women have limited access to the labor market because they are less educated, because they marry earlier, because they must do house work, because the mass-media promotes a stereotypical image of them, because they live in an archaic society that prevents their development. And the cause-effect relationships are not unidirectional. This is actually intersectionality and the way in which gender and ethnic inequalities feed each other and put Roma women in vulnerable situations and many times make it impossible for them to manage the two types of identity in favor of personal autonomy. The intersection between gender, ethnicity and race generated for Roma women a position of impossibility:

1. Denying/(hiding) ethnic identity and trying to integrate in order to reduce gender inequalities by adopting “the Romanian model of emancipated woman”. This way of positioning oneself is also coming together with the risk of losing the power of representation – they became “Romanian” women (“românizare”) that could not substantially stand for “Roma women”;

2. Denying/(neglecting) gender identity and thus taking upon them the burden of a patriarchal ethnic construction that deprives women of any power of effecting change from inside.

In this respect, Nicoleta Bițu, a Romanian Roma women activist is asking a fundamental question: how much can we (as Roma women activists) promote the individual rights discourse such that we can still conserve our ethnic ties and not be assimilated?⁶ Also Nicoleta Bițu underlines the intra-ethnic conflicts that she was part of, conflicts in which she and other Roma women were forced to ignore their gender identity in order to create a better context of promoting the ethnic one.⁷

Ethnic or/and gender identity?

Even if the denial/(or strategic hiding) of ethnic identity itself is not taken into account, criticizing the internal practices of the group to which one belongs is seen many times as a challenge issued to the elements that define an ethnic group. Perhaps this is clearer in the case of Roma than elsewhere given the fact that those who challenge the tradition can be called “gadjikanime”⁸. Thus, Roma women who try to promote gender equality and emancipation within the community are many times seen as outsiders, accused of having become modern and told that they can no longer represent the community’s interests. In order to better understand this exclusionary mechanism we

⁵ Carmen Gheorghe, “Femeile Rome: între dominație socială și automarginalizare” (Roma Women : between social domination and self-exclusion), în *Feminisme. Recapitulând concepte și acceptând noi poziții* (Feminisme: Reviewing concepts and taking new stands), (Erste Stiftung, Kultur Kontakt, 2010), p. 245;

⁶ Nicoleta Bițu, “Femeia Romă între două lumi” (*Roma Woman between two worlds*), accessed in 20.10.2016 at <http://www.romanicriss.org/Femeia%20roma%20intre%20doua%20lumi%20Bitu%202006.pdf>;

⁷ Nicoleta Bițu, Femeile Rome și Feminismul (Roma Women and Feminism), *Perspective Politice (Perspectives on Politics)*, vol V, nr.2, 2012, pp. 136-137;

⁸ Alexandra Oprea, „Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground Up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women”, *Essex Human Rights Review* Vol. 1 No. 1, 2004, p. 32;

must introduce the concepts of cultural competency and ethnic suitability. Cultural competency is defined as “the capacity to operate within an ensemble of human behavior patterns that are culturally integrated and define a group”⁹ (or as “a series of behaviors and attitudes that denote the specialists’ capacity to work efficiently in an environment made of more than one culture and understanding them in terms of communication and work styles. It underscores the idea of operating efficiently in a different cultural context that is not included in the cultural knowledge, awareness or sensibility”¹⁰.

The exclusion of Roma women who fight gender inequalities and who use a feminist discourse springs from the association between cultural competency and ethnic suitability. To be more precise, these women are no longer seen as representative for the community because they have distanced themselves from traditions and cultural norms that are also seen by others as community ties. In this sense, emancipated Roma women, those who assume the feminist label, can be accused of paternalism to the extent that they are the drivers of changes associated with the dominant/ opposed/ majority group. As an example, Nicoleta Bițu present the harsh critiques that a young Roma women activist received at her article in which she discussed the different gender roles inside Roma community, article suggestively named “Everything we do not want to hear”. Very important was the fact that not only men formulated the critiques, but also women, and most of them referred to the fact that gender identity must be subordinated to ethnic identity.¹¹

