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ENVISIONING ROMA FEMINISM

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Edited by the [The Romanian Society for Feminist Analyses AnA](#), the journal intends to open conversations among eastern and non-eastern feminist researchers on the situated nature of their feminism(s) and to encourage creative and critical feminist debates across multiple axes of signification such as gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, etc.

The journal publishes studies, position papers, case studies, viewpoints, book reviews from practitioners of all grades and professions, academics and other specialists on the broad spectrum of gender and feminist studies.

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Editorial: Envisioning Roma Feminism

Carmen GHEORGHE

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For a very long time, Roma women were treated as an object of research in social studies, anthropology, history or literature with many consequences at different levels. The research produced became the dominant discourse centered on Roma in a unitary way, with the premises that Roma are a social issue that must be overachieved. That framed Roma women in policies at national or international levels, reducing them to their ethnic and/or social issue, hindering their gender identity or pinpointing it through their bodies and biological grounds. When concerning Roma women, especially issues of early marriages or high fertility rates have always been in the spotlight in the detriment of other issues such as reproductive rights or structural violence.

Without arguing the necessity of such studies whom emphasizes Roma women's access or lack of access to health care, education, labor market etc I must add that the research on Roma issue is still dominated by non Roma men and women and Roma whereas they are men or women, they are still marginal or invisible.

Also there is a scarcity of feminist research to reshape Roma women as subjects of research. The under representative Roma women in academia and as researchers is even more painfully clear. So, without a feminist standpoint and the weak voice of Roma women in research and academia, the question that stance is: what do we need to reframe Roma women from a social issue to a political subject?

In the meanwhile Roma women activists in different countries engaged to create their own narrative by becoming a voice in civil society, academic or political sphere, struggling for the recognition of policy inclusion that would make Roma to overcome the social and economic status and to achieve remuneration for abuses during slavery, Holocaust or force sterilization cases (such as Czech Republic, Slovakia). Few of them publicly assumed the identity of Roma feminists, going even further by fighting for the recognition of the multiple discrimination as an experience specific to both ethnic and gender identity, for anti-racist and feminist policies, to end forced marriages and violence against women (Oprea 2004; Kocze 2011) These movements created dichotomies between Roma issues and gender issues, LGBTQI issues and Roma, creating debates and conflicted situation (Kurtic 2013, Mirga 2014). But they also conceptualized the theory of intersectionality, by working with ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation.

The call for proposal solicited by the Journal was indeed very challenging from many aspects. First, as far as I know, it is the first time when the Analyze Journal inquired feminist theory and its potential relation with Roma women. Secondly, because it created an opportunity to dismantle the existentialist views on ethnicity and gender. Third because there is always a possibility for readers, scholars, and researchers to change their paradigm and produce knowledge that is so much needed due to the historical invisibility.

Without doubt intersectionality is a theory seen by all authors as crucial analytical tool that has the potential of being conceptualized by Roma women due to their identities. But it is also an opportunity to gain new allies, find solidarity and understanding towards issues of power relation. As it replicates within the communities and outside of it, it has the capacity of envisioning feminism and women's rights as Raluca Popa states is very well:

„I dare to 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” (Popa, 2009, 79).

Following the collection of articles presented above, I will briefly reflect on author's contribution from a bottom – top paradigm hoping that readers will also reflect on conceptualizing intersectionality.

In the article “Roma women's marginalities in the recognition struggles of a Hungarian Roma Women's NGO” Ildikó Asztalos Morell propose a cross – cutting analyze of a Roma women NGO who manages to deal with ethnic and gender issues in a contexts of a post socialist state and the influence of a western NGO with feminist liberal agenda. Her study case is based on Roma women activists from the '90 until present who tells her story combined with the stories of women. The author questions different frames that Roma women are related to: high fertility rates, early marriages (with social and health consequences). Due to stigmatization and arise of right wing parties, Roma ngo became reluctant in addressing issues such as: reproductive rights, gender based violence or early marriages as Roma culture. The neo-liberal policies and their influence on Roma inclusion with a focus on Roma women – Western economies and its influence on CEE (Central and Eastern European) made NGO's to fill spaces where the state cut downs its support .

The dilemmas between social condition, integration within the society neglecting other aspects such as gender combined with the dilemmas that Roma women's NGO's in Hungary have due to the support received by international women's organization, donor's dependency and ideation are interlinked in Roma women's NGO, poses an important question: how is Roma women's issues constructed?

Following the same path, Diana Neaga asks a very relevant question: *How can Roma women's empowerment be possible in the context of intersectional representation of inequalities?* Reading her article “Empowering Roma women in Romania – gender or/and ethnicity” one can identify Roma feminists and their struggle to develop offer an intersectional agenda with the mainstream feminism, the ethnic and gender dichotomy that determine the questioning of “real Roma” from gadjicanes.

Marion Colard goes further to understand how Roma women could live in “two worlds” seeing intersectionality as a way of cross-cutting Roma ethnics and gadje in “L'émancipation de la femme dans la société rom traditionnelle de Roumanie”.

Eniko Vincze proposes a move beyond fake dilemmas such as universalism vs difference or ethnic vs gender identity considering that politics of culture does not address the systematic economic causes of social inequalities. Politics of human rights with its universal values generated formal equality but the socio economic rights failed to be addressed. She describes the European policies from 1990 – 2000 as “liberal

limited optimism” and shift after 2000 for Roma inclusion policy described as neoliberal due to its focus on Roma as capital who can be more productive if its integrated rather than exclude. Roma became “object of negotiation for former communist countries in their accession to EU” she states in “The racialization of Roma in the new Europe and the political potential of Romani women”. Identity politics and Roma inclusion politics were both blind to gender and racialised class division. So the challenge is: how to reframe Roma women as political subjects at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and class? One example of the solution that the author proposes is to reshape different concepts from the feminist agenda such as turning violence against women into structural violence (which includes also marginalization, exclusion, racism and patriarchy). To better understand the process of marginalization and oppression from ethnic group and the gadje, Mihai Lukacs in “The Critical Ones: Another Tale of Slavery” goes back in history to the slavery period that brings knowledge and justifies the current situation of Roma women. He also pleads for intersectionality as “(...)the tool of choice when addressing the multiple inequalities experienced by Roma women in Romania today, then the analysis of these inequalities can go back in the past and has to look at the connection between the anti-slavery movement and women’s activism in the nineteenth century”. His critical voice towards the gadje women and men and the oppression during different historical time have shown a Roma resistance where Roma women’s role was crucial.

Talking about the role of “othering” in defining Roma women, Iulia Haşdeu takes a critical stance towards the position of different anthropologist who neglect experiences such as the memories of Holocaust, racists attitudes or discrimination in a context given due to their multiple privileges as white, middle class and gadje (non Roma).She pleads for anthropology to introduce into its work power relations inside, between group and in relation with different parts of society. This could bring new understanding on how gender and ethnicity works within groups, how it effects in larger contexts as domino I would say, reaching the structures of states. In her suggestive article “Words that don’t come easy. Intersectional and post-colonial feminist understandings about Roma in East-European societies” she also questions her own position as gadje discussing about race and racism in an honest way.

This issue contains also a reinterpretation of the story of the Queen of Sheba, a women leader in Quaran reevaluated from an Islamic feminist standpoint.