Even though feminist activism is not equivalent with the loss of ethnic identity, such an attitude puts Roma women in a position to choose between personal autonomy and, many times, the severing of ties with their families and communities. This happens because of the community’s cultural norms that value the individual especially through his role in the family and society, that reward the observance of such norms and punish severely any breach, that subordinate personal interest to the family and to the community’s future, where the Roma family is a place of belonging, of self-preservation and of protection, but also a place of strong social control that limits the freedom and autonomy of women, where maintaining the family’s prestige is a capital duty, that see the family as the keeper of cultural values which it passes on from generation to generation, especially through women in their role of main caregiver and educator, and which exerts on women a strong social control in order to make sure that they are suitable for the social role imposed on them¹².

Even though Uma Narayan criticizes at the theoretical level the cultural relativism that opens the way to intra-community abuse posing as the valorization of “authenticity”, saying that the latter should not mean lack of criticism or change¹³ and

⁹ Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, „Combaterea violenței domestice împotriva femeilor rome: prevenire, depistare, recomandări de intervenție” (Fighting against Roma women violence: prevention, discover, recommendations and intervention), (Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, EMPOW-AIR, Dephane, 2012, p. 6;

¹⁰ Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, „Combaterea violenței domestice împotriva femeilor rome: prevenire, depistare, recomandări de intervenție” (Fighting against Roma women violence: prevention, discover, recommendations and intervention), Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, EMPOW-AIR, Dephane, 2012, p. 16;

¹¹ Nicoleta Bițu, Femeile Rome și Feminismul (Roma Women and Feminism), *Perspective Politice (Perspectives on Politics)*, vol V, nr.2, 2012, pp. 136-137;

¹² Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, „Combaterea violenței domestice împotriva femeilor rome: prevenire, depistare, recomandări de intervenție” (Fighting against Roma women violence: prevention, discover, recommendations and intervention), Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, EMPOW-AIR, Dephane, 2012, p. 11;

¹³ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 33;

that it is important to understand that the women's aspirations to equal treatment are indigenous to any culture¹⁴, things are very different in practice and subtle theoretical arguments are hard to internalize especially by those who are forced to change and even more so when change means the loss of a position of power. Perhaps the best example is the one given by Alexandra Oprea. Her subject was Nicoleta Bițu, one of the most visible Roma feminist women in Romania. Alexandra Oprea said: "I remember many conversations during which the «Romaness» of activist Nicoleta Bițu was questioned by the "căldărari" Roma during her efforts to fight gender oppression in Roma communities. Mrs. Bițu is not a "căldărar" Roma. She's part of a Roma group that is seen as less "traditional". Her husband, Dr. Nicolae Gheorghe, also belongs to the less traditional Roma circles, but he is accused less often of being "gadjikanime" than his feminist wife because he does not engage on a regular basis in activities that criticize the internal practices"¹⁵.

Gender and ethnicity and the role of Romanian feminist movement in developing the intersectional approach.

Caught within the rhetoric of division, Roma women are forced to develop a way of thinking best expressed as "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", and when stereotype, prejudice and discrimination manifest themselves as external threats, the internal problems, including the gender problems, become an adjunct of the ethnic problems. Thus, women can only continue to take part in the process of reproducing the patriarchy. We can call this action method used by Roma women as the first method approved by the first informal group organized in 1994 at the international congress held in Seville, Spain (according to Nicoleta Bițu).

Magda Matache proposed an interesting approach in order to underscore this by a comparison with the women's rights conference held in Seneca Falls which resulted in the Declaration of Sentiments and the manifesto drafted by the first informal group of Roma women (beyond the approximately 150-year time gap). While the Declaration of Sentiments spoke clearly about a demand for equal rights, the Roma Women's Manifesto drafted in Seville focused on the "chance of Roma women" to be fully responsible for their cultural roles and on the traditional values, even when these values hinder the woman's self-expression and despite the fact that gender inequality had been a topic of discussion"¹⁶. Ethnic identity was clearly the defining aspect during the talks and in the same time gender has not been questioned.

Therefore, the activism of Roma women has been inevitably focused on their community role as mediators between the family/community and the public institutions (especially the education and healthcare systems), which is still a focus on the traditional roles and the so-called feminized fields of action¹⁷. We can mention here the school mediators and healthcare mediators programs involving mostly women, because the associated activities did not contradict the gender roles promoted by the community.

Still, the above-mentioned logic of division can work both ways, thus generating solidarity among women that stems from their common experiences. The proof is that

¹⁴ Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 22;

¹⁵ Alexandra Oprea, „Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground Up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women”, *Essex Human Rights Review* Vol. 1 No. 1, 2004, p. 32;

¹⁶ Magda Matache, "Gender equality, sens of belonging, both?", *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 51;

¹⁷ Angela Kocze, *Missing Intersectionality. Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe*, Budapest, Central European University, 2009, p. 24;

some Roma women have shown progress in their assumption of feminism. In order to move beyond the gender – ethnic antagonism, Roma activists are promoting more and more the feminist discourse based on intersectionality, which has been conceptualized in various ways by Romani women activists from different NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, such as the Council of Europe (CoE), EU institutions, the UN system, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)¹⁸. A good example is the report on the situation of Roma women adopted in 2006 by the European Parliament in a move that was seen as a landmark vote supporting Romani women’s equality with Romani men and with other women in Europe¹⁹. Even though the report was not followed with clear support measures for Roma women, it can still be considered a step forward.

As Raluca Maria Popa said, “the novelty of the language of intersectionality is perhaps the renewed sense of hopefulness with which it is spoken by scholars and activists alike. Many of them feel that intersectionality provides an alternative to the homogenizing pressures of identity politics, but also an alternative to “assimilationist universalistic politics”. In other words, intersectionality is neither an essentializing “politics of difference”, nor a “politics of universalism” that assimilates differences within categories patterned on the experiences of privileged groups”²⁰.

Instead of conclusions, in the following pages I will focus on one of the solutions offered by one of the theoreticians who had studied the issue: the assumption by Romania’s mainstream feminism of an intersectional agenda and the building of a deeper and stronger cooperation between the feminist movement and the Roma women’s movement. Raluca Maria Popa has spoken about the opportunity that the Romanian feminist movement has to make the problems faced by Roma women part of its own agenda. The author’s main argument is that “in some countries, such as the UK, the move towards intersectionality has meant the contraction of the equality field, by merging previously dedicated bodies into a single equality body. In other countries, such as Romania, notions of multiple discrimination emerged at around the same time with gender equality policies. As a consequence, there is more room for institutions addressing multiple discrimination and for those addressing gender equality to enhance, rather than undermine each other”²¹. Aside from bringing this opportunity to our attention, the author recommends a course of action that could lead to an improvement of the intersectional approaches in Romania: „I dare suggest that gender equality can be a starting place for more inclusive equality struggles. I see a potential for intersectional feminism in Romania that would go a long way beyond merely including gender in a list of inequality categories. The potential of intersectional feminism in Romania and perhaps elsewhere is to offer a vision of equality that starts from the most marginalized positions, usually those of women at the intersection (Romani women, poor women or disabled women) and builds a framework for a more just and a more equal society”²² (Popa, 2009, 79).