Last, the issue closes with two book reviews that follow the topic solicited. First is the story of Anina Ciuciu “Proud to be Roma” summarized by Simona Chirciu where a young Roma from Craiova travels with her family in a caravan to France in order to find a better life. Anina is a successful story of a young Roma, challenged and intelligent who studies at Sorbona and had the chance to give voice to many immigrants living in France.

The second book review is “Gypsy Economy: Romani Livelihoods and Notions of Worth in the 21st Century” summarized by Elena Popa. The book tells the story of Roma from Eastern European countries in their struggle to manage income-generating activities in the context of free market, privatization and neo-liberalism policies. The book shows an insight on the economic strategies and values, networking and social relations to maintain a business. It represents a good opportunity to know different traditional occupation of Roma as well as craftsmen’s.

Reaching the end of this issue I want to thank Diana Neaga for her proposal on this topic and support through the entire process. Also many thanks for the teamwork from AnA Society for Feminist Analyses for all the amount of work and for those who sent articles.

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Roma women's marginalities in the recognition struggles of a Hungarian Roma Women's NGO

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Abstract

The intersectional aspects of Roma women's marginalities are politicized. In the ongoing recognition struggles diverse aspects of their inequalities are lifted into the forefront¹. Whereas public institutions perceive Roma women as clients of the welfare state or of charity, Roma women's civil organizations have the potential to offer Roma women subjectivity to define their concerns within their own communities and in relation to majority society². However, even these organizations act within the context of dominant discursive frames addressing their situation.

This paper explores through the study of a Roma Women's civil organization, Roma Women Public Advocates, the way how this organization manages to bring forward the complexity of Roma women's situation and give voice for their identity struggle in the context of the dominant discourses of majority society and discourses within male dominated Roma organizations. It is to explore how vulnerabilities of different origins, such as ones related to work life balance, gender based violence and intimate citizenship become framed in relation to the own community vs dominant discourses in majority society.

Furthermore, the paper explores sources of ideation and economic support for the NGO. What are the economic dynamisms and dependencies behind NGO-isation and how do dependencies influence the processes of ideation of gender equality? Most importantly, the paper explores whether the ideation processes are empowering, participatory, bottom-up processes growing out of the culturally and socially specific conditions of the NGOs' constituencies as well as it explores the interplay between bottom-up and donor driven ideation processes.

The paper is based on a broader study on Roma women's NGOs, Roma NGOs and Women's NGOs in Hungary addressing concerns of Roma women. The study of the particular organization in this paper included several interviews and participant observations in events.

Keywords: Roma women, Hungary, civil society, NGO, gender equality, framing

¹ I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015;

² V. Vincze, "Roma Women's Voices and Silences on Unjust Power Regimes." Paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists organized by the Council for European Studies, Amsterdam, 25-27 June 2013: Crises and contingency: states of (in)stability Panel: Romani activism, challenged democracies, contentious politics, 2014;

Introduction

Roma women's marginalization processes emerge along the intersection of social, gender, ethnicity and age based inequalities in their communities as well as in their relationships to majority society and as consequences of global inequality relationships. Roma at large have been hit hardest by the post-socialist integration into a globalised world economy, due to mass loss of work opportunities that followed deindustrialisation and economic restructuring³[1]. While job-opportunities were lost mainly in industry and mining, the expansion of the institutional framework of the post-socialist welfare regime created increasing work opportunities. However, these openings came to the benefit of primarily educated white women⁴ (Fodor, 2002). Economic activity rates are among the lowest in Hungary among EU member states both for men and women, but they are lowest for Roma women[2]. Beyond their greater exclusion from work, Roma women score low on health measurements compared to both non-Roma women and Roma men due to economic deprivation and a higher number of births starting earlier in life⁵. As female victims of domestic and sexual violence and in areas of intimate citizenship Roma women experience vulnerabilities accessing institutional support⁶.

Balogh et al (2011) identify the target areas of Roma women's gender equality struggle based on a definition of multiple discrimination in the following: domestic violence, arranged marriage, forced marriage and child marriage, trafficking and enforced prostitution, Romani women and children threatened by right wing politicians and extreme right groups, multiple disadvantages in education, lack of employment, lack of access to social benefits, intersection discrimination in reproductive health, and lack of access to financial services⁷.

As argued by intersectional analysis⁸ multiple marginalities are not additive, rather they surface in the amalgamation of vulnerabilities of different origins. A great many women endure domestic violence within intimate relationships⁹. Nonetheless, Romani women are multiply victimized as victims of domestic violence since they expect stigmatization rather than help from institutions. Poverty and lacking social institutions cut opportunities for finding viable alternative accommodation or subsistence making exit from disruptive relations harder¹⁰. Thus, working for gender equality for Romani

³ J. Ladányi and I. Szelényi, *A kirekesztettségváltozóformái*. [Exclusions varying forms], Budapest: Napvilág, 2004;

⁴ J. Szalai, A jólétifogda [The welfare prison]. In *Kisebbségekkisebbsége. A magyarországi cigányok emberi és politikai jogai* [Minority of minorities. Human and political rights of the Hungarian Roma], MáriaNeményi and JúliaSzalai, 43-93. Budapest: ÚjMandátumKönyvkiadó, 2005;

⁵ EP (European Parliament and Èva Fodor) *The Policy of Gender Equality in Hungary, Update 2013*, Brussels: European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. ERRC (European Roma Rights Centre), *Trafficking in Romani Communities, Breaking the Silence: A report by the ERRC on people in need*, Budapest: ERRC, 2011, p.72;

⁶ L. Balogh, A. Kóczé, *Fókuszban a nők. A roma nők társadalmi és politikai befogadásának időszzerű kérdései Európában*, Budapest: Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség, 2011; I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

⁷ L. Balogh, A. Kóczé, Angéla, *Fókuszban a nők. A roma nők társadalmi és politikai befogadásának időszzerű kérdései Európában*, Budapest: Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség, 2011;

⁸ N. Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (3) (2006): 193-209;

⁹ A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011 p. 84;

¹⁰ L. Balogh, Lídia and A. Kóczé, *Fókuszban a nők. A roma nők társadalmi és politikai befogadásának időszzerű kérdései Európában*, Budapest: Magyar NőiÉrdekérvényesítőSzövetség, 2011, p. 4-5;

women assumes a struggle on multiple fronts, which assumes an intersectional framework.

In diverse arenas of politics only limited aspects of Roma women's intersecting marginalities become subject to politicization. On the one hand Roma women are targeted by dominant state and media discourses¹¹. On the other hand, in the ongoing recognition struggles Roma women's civil organizations lift selective aspects of their situation and concerns into the forefront¹² (Asztalos Morell 2015). Whereas public institutions perceive Roma women as clients of the welfare state or of charity, Roma women's civil organizations have the potential to offer Roma women subjectivity to define their concerns within their own communities and in relation to majority society¹³. However, even these organizations act within the context of dominant discursive frames addressing their situation.