¹⁸ Angela Kocze, *Missing Intersectionality. Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe*, Budapest, Central European University, 2009, p. 24;

¹⁹ Angela Kocze, *Missing Intersectionality. Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe*, Budapest, Central European University, 2009, p. 25;

²⁰ Raluca Maria Popa, “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 73;

²¹ Raluca Maria Popa, “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 72;

²² Raluca Maria Popa, “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 79;

While perhaps not as clear or forceful, the suggestions made by Alexandra Oprea spring from the same source. Starting from a criticism of either paternalistic formulas or the exclusively formal ones, those that mention Roma women only as numbers in reports, or from the blindness shown by the feminist organizations toward the problems of Roma women, she proposes the strengthening of grass-roots actions and also the building of a coalition between the feminist and Roma women's organizations. The author also stresses the need for privileged groups to recognize their position, whether their members are women, Roma men or non-Roma men, and to accept their own duty to promote or deconstruct the multiple discriminations faced by Roma women²³.

Thus, the feminist movement and/or the feminist NGOs operating in Romania and their involvement in the problems of Roma women become one of the main issues of this debate²⁴. And yet, regardless of how pragmatic such a solution seems, it is easy to see how it would lead to more debates. More to the point, the main issue will be what feminist movement means in Romania, which of the movements are feminist and how to identify them. Using this as our starting base, a prospective study into the action strategies of Romanian feminist organizations after 1989, which I had launched together with Valentin Quintus Nicolescu, points out these difficulties. At the end of this study we concluded that, taking into account the variation in actions taken within the feminist movement and the fact that they are often contradictory, and also the fluidity of ideological actions and assumptions in an organizational context, a clear classification of feminist NGOs vs non-feminist NGOs is, from our point of view, quasi-impossible. Moreover, at times and given the stereotypes and prejudices that the movement has to deal with, the explicit and manifest refusal to assume a feminist position can be a strategic decision (see the feminism debate – gender studies). For instance, given that one of the most openly and active feminist organizations of the Romanian civil society - FILIA – has recently changed its charter in order to explicitly state its adherence to the feminist ideology, it's difficult to set the formal adherence to feminism as a valid classification criteria. The basic tension between essentializing (I am talking here about the women's organizations that promote the traditional gender roles) and empowerment (the feminist organizations that challenge the power relations between men and women) is still valid to the extent that the above-mentioned problem is valid.

One of the first observations of the same prospective study, which should not be taken as an exhaustive research of all feminist movements, but rather as a way of pre-testing the methodological system and adapting the theoretical framework to the situation on the ground, and which involved five Romanian NGOs, focused on the themes. We were able to identify two major trends: on the one hand there are organizations that assume specific goals (localized in nature, focused on solving problems, providing social/community services; awareness and education only in connection with the specific assumed problems) and, on the other hand, organizations with big, sweeping goals pertaining to visibility, principles, mainstreaming and awareness.

An analysis of the themes used by the organizations in question has revealed a clear tendency to focus on two major issues: equality of chances/nondiscrimination

²³ Alexandra Oprea, „Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground Up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women”, *Essex Human Rights Review* Vol. 1 No. 1, 2004, pp. 38 - 39;

²⁴ For an analysis of how Romanian public policies approach intersectionality see the presentation of the Quing project's results written by Raluca Maria Popa in “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy”, Nevi Sara Kali, 2009;

(approximately 28% of the projects) and violence (approximately 26% of the projects). So, the Roma women issue do not entered in the mainstream of women rights activism developed in Romania.

Even though the association with the feminist movement is theoretically beneficial, it can still be criticized for the lack of strategic vision, to the extent that it involves an alliance between two marginal groups of the Romanian society. Carmen Gheorghe notes that “although they are aware that sexism allows men belonging to the same ethnic minority to enjoy privileges that they are denied [...] many Roma women, including those who take an active part in the public life, refuse to support feminism because they have an inadequate understating of its meaning or because they associate it with homosexuality. There are women who do not wish to be associated in any way with the women’s rights movement and, therefore, they reject and oppose the feminist movement. They are far more familiar with the negative opinions presented by the mass media”²⁵.