Hungarian women's organisations are described to represent a mixture of hybrid feminism and anti-feminism¹⁴. Roma women's organisations are not exempt from this description. Meanwhile, they find themselves in the intersection of diverse marginalities based on ethnicity, class and gender. Being located within the context of dominant racialized discourses, poses challenges for Roma women's organisations on their formulation of these intersectional concerns and to which degree they adapt critical gender equality discourse to identify their concerns. Dombos, Krizsán and Zentai¹⁵ utilise the concept of framing¹⁶ to explore how gender equality discourses problematize key gender equality concerns, which they group into three main categories: GBV (Gender-Based-Violence), which includes issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and trafficking; IC (Intimate Citizenship) incorporating concerns in divorce, marriage, separation, sexual orientation and reproduction rights; and NE (Non-Employment) which focuses on issues regarding employment, tax and benefit policies, care-work, reconciliation of family and work, gender pay gap and equal treatment. From an intersectional perspective gender equality struggles based in diverse constituency of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and class might bring different issues into the forefront. Framing the intersectional complexity of relationships makes visible certain systems' domination over others¹⁷.

This paper explores through the study of a Roma Women's civil organization, Roma Women Public Advocates, the way how this organization manages to bring forward the complexity of Roma women's situation and give voice for their identity struggle in the context of the dominant discourses of majority society and discourses within male

¹¹ J. Goven, "New parliament, old discourse? The parental leave debate in Hungary" In *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* edited by Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, 286-306. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000;

¹² I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015;

¹³ E. Vincze, "Roma Women's Voices and Silences on Unjust Power Regimes." Paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists organized by the Council for European Studies, Amsterdam, 25-27 June 2013: Crises and contingency: states of (in)stability Panel: Romani activism, challenged democracies, contentious politics. 2014;

¹⁴ K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009;

¹⁵ T. Dombos, A. Krizsan, M. Verloo, V. Zentai, Critical Frame Analysis: A Comparative Methodology for the Quality in Gender + Equality Policies, (QUING) project. 2012. Accessed September 30, 2016: <http://hro.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/publications/cps-working-paper-critical-frame-analysis-quiring-2012.pdf>;

¹⁶ E. Lombardo, A. Rolandsen, "Framing Gender Intersections in the European Union: What Implications for the Quality of Intersectionality in Policies" *Social Policy* 19 (4) (2012): 482-512;

¹⁷ E. Lombardo, A. Rolandsen, "Framing Gender Intersections in the European Union: What Implications for the Quality of Intersectionality in Policies" *Social Policy* 19 (4) (2012): 482-512;

dominated Roma organisations. It is to explore how vulnerabilities of different origins, such as ones related to NE, GBV and IC, become framed in relation to their own community or/and to majority society.

Furthermore, the paper explores sources of ideation and economic support for the NGO. What are the economic dynamisms and dependencies behind NGO-isation and how do dependencies influence the processes of ideation of gender equality? Most importantly, the paper explores whether the ideation processes are empowering, participatory, bottom-up processes growing out of the culturally and socially specific conditions of the NGOs' constituencies as well as it explores the interplay between bottom-up and donor driven ideation processes.

Theoretical Concerns

Racial/ethnic minority women emerge commonly as targets of "othering" practices in dominant discourses where IC and GBV issues are not uncommonly an element of othering¹⁸. The issue of early marriages is one topical concern through which Romani women's status is problematized, constructing it as an expression of Romani culture¹⁹. Oprea (2005) does not question the oppression of young Romani women within their communities, but challenges "the mono-focal conceptualization of 'Romani culture' as being the sole factor affecting their experiences"²⁰. Similarly, Durst²¹ argues for a social sensitive approach highlighting that Roma girls in marginalised rural areas, lacking other alternatives, find giving birth as the only way of gaining recognition in their communities. Giving birth at an early age in turn cuts their chances of further education. Social deprivation, rather than Roma cultural difference, thus generates young Roma mothers' gender- and ethnic-specific marginalities. Furthermore, it needs to be pinpointed, that mono-focally cultural explanations of early pregnancies among Roma girls are often inattentive of the health and social consequences of early marriage for young mothers.

Another topical area for framing Roma women's "otherness" has been related to their higher fertility rate and allegations as to the motivation for this being the over-utilisation of generous parental benefit systems. Like a number of other post-socialist countries, and also France and Finland, Hungary remained a maternalistic gender regime characterised as a public matriarchy²². Hungary has a continuing high degree of state support for maternity (paid childcare subsidy until the child's third year), which does not encourage mothers to return to the labour market. Gender policies are recurrently reconfigured in Hungary along dominant political block politics²³. As

¹⁸ I. Asztalos Morell, H. Carlback, S. Rastback Sara and M. Hurd, eds, *Gender Transitions in Russia and Eastern Europe* Eslöv: Gondolin, 2005;

¹⁹ A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011;

²⁰ A. Oprea, "Child Marriage a Cultural Problem, Educational Access a Race Issue? Deconstructing Uni-Dimensional Understanding of Romani Oppression." *Roma Rights Journal*, 21 July 2005, ERRC, Accessed March 28, 2015 <http://www.errc.org/article/child-marriage-a-cultural-problem-educational-access-a-race-issue-deconstructing-uni-dimensional-understanding-of-romani-oppression/2295>, p. 133 - 148.

²¹ J. Durst, ""Bárók", patrónusok versus "komák" - eltérőfejlődésiutakazaprófalvakban." In *Kisteleplüléseklépésényszerben*. Edited by MónikaVáradi. Budapest: ÚjmandátumKiadó, 2008;

²² Glass, Christy and Fodor, Éva. "From Public to Private Maternalism? Gender and Welfare in Poland and Hungary after 1989." *Social Politics* 14 (3) (2007): 323-350;

²³ Krizsán, Andrea and Zentai, Violetta, "Gender equality policy or gender mainstreaming?" *Policy Studies*, 27 (2) (2006): 135-151, p. 141;

Szikra²⁴ highlights, socialist governments argued for cutbacks in reproductive benefits and emphasized the social aspects of reproductive rights and the maintenance of flat rate transfers to benefit the poor. By contrast, conservative governments motivated the high level of transfers of reproductive benefits with prenatal sentiments and a focus on working mothers and work-related benefits²⁵. Demographic growth, along right political sentiments was to be stimulated by protecting the family with a strong focus on middle class families²⁶. Roma women's high fertility was identified in public debates as misuse of childcare benefits and as the use of benefits as a livelihood strategy²⁷.

Thus, on the one hand stigmatising and culturifying framing of Roma women in right wing political and media discourse made Roma movements, including Roma women's movements, reluctant to address central IC (early pregnancies, women's reproductive health) and GBV (domestic violence) issues in their communities²⁸. On the other hand lacking attention of these issues denies visibility and advocacy for Roma women victims of family violence²⁹. Intersectional analysis, utilized in this paper, offers the possibility to address cross-cutting vulnerabilities without reinforcing the stigmatisation of multiply disadvantaged groups.

The Neo-liberal and Conservative Welfare State and the Role of NGOs in the Welfare Mix

Former state socialist societies were commonly characterised by a low degree of institutionalisation of civil society. Following the transition period, western economic and ideation support played an allegedly important role in CEE (Central and East European) "NGO-isation"³⁰. NGOs fill black spots left unaddressed by the retrenching post-socialist neoliberal/conservative welfare state³¹ and address needs defined according to claimed identities and communities³². Gender- and ethnicity-based identity struggles have been common mobilizing factors during the post-socialist transition. Roma minority organizations that have emerged from the late eighties onwards focus on identity politics primarily and problematize the conditions of Roma within majority

²⁴ K. Szikra, "Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014." *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24 (5) (2014) 486-500;

²⁵ K. Szikra, "Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014." *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24 (5) (2014) 486-500, p. 494;

²⁶ A. Duman, A. Horváth, "Reconciliation of Work and Family Life in Hungary, Reconciling Work and Welfare in Europe." *REC-WP 05/2010 Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe*. 2010. Accessed March 19 2015 http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1634837.

²⁷ J. Goven, "New parliament, old discourse? The parental leave debate in Hungary" In *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* edited by Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, 286-306. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000;

²⁸ A. Kóczé, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011;

²⁹ I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

³⁰ Y. Gradszkova, S. Sanders, *Institutionalizing Gender Equality, Historical and Global Perspectives*. New York: Lexington Books. 2015; K. Jacobsson, S. Saxonberg, Steven. *Beyond NGO-ization, The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, Burlington: Ashgate. 2013;

³¹ V. Vesterberg, "Learning to be Swedish: governing migrants in labour-market projects," *Studies in Continuing Education*. 37 (3) (2015): 302-316;

³² I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

society and typically do not address gender concerns. Meanwhile, a plethora of women's organizations that emerged during the transition period did not, to begin with, address issues of Roma women specifically³³.

Among the growing number of women's organizations feminist ideation was at first embraced by only a minority of CEE women, who primarily mobilized around a series of welfare issues³⁴, for example reproductive rights, raising women's pension age and the restructuring of maternity benefits. Most women's organizations choose a less confrontational approach due to anti-socialist sentiments that contest state interference in matters of the state³⁵. As Fábíán argues, civil organizations that make up the women's movement in Hungary manifest a mixture of "antifeminism and hybrid feminisms" with only a few adhering openheartedly to a feminist agenda, defined as having "a political agenda to end the oppression of women"³⁶. Women's NGOs often reformulate rather than openly challenge traditional perceptions that "view the welfare of children being women's main public concern"³⁷. A good example is how conservative grass-roots based women's NGOs were successful in mobilizing against the restrictions on childcare benefits that the socialist/liberal government had introduced³⁸.

However, even Western feminist movements often critical of the achievements of state socialist emancipatory projects were instrumental in spreading previously not attended feminist ideas of GBV and IC related gender inequality. We find nonetheless, women's organizations with explicit gender equality agenda, such as MONA (MagyarországiNőiAlapítvány: Women's Foundation of Hungary) or NANE (Nők a NőkértEgyüttazErőszak Ellen: Women for Women Together Against Violence), that are at the forefront when it comes to voicing issues of violence against women. The role of these feminist oriented women's organisations in the advocacy on and collaboration concerning Roma women's issues needs to be further explored³⁹.

Considering the rise of Roma civil activism following the transition critics⁴⁰ (Arató, 1992, Fowler, 1997, Trehan, 2001) highlight that "the majority of projects are necessarily donor-driven and the consequent dependency seriously affects and undermines the independence of local NGOs"⁴¹. Most significantly, there are "global forces that inevitably impinge on the current trajectory of the transnational movement

³³A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011; Fábíán, Katalin. *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009;

³⁴ K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, p. 200;

³⁵J. Goven, "New parliament, old discourse? The parental leave debate in Hungary" In *Reproducing Gender: Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life After Socialism* edited by Susan Gal, Gail Kligman, 286-306. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000;

³⁶ K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, p. 77;

³⁷K. Fábíán, *Contemporary women's movements in Hungary: globalization, democracy, and gender equality*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, p. 78-79;

³⁸S. Saxonberg, "The Influence of "Conservative" Women's and Family Organizations in Hungary and the Czech Republic" In *Beyond NGO-ization, The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Kerstin Jacobsson and Steven Saxonberg, 97-115. Steven Burlington: Ashgate, 2013;

³⁹ Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, 2015, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46;

⁴⁰ Arató, Andrew, 1992, "Social Theory, Civil Society and the Transformation of Authoritarian Socialism" In *Citizenship in Europe*, edited by V. Gathy and J. Jensen, 116-146. Szombathely 1992; Trehan, Nidhi 2001, 'In the name of the Roma? The Role of Private Foundations and NGOs'. In: Guy, W. ed *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press;

⁴¹ A. Kóczé, *Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women's political activism and social struggles*, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 40;

for ‘Roma rights’⁴². This dependency was convergent with the acceptance of a neo-liberal agenda focusing on human rights in the context of a neo-liberal paradigm, implying a pro-free market and procedural democratisation paradigm⁴³. This human rights discourse focuses on discrimination perpetrated by the state. This civil rights approach thus does not engage in the structural roots of increasing social differentiation. The neo-liberal imperative relegated “issues of egalitarianism and social justice within civil society to the periphery”.

The theory of donor-dependency of CEE NGOs has become criticised recently, arguing that such dependency characterised the NGO-sation in the early post-socialist period. As Jacobsson and Saxonberg argue, NGO development in the CEE has entered a new phase after the 2000s, where the donor dependency of the early post-socialist period is overcome by a more participatory, grass-roots-based development⁴⁴. Research on Roma civil organisations in Hungary indicates, that, in addition to western economic support, state and municipal funding originating from a changing institutional background and size, has been an important source of economic support for Roma civil organisations as well as CKÖs (Roma Municipal Self-governments)⁴⁵. However, further research is needed to indicate how donor-dependency and ideation are interrelated in case of Roma women’s NGOs? Some, as Trehan argue, that there has been a growing institutionalisation, marketization and entrepreneurship in human rights work and as an outcome this top-down model shun grass-roots agency and even resistance⁴⁶. There is a pecking order of NGOs and white supremacy prevails, prohibiting “Romani participation in the achievement of their own emancipation”⁴⁷. Nonetheless, despite of the relevance of this critical stance, there has been an upsurge of civil organisations pivoting Roma and Roma women’s identity struggles⁴⁸. A less revolutionary perception of civil movements is suggested to provide an alternative reading of the status of Roma civil organisations. As van Baar suggests, this “less dramatic notion of politics” would incorporate Romani asylum seekers as “as ambivalent yet vital attempts to repoliticize inequality and poverty”⁴⁹. Incorporating a broader less formalised conception of civil society along van Baar opens for reading Roma civil movements as contributing to transformative, participatory reconfiguration of citizenship independent of the mainstream Roma and PRO-Roma NGOs, which were seen by some⁵⁰ supporting the

⁴² A. Kóczé, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 41;

⁴³ A. Kóczé, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 42;

⁴⁴ K. Jacobsson, S. Saxonberg, Beyond NGO-ization, The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe, Burlington: Ashgate, 2013;

⁴⁵ B. Majtényi, G. Majtényi, *Cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1945-2010*. Budapest: Libri, 2012; Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 Secretariat Foundation. “CSMR (Civil Society Monitoring Report Hungary in 2012).” 2013, Accessed March 28, 2015 http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file8_hu_civil-society-monitoring-report_en.pdf; I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, “Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary” *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015;

⁴⁶ N. Trehan, ‘In the name of the Roma? The Role of Private Foundations and NGOs’. In: Guy, W. ed Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001;

⁴⁷ A. Kóczé, Angéla, Gender, ethnicity and class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles, CEU, PhD thesis, Budapest, 2011, p. 45;

⁴⁸ I. Asztalos Morell, “Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women’s NGOs in Hungary”. In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) “Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective,” Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

⁴⁹ H. van Baar, “Toward a politics of representation beyond hegemonic neoliberalism: the European Romani movement revisited”, *Citizenship Studies*, 16:2, 287-296, 2012, p. 295;

⁵⁰ P. Veermesch, Peter. *The Romani Movement Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006; N. Trehan, Nidhi, ‘In the name of the Roma? The Role of Private

“neo-imperial and neoliberal” order. Others are instrumental in arguing that Roma women’s organisations are the potential vehicles for voicing subjugated voices. The construction of the message voiced receives its importance from the central importance of the *act of voicing*⁵¹. Roma women’s NGOs open the possibility to thematise their agenda *with* rather than *for* Roma women. The paper therefore explores whether the RKNSZ (Roma Közéleti Nőkés Szószólók) (Roma Public Women Advocates) perceives its constituents, Roma women, as *agents* rather than *clients* and in what ways this agency is invoked.

Research Design

This paper explores the perceptions of those agents representing civil organizations, who are engaged with issues that have relevance for the conditions of Roma women. This paper is based on my interviews conducted with Blanka Kozma, founder and leader of RKNSZ in 2012 and 2014. Furthermore, it includes reflections on the event where RONAH (National Roma women’s Association in Hungary) was founded and where Blanka Kozma participated in 2014.

The voices upon which this study is based are selected from a broader research conducted on the topic how Roma women’s concerns are constructed in Hungarian NGOs. Results of these studies concerning the proliferation of Roma women’s concerns were published in earlier studies⁵² and do therefore not constitute part of this study.

Roma Közéleti Nőkés Szószólók (Roma Public Women Spokesmen)

The creation of RKNSZ: a Roma women’s NGO

RNE (Roma Nők Egyesület: Roma Women Association), which was the predecessor organization of Roma Public Women Spokesmen, was founded by Blanka Kozma in 1995. Kozma was educated as teacher, and had been active as social worker and welfare activist in Ferencváros municipality for 5 years at the time. She was invited by Géza Gosztanyi, leader of the Teréz Municipal Family Assistance Service and employee of Autonomia Foundation to participate in a project financed by the Soros Foundation (later OSI: Open Society Institute) to study and establish contact with US women’s organizations, such as the Female Voters League. The leader of Autonomia, where Gosztanyi was also active, at this time was, András Bíró, who according to Kozma, emphasized the importance to “work with Roma not only for Roma”. Kozma argues that many of “the large civil organisations work for the Roma but not at all with the Roma”. This remark corroborates with the critique of Trehan (2001) and Kóczé (2011) referring

Foundations and NGOs’. In: Guy, W. ed *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001;

⁵¹ E. Vincze, “Roma Women’s Voices and Silences on Unjust Power Regimes.” Paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists organized by the Council for European Studies, Amsterdam, 25-27 June 2013: Crises and contingency: states of (in)stability Panel: Romani activism, challenged democracies, contentious politics. 2014;

⁵² I. Asztalos Morell, Ildikó, “Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary” *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, “Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women’s NGOs in Hungary”. In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) “Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective,” Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

to the white primacy within Pro-Roma NGOs. Nonetheless, the fact that Kozma was engaged with the project indicates, in opposite to Trehan and Kóczé, that there was a sensitivity to include Roma activists. Thus, Gosztonyi “he knew me, and he saw values in me and informed me about the opportunity”. Twenty women activists were invited for a 6 week study trip, where one of the criteria was to choose activists who are considered capable of utilizing the knowhow in Hungary. One of the chosen was Kozma, who found that “the study of the [US] civil organisations was a big push... I was motivated all the way to see how I could utilize this.”

Soros Foundation at that time had a women’s section, which was led by ÈvaFöldvári, which organized a conference “The democracy-woman” (A demokrácia-nő), where all Hungarian women civil organisations were present. Kozma come in contact with NANE and this Feminist network conference organized following this study visit: “they took me under their wings”. Our Roma women’s organization became independent under their midwifing (bábáskodás)”. They helped to write the foundation (alapszabályzat) document, helped with the first project applications, with contacts. One of the key activists of the time was Antonia Burrows, who was an English citizen teaching English at ELTE. She had many students on her feminist sensitizing seminars. They were also developing the Lesbian Movement. The organization started to develop with their initial help. Kozma’s account is supporting the reflection by Kóczé (2011) and Trehán (2001) even in reference to the instrumentality, both in terms of finances and ideation, of global actors, such as the Soros foundation, in initiating NGOs advocated concerns of both critical gender issues and ethnic identity struggles.

To start with the initiated projects concerned preparatory training for Roma women in different subjects, such as personality development, enterprise initiation and management, networking. Some of the projects were common projects with other NGOs. An enterprise management training was led by SZID. However, Roma Women’s Association provided the clients for the training. The Economic University received US support for a project MECCS, which had a minority aspect that they could not realize. They found a partner in Kozma for holding the seminars directed towards Roma women. “The association developed a name, due to the media coverage.”

As Kozma’s reflection indicates, much of the ideation and economic support of the NGO has evolved as a result of close collaboration with internationally supported NGOs at this initial phase. The success of the NGO to attract support has created reactions within some segments of the national Roma movement, which operated with support from governmental foundations. Specific state financed support became ear-marked through the grounding of public foundations such as MACIKA (Magyarországi Cigányokért Közalapítvány: Hungarian Foundation for Roma) emerged at that period. MACIKA, a state foundation to enhance the position of Roma minority in society, was founded in 1995 under the socialist liberal coalition government with Gyula Horn as prime minister and was dismissed in 2011 under the FIDESZ-KDNP coalition government with Viktor Orbán as prime minister. This foundation had as a task to support Roma participation in public life, to contribute to the training of Roma political agents and activists. However, the success of Roma Women Association to attract external financial support for the projects raised even jealousy: “After the first 5 years, a jealousy emerged against the association. ... To provide financial support [to improve Roma’s] political role taking became also the part of distribution of resources to Roma. ... By the end everyone received financial support with the exception of us.”Kozma indicates as the source of jealousy, the connections and support by international donors. Nonetheless, it is important to remark, that the gender critical issues forwarded by the

organizations which supported RNE were not shared by the interests of MACIKA, an observation that corroborates with Kóczé's (2011) remark on the lack of gender sensitivity in Roma minority organizations.

Roots in social issues of the constituency

Kozma found that these projects, initiated by international donor supported NGOs working in Hungary, were focusing a lot on organizational, networking issues and seemed superficial compared to the down to earth results of working directly with the social problems of clients:

"My work had a concrete result. Once the clients enter, I open for them the doors of the social network. When they enter, we fill in the social assistance application forms, pension applications, early pension agreements, disability statements, started child custody suits all kinds of things. When was a social worker. ... I could not see these values in the movement at that time."

This reflection by Kozma indicates her deep engagement with grass-root issues and social sensitivity, which contradicts with the perception of the concerns of NGOs emerging with international economic and ideation support, as understood by Trehán (2001) and Kóczé (2011). Thus, Kozma, despite of her international connectivity, has maintained "down to earth" connectivity to the issues of her constituency.

Her thematic interest had its roots in her engagement as social worker with charge for Roma issues in the Ferencváros Municipality Office. This experience raised her interest for Roma women. Kozma argued that many Roma families are fallen apart: "many are not married, there are many divorces, many separations, many like, neither with you or with you cases". Furthermore, where families are split, it is the women who became awarded custody for the children. They become the focal point of the families, while "men far away, they are in prison, they are fallen apart, they spent the money, and if they do not spend it, they spend it on such things that women do not agree with." Due to women's focal point in the families, they are the ones who keep in touch with the authorities, they are the ones who the authorities call and recognize. They are the ones who seek help at civil organisations. "Poverty has a female and a child face. This is the truest for Roma."

Kozma contrasts this experience as having the municipal office to rely on in meeting her clients, with her experience in civil service. She misses the security of the official background, meanwhile praises the freedom to choose orientation and the independence it provides. What was common in the two cases was the presence of the clients and their issues to support and solve. The importance of civil service background and engagement with social concerns of the constituency has been highlighted in relation to other Roma women's NGOs also, such as Szinesgyöngyök⁵³.

Kozma's own position and ability to keep the NGO running, was secured by her political career. She was elected as member of council in the municipality. After the end of her period she could continue as Liberal party (SZDSZ) remunerated representative in the Employment Committee. This gave her both forum to influence development and a steady income.

⁵³ I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradska and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality - a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

The organization started a new profile in 2000 (during the first FIDESZ government).with opening a legal aid office: RJI (Roma Jogvédő Iroda: Roma Legal Rights Protection Bureau) with focus on help to concrete client cases. “Not the very visible civil discrimination cases”, rather helping with everyday issues, filling formulas, applying for aid and similar issues. At first the organization was supported by specific Roma state support and Soros Foundation support. RJI continued its operation through the socialist-liberal coalition period between 2002 and 2010, when it was laid down during the second the FIDESZ (national conservative) government, due to cut of support for legal aid, even if they tried to keep up the organization an additional two years. Since the second FIDESZ government period financing is achieved from diverse project applications. Another project initiated created labor market information point financed by the National Employment Foundation (Országos Foglalkoztatási Közalapítvány).

At the moment of the interview, the district where the RKNSZ office is operating is led by FIDESZ, which prompted, after the dissolution of SZDSZ as a party after the loss in the 2010 elections, Kozma lost her party political ground of representation. This prompted a pragmatic turn in political orientation in order to be able to work for her constituency, which she motivates by: “the Roma always has the orientation of the leading party in the municipalities”. This corroborates with the analysis of political scientists pinpointing the difficulties for Roma politicians to unite around Roma identity issues and the apparent felt need to associate with dominant majority society political party politics⁵⁴.

Framing gender inequalities

As argued above, RKNSZ emerged in the intersection of two sources of ideation. On the one hand its origins are interwoven with the network of NGOs that grew out of the engagement and support by global agents, among these radical feminist organisations. Kozma has been also inspired directly by contacts with radical feminist international organisations. On the other hand, as representant for a Roma women’s organization and as an agent originating from the social welfare sector, Kozma maintained close association with her constituency, i.e. with marginalized Roma communities and with the concerns of women originating from these communities.

The orientation of RKNSZ towards Western feminist movements can be understood from the backdrop of the original support, both in terms of access to economic support and ideation, which the organization enjoyed at its upstart. In this sense RKNSZ was well integrated with mainstream Hungarian outright feminist civil organisations. Among these Kozma identifies the most important ones in the following.

Feminist Network (Feminista Hálózat) was an important source for women’s movements. This network was among the exceptional ones addressing critical gender perspectives among women’s organisations, as Fábíán’s (2009) research also indicates. It had even a journal *Nőszemély* and drove women’s issues on a broader scale including GBV and IC issues beyond NE issues. However, it dispersed. NANE had connections to it, but it works for a narrower focus on violence against women. One of the aims of Feminist Network was to create a women’s shelter: *Nőkháza* (Women’s House). During

⁵⁴B. Vizi, Ba(ed), *A romapolitikákértékelésimódszereiés a magyarkormányzatokromapolitikáiTanulmánykötet. Budapest: NemzetköziIntézet.* Accessed March 28, 2015 http://real.mtak.hu/16483/1/tanulmanykotet_roma.pdf. Yuval-Davis, Nira. “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13 (3) (2006): 193-209;

the Socialist Meggyesy government Katalin Lévy has worked for its establishment. However, by this, this issue was taken away from the feminist movement: “the civil movement has moved out of it”. Soros, OSI, Friedrich started to engage around this time and distribute support. But the network faded away in this process, as Vera Bozzi’s book “Elsikkasztott feminizmus” describes.

Kozma argued that the national feminist movements were open and supportive of Roma women’s organization. As one of the first organisations after 1989 was Roma Mothers (Cigányanyák) founded, a short-lived Roma women’s organization with focus on Roma mothers. They could survive since they were discovered by the feminist organisations and were helped (hónukalávétték)”. Blanka Kozma’s organization came by in 1995 and was situated on the left. Another organization, Roma Női Közhasznú Szervezet (Roma Women’s Public utility Organisation) led by Istvánné Makai in the seventh district of Budapest. They were very much propagated for as a right wing oriented organization.

Compared to the American experiences with women’s civil movements, which relied heavily on the volunteer work of middle class women, Kozma found that the Roma civil movement cannot draw on volunteers. Those working for the association are in need of income. This has to do with the social base of the movement. Firstly, the potential civil workers often come from poor background with long-term unemployment: “there was a girl here. She was working here for three days. I saw that she did not have money to get here teeth repaired. When people have such difficulties, how can we talk about volunteer work?” There are long-term unemployed even among well-educated: “Here is a man with university degree and English exam. He has no job. He is here and works for 60000 Forints (approx. 200 euros) in the Roma civil organization. He cannot afford to work as volunteer.” On the other hand, the younger generation of well-educated Roma Women, they would like to have jobs and wages according to their training. This observation corroborates with Fábíán’s (2009) observation of the difficulty of Hungarian civil organisations to rely on voluntary work.

The larger Hungarian women’s organizations, in Kozma’s view, rely on well-educated upper-middle class women, who can rely on better paid main-stream employment as university teachers or “they have established themselves within their special field to such a high degree that they can apply for such large projects, as EU, or Norwegian, and from these they can pay honorable wages (tiszteletdíj)”. Thus Kozma finds that “we have difficulties to get connected with each-other [i.e. middle class women’s organizations with Roma women’s organizations], since we are not as educated on the one hand and that our starting point is what do Roma women want”.

Another difference from the US women’s organizations is that while these focus on the issue of violence against women (GBV issues), women’s political representation, Roma women’s organizations are engaged with employment and social representation, classical NE issues. In this sense, Kozma’s experience deviates from the way Trehán (2001) and Kóczé (2011) highlight the lack of social sensitivity of internationally connected Roma NGOs. RKNSZ agenda is growing out of the concerns of the organisations constituency and is empowering its members by providing assistance with the issues that the members find most important.

However, despite her engagement with national and international feminist networks, Kozma emphasizes the importance to take a starting point in what the issues are for Roma women themselves. And they do turn to the organization first of all with their social problems: “they want employment, they want to start an enterprise, adult education, good schools for their children, schooling support, and they have housing

problems. They seek us for these economic problems. Not because their husband is beating them.”

Nonetheless, a special strength of Kozma, and by this of her NGO, is that, while allowing concerns grow bottom up in the organization, she succeeded also in amalgamating influences from international women’s movement and Hungarian mainstream feminist movement with the grass-root issues of Roma women. Recently, she has been active in raising the issues of family violence and of trafficking and creating consciousness raising projects around these issues. However, Kozma emphasizes the welfare connections of both of these areas pinpointing that prostitution is a consequence of poverty and lack of alternative ways to survive. Concerning family violence, she sheds light on specific context within which her organization confronts the issue of family violence:

“Women seek us with their financial problems. Not with violence within the family, that her husband has beaten her. Violence within the family is present. But she does not come here to ask help for getting her husband punished. She comes to us for the consequences of it. That she wants to move away from home, she wants another flat, that the husband has kicked her out of their flat. *She comes for the flat, to get help to move somewhere* because he is beating them. But if she could get a work, since she had not worked so far, she would go and take a work.”

Making connections between social marginalization and domestic violence leads associations to feminist interpretations of connecting the shortcomings of women’s economic citizenship to hinders they face in accessing civil citizenship rights, i.e. economic dependency is a major hinder to leave destructive relationships⁵⁵.

As another aspect of her multifaceted advocacy and international acknowledgement is exemplified by her being invited by the European Council to discuss the issues of human rights and legislation on family violence. Kozma argues that for her clients the social welfare issues and opportunities are the primary and the lack of support and options. Her organization is occupied with assisting her clients and do not have the resources to think on the level of legislation. This is more the larger women’s organizations, such as NANE, who have the resources to deal on that level with women’s battering.

Meanwhile, she distances herself both from mainstream feminist organisations and from mainstream Roma organisations. On the one hand, in relation to mainstream civil society organisations, Kozma criticizes these for lacking bottom up engagement of Roma: “they should work with Roma not only for Roma”. She finds that many civil organizations do not incorporate Roma people in their agitation for Roma. On the other hand, she feels herself being challenged by Roma organisations critical towards the connections of her organization with larger feminist organisations, such as MONA and NANE. Her critics perceived these national organisations as having apart interests to that of Roma women: “wait until you have to meet the real bossy Roma women, in long skirts and with long hair, not those (urban feminist women) under the influence of American lesbians.” Thus, Kozma’s own experience concerning interaction with so well mainstream feminist as with other Roma women’s organisations partially corroborates the critique forwarded by Trehán (2001) and Kóczé (2011) concerning two points: the lack of critical engagement with Roma women’s concerns in a bottom up fashion.

⁵⁵B. Hobson, “No Exit, No Voice: Women’s Economic Dependency and the Welfare State” *Acta Sociologica*, 33 (3) (1990): 235-250;

Nonetheless Kozma's own engagement exemplifies the opposite of the trends criticized above.

By the time of my second interview and following visit at the foundation of RONAH (Roma Női Aktivisták Hálózata: Roma Women Activist Network) initiatives were made to overcome the above indicated gap between mainstream feminist organisations and Roma women's organisations by first of all the initiative of NANE (Asztalos Morell 2015a).

Conclusions

Recent publication by Jacobsson and Saxonberg challenges the view of low civil engagement in former East block countries as well as the thesis that such activities would be the outcome of global agencies referred also to as NGO-isation. They argue that current trends indicate autonomous movements, even if the patterns of civil organizing might differ to that common in the developed world. The latter is also supported by Fábrián finding alternate patterns prevail within the women's movement in Hungary compared to the anglo-saxon feminist movements.

Asztalos Morell⁵⁶ indicated similar trends within Roma women's organisations in Hungary. Roma women's organisations in her studies had dual roots. On the one hand they were facilitated in their initiation by global actors, such as Soros foundation funded main-stream national agencies. On the other hand, they have roots in local autonomous civil organizing, not uncommonly having roots and connections to local municipal social welfare institutions. There is also a permeability between positions held in local minority self-organisations and participation in civil organisations. Asztalos Morell⁵⁷ showed also how an intersectional analysis can contribute to better understanding of the dilemmas civil organisations face in formulating their agenda concerning Roma women. Roma women, just as black women, find themselves in the intersection of multiple systems of domination. Majority society had the voice to define Roma women's concerns, a monopoly that contributed to the problematisation of Roma women (similar to what Matras criticized in majority policies problematizing Roma). Issues highlighting Roma women's vulnerable situation in the family, with early pregnancies and domestic violence and trafficking, have been constructed in culturifying images stigmatizing Roma communities. Opposing to such stigmatizing imaginary, Roma women as well as radical feminist movements have been skeptical to take these IC and GBV issues on board of their policies. Asztalos Morell highlighted merging points between radical feminist organisations, such as NANE and Roma women's organisations, such as Szinesgyöngyök, where interplay between radical feminist organisations and Roma women's organisations created a fruitful ground to enlarge the concerns of Roma women organisations and make taking GBV issues on board, despite of initial opposition from Roma organisations as well as their own constituency.

⁵⁶ I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

⁵⁷ I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

This paper provides an additional support to the intersectional interpretation of the emerging Roma women's movement. RKNSZ is an organization which fits into the pattern described by Asztalos Morell⁵⁸ of multiple initiation. RKNSZ has been an organization where, thanks much to the charismatic leadership of Blanka Kozma, top down influences through connections to and integration with mainstream civil society organisations on the liberal playground, with bottom up concerns. These bottom up concerns have partly developed through previous engagement with social welfare issues of marginalised Roma communities partly can be considered as a general political and ethical standpoint. This standpoint is rooted in a class and ethnicity specific positioning of the concerns of Roma women. While taking on board even GBV and IC issues, Kozma makes it clear how these need to be anchored in the specific social circumstances of Roma. In doing so Kozma acted against mainstream opinion among both Roma community leaders and leaders of Roma women's NGOs, which opposed to raise private issues in the organisations.

Vincze (2014) emphasized the historic importance of Roma women's civil society mobilization to offer an opportunity to voice their concerns as subjects. This connects to Crenshaw's and Spivak's image of the silenced sub-altern's possibility to speak. I find in Kozma's positioning herself and her organization as the key facilitator of such development in Hungary. She positions herself in the merging point between middle-class white feminist Western and Hungarian mainstream feminist movements and Roma civil right movement with focus on underprivileged Roma women's situation. She positions herself also in the merging point between Roma mainstream organisations, including the most of Roma women's organisations and a radical feminist standpoint. Thus, taking the cause of the most underprivileged captured by both vulnerabilities related to GBV and IC issues. Nonetheless, maintaining a constant contextualizing of issues of trafficking or family violence in the underprivileged Roma community. By this, she is departing from both middle class white women's earlier focus on GBV issues as detached of class and ethnicity and Roma civil organisations lacking engagement with GBV issues.

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⁵⁸ I. Asztalos Morell, "Representations of Romani women in civil society initiatives in the context of post-socialist transition in Hungary" *Baltic Worlds*, 8 (3-4) 34-46, 2015; I. Asztalos Morell, "Voicing Roma women: Intersecting marginalities and social entrepreneurship of Roma women's NGOs in Hungary". In: Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders (Eds) "Institutionalizing Gender Equality – a Critical Approach from a Global Perspective," Lexington Books at Rowman and Littlefield, 2015;

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Empowering Roma women in Romania – gender or/and ethnicity

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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.⁵⁹

According to Roma Inclusion Index 2015⁶⁰:

- 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

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ 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 cohabitating. 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”⁶¹. 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 Romani⁶², 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

⁶¹ Analysis of FRA Roma survey results by gender, June 2013;

⁶² 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”⁶³. 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?⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

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”⁶⁶. 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

⁶³ 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;

⁶⁴ 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%20%20Bitu%202006.pdf>;

⁶⁵ Nicoleta Bițu, Femeile Rome și Feminismul (Roma Women and Feminism), *Perspective Politice (Perspectives on Politics)*, vol V, nr.2, 2012, pp. 136-137;

⁶⁶ 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”⁶⁷ (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”⁶⁸.

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.⁶⁹

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 them⁷⁰.

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 change⁷¹ and

⁶⁷ 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;

⁶⁸ 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;

⁶⁹ Nicoleta Bițu, Femeile Rome și Feminismul (Roma Women and Feminism), *Perspective Politice (Perspectives on Politics)*, vol V, nr.2, 2012, pp. 136-137;

⁷⁰ 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;

⁷¹ 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 culture⁷², 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"⁷³.

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"⁷⁴. 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 action⁷⁵. 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

⁷² Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 22;

⁷³ 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;

⁷⁴ Magda Matache, "Gender equality, sens of belonging, both?", *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 51;

⁷⁵ 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)⁷⁶. 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 Europe⁷⁷. 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”⁷⁸.

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”⁷⁹. 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”⁸⁰ (Popa, 2009, 79).

⁷⁶ 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;

⁷⁷ 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;

⁷⁸ Raluca Maria Popa, “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 73;

⁷⁹ Raluca Maria Popa, “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policy”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 72;

⁸⁰ 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 women⁸¹.

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 debate⁸². 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

⁸¹ 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;

⁸² 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”⁸³.

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”⁸⁴. 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”⁸⁵.

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 level⁸⁶. 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

⁸³ 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;

⁸⁴ Magda Matache, “Gender equality, sens of belonging, both?”, *Nevi Sara Kali*, 2009, p. 51;

⁸⁵ Monica Stancu, „Learning to fight back: Roma Women s Activist Movement 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;

⁸⁶ 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"⁸⁷ (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

⁸⁷ 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.

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L'émancipation de la femme dans la société rom traditionnelle de Roumanie

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Abstract

L'émancipation de la femme dans la société rom traditionnelle de Roumanie s'intéresse à l'émancipation de la femme rom de Roumanie qui permettrait la réconciliation entre la société majoritaire roumaine et les communautés roms, souvent exclues sur base de leur ethnie et leur situation de pauvreté extrême. La femme rom, souffrant d'une triple discrimination basée sur son genre, à la fois à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de la communauté, est la médiatrice entre ces deux entités. Malgré tout, plusieurs dysfonctionnements et pressions tant internes qu'externes empêchent la femme de s'émanciper dans plusieurs domaines tels que l'éducation, l'emploi, la santé, etc. Cet article tente également de comprendre si une conciliation entre valeurs traditionnelles et modernes est possible pour la femme rom émancipée.

The emancipation of women in traditional roma community in Romania analyses the emancipation of Roma women in Romania as a possible way to reconcile the mainstream society with Roma communities, which continue to suffer from exclusion on grounds of their ethnicity and extreme poverty. Although the Roma woman faces a third discrimination, as a woman, both in her community and outside her community, there is a chance that she could act as a mediator for these two entities. However, many internal and external pressures and disruptions severely hinder women's emancipation in areas like education, employment, health care system, etc. This paper also tries to understand whether or not the emancipated Roma woman could actually live with a mix of both traditional and modern values.

Keynotes : Roma, emancipation, Romania, women, empowerment



Introduction

À l'heure actuelle, les Roms constituent la minorité ethnique la plus importante en Europe. La Roumanie, un des pays les plus pauvres de l'Union Européenne, en recense 8% de sa population totale. Ces Roms subissent une exclusion de la société dite *mainstream*, à la fois par racisme et par effet de l'extrême pauvreté dans laquelle bon nombre d'entre eux sont contraints de survivre.

Méthodologie et contexte

Cet article s'appuie sur plusieurs sources dont des documents officiels des organisations non gouvernementales de dimension européenne ainsi que des ouvrages de spécialistes de la question. Une observation de terrain d'une période de février à avril en Roumanie a été effectuée ainsi que neuf interviews avec plusieurs personnes clés, témoins ou spécialistes. Ces entretiens étaient semi-directifs et ont été fait par prise de note et non enregistrées.

A noter que le terme « Rom » est utilisé, conformément aux institutions européennes et le Conseil de l'Europe « en tant que terme générique couvrant diverses populations qui présentent plus ou moins les mêmes caractéristiques, [...] qu'ils soient sédentaires ou non [...] » (COM, 2011, cité par Migrations Magazines, 2012). L'auteur de cet article est consciente des réalités socio-historiques, des diversités culturelles et géographiques sur lesquelles chaque terme repose. Le terme « Rom » ou « communauté rom » est utilisé par souci de clarté.

La Roumanie, qui a fait son entrée dans l'Europe en 2007, reste à l'heure actuelle l'un des pays les plus pauvres de l'Union Européenne. Dans l'UE, est considérée comme pauvre, en termes monétaires, toute personne dont les revenus sont inférieurs à 60% du revenu "médian" national⁸⁸ (Armand-Eeckhout, L. (2013). Avec 180 euros, la Roumanie a le seuil de pauvreté le plus faible (Observatoire des inégalités, 2014).

Le gouvernement roumain reconnaît officiellement les minorités ethniques du pays. La législation distingue la citoyenneté, droit du sol, de l'appartenance ethnique, droit du sang. Les Roms ont une représentation permanente d'un ou de plusieurs députés à la Chambre des Députés soit comme faisant partie du *Partida de Romenge*, (Parti des Roms), soit comme membre d'un autre parti plus générique. Selon la Constitution, tous sont égaux en droits et toute discrimination est punie par la loi ; il existe cependant d'importantes tensions entre les Roumains et ces communautés roms.

Dans la pratique, les communautés roms sont victimes de discrimination liée à leur ethnie et à leur pauvreté. Le terme « Rom » est souvent associé à « culture de pauvreté » et au sous-développement social. Même si bon nombre de Roms n'entrent pas dans ces critères et sont intégrés à la société roumaine, il subsiste une majorité de Roms souffrant de problèmes de pauvreté, de chômage, d'accès limité aux soins de santé et à l'éducation. La Banque Mondiale estime leur espérance de vie en Europe centrale et occidentale à 10 ans de moins que la moyenne du reste de la population nationale. Les conditions de vie précaires et le manque d'accès aux soins d'hygiène et de santé exposent cette population

⁸⁸ Les personnes à risque de pauvreté sont celles vivant dans un ménage disposant d'un revenu équivalent-adulte disponible inférieur au seuil de pauvreté qui est fixé à 60% du revenu médian national équivalent-adulte (après transferts sociaux). Le revenu équivalent-adulte est calculé en divisant le revenu total du ménage par sa taille, déterminée par l'application des pondérations suivantes: 1,0 au premier adulte, 0,5 aux autres membres du ménage âgés de 14 ans ou plus et 0,3 à chaque membre du ménage âgé de moins de 14 ans.

à un risque de mortalité plus élevé. La marginalisation et la stigmatisation renforcent les inégalités et ces conditions précaires aggravent les préjugés véhiculés par la société à leur égard. C'est donc un cercle vicieux