Aside from this comment that I see as essential, I would like to emphasize the existence of two trends that can be used to characterize the Romanian society:

1. *A dynamic of the goals assumed by the Roma women organizations from the prevalence of ethnic identity to an intersectional agenda.* My own point of view is that we’re dealing here with a somewhat natural evolution designed to close the initial gap between a profoundly emancipating and modernizing ideology such as the feminist one and the tradition of the archaic and profoundly patriarchal Roma community. Roma women are involved in the promotion of Roma culture and traditions, „even when these values hinder the woman’s self-expression”²⁶. Even though these actions have initially required a clear hierarchy between gender and ethnicity, we are actually talking about the Roma women’s release from the family’s gynaeceum, the household world, and into the public world by assuming roles that conform with the traditional gender roles – school mediators, healthcare mediators. As Stancu said, “soon after the fall of communism in 1989, the activities of NGOs dealing specifically with Roma women’s issues focused on health care and reproductive issues. Roma women’s projects usually dealt with promoting family planning and the use of modern contraceptives instead of abortion. For instance, organizations such as Romani CRISS and the Roma Women’s Association in Romania trained health mediators and created educational materials on modern contraceptive measures”²⁷.

Even though I cannot say whether this dynamic was planned, from my point of view its results indicate a very large strategic potential, especially since the generation of the activist group of Roma women (the mediators especially) has also created a link between this group and the feminist movement or, at least, it has brought the two movements closer together, a trend that Angela Kocze supported at the European level²⁸. An interesting example is that of Letiția Mark, President of The Association of Gypsy Women for Our Children, who “used to shy away from the feminist label but now, she realized that a feminist ideology does not imply that women should hate men and

²⁵ Carmen Gheorghe, “Femeile Rome: între dominație socială și automarginalizare” (Roma Women : between social domination and self-exclusion), în *Feminisme. Recapitulând concepte și acceptând noi poziții* (Feminisme: Reviewing concepts and taking new stands), Erste Stiftung, Kultur Kontakt, 2010, p. 246;

²⁶ Magda Matache, “Gender equality, sens of belonging, both?”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 51;

²⁷ Monica Stancu, „Learning to fight back: Roma Women s Activist Mouvement in Post-Communist Romania”, paper presented at European Conference on Politics and Gender, 2012, accesed in 20.11.2016 at <http://www.ecpg-barcelona.com/learning-fight-back-roma-women%E2%80%99s-activist-movement-post-communist-romania>, p. 11;

²⁸ Angela Kocze, *Missing Intersectionality. Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe*, Budapest, Central European University, 2009, p. 25;

that they should not collaborate with them; it is a belief in gender equality and in women's worth"²⁹ (Stancu, 2012, 9).

2. *The strengthening of the cooperation between the feminist organizations and the Roma women's organizations.* The past years have brought some changes in the nature of the connection with the movement of Roma women, a thing made even more interesting by the fact that one of the engines driving these changes is the academia.

Let's start at the beginning. The main organizations dealing with Roma women's issues are the Roma Women's Association in Romania (RWAR), the Association of Gypsy Women for Our Children, Romani CRISS - Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies, The Association for the Emancipation of Roma Women, Agency for Community Development "Together" and recently E-Romnja Association. All these organizations have implemented projects with the help of the feminist organizations, but one should note the deeper cooperation that has developed around a special doctoral program that focuses on Roma issues, a program launched few years ago by The National School of Political Studies and Public Administration. The "Building and implementing an innovative interdisciplinary doctoral program regarding the Roma issues" project aims to create and consolidate expertise and to develop scientific research in the field of Roma issues.

Another interesting aspect that should be mentioned is the existence within the SNSPA of a gender and minorities master's program, which all the five students of the Roma women issues had graduated, a master's program with a strong feminist political theory dimension and which has given rise in time to two of the most active feminist NGOs in Romania – The Filia Center for Curricular Development and Gender Studies and the Front Association – and to the www.feminism-romania.ro website. Moreover, Andreea Bragă (non-Roma), a member of the Ph.D. program who focuses on Roma issues, is now president of the Filia Center and activist Nicoleta Bițu is a Front member. Carmen Gheorghe, a Roma activist who has worked for years at the "Together" Agency (NGO), where she has implemented several projects dealing with Roma women's issues, is now the president of a new organization that focuses directly on the problems of Roma women.

I will include here a brief presentation of some of the results of this cooperation: The Filia Center offered in 2012 an award to a group of Roma activists from the commune of Măguri with the purpose of encouraging the initiatives that lead to the emancipation of women. The award consisted of financial support for the establishing of the Măguri Roma Women's Association, which took place in August 2012. The Center is still providing support to the association; The Filia Center has recently launched an active citizenship promotion project through a partnership with, among others, the E-Romanja association and the Măguri Roma Women's Association; The Roma Women's Gala – an event meant to recognize, encourage and make visible the civic involvement of Roma women – whose third edition (2013) enjoyed the support of the Filia Center and the Front Association; E-Romnja is a member of Gender Equality Coalition, together with other nine feminist NGO's and is working in different projects with Filia Center and other Roma rights NGO's. In this context we can conclude that an organic consolidation of the collaboration between Roma and non-Roma women rights activists is clearly observable in the Romanian NGO arena. This can be seen as the result of some formal institutional developments like the Ph.D. program mentioned above, but also as a result

²⁹ Monica Stancu, „Learning to fight back: Roma Women s Activist Mouvement in Post-Communist Romania”, paper presented at European Conference on Politics and Gender, 2012, accesed in 20.11.2016 at <http://www.ecpg-barcelona.com/learning-fight-back-roma-women%E2%80%99s-activist-movement-post-communist-romania>, p. 9;

of a sort of feminist contagion that happened slowly and that gave space to Roma women to construct their one emancipatory discourse.

Bibliography:

- Bițu Nicoleta, "Femeia Romă între două lumi" (*Roma Woman between two worlds*), accessed in 20.10.2016 at <http://www.romanicriss.org/Femeia%20roma%20intre%20doua%20lumi%20%20Bitu%202006.pdf>;
- Bițu Nicoleta, Femile Rome și Femismul (Roma Women and Feminism), *Perspective Politice (Perspectives on Politics)*, vol V, nr.2, 2012;
- FRA Roma survey results by gender, June 2013;
- Francoli Sanglas Nuria, Casals Mar Camarasa, "EMPOW-AIR European Comparative Report on Violence against Women within Romani Communities", Daphane, 2012;
- Gheorghe Carmen, "Femeile Rome: între dominație socială și automarginalizare" (Roma Women : between social domination and self-excluzion), în *Feminisme. Recapitulând concepte și acceptând noi poziții* (Feminisme: Reviewing concepts and taking new stands), Erste Stiftung, Kultur Kontakt, 2010;
- Kocze Angela, Missing Intersectionality. Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe, Budapest, Central European University, 2009, pag. 24;
- Matache Magda, "Gender equality, sens of belonging, both?", *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009;
- Narayan Uma, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997;
- Oprea Alexandra, „Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground Up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women”, *Essex Human Rights Review* Vol. 1 No. 1, 2004;
- Popa Raluca Maria, "Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy", *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, pag. 79;
- Roma Inclusion Index, 2015, accessed in 15.11.2016, at http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9810_file1_roma-inclusion-index-2015-s.pdf;
- Stancu Monica, „Learning to fight back: Roma Women s Activist Mouvement in Post-Communist Romania”, paper presented at European Conference on Politics and Gender, 2012, accesed in 20.11.2016 at <http://www.ecpg-barcelona.com/learning-fight-back-roma-women%E2%80%99s-activist-movement-post-communist-romania>, pag. 11;
- Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, „Combaterea violenței domestice împotriva femeilor rome: prevenire, depistare, recomandări de intervenție” (Fighting against Roma women violence: prevention, discover, recommendations and intervention), Surt. Fundació de dones. Fundació Privada, EMPOW-AIR, Dephane, 2012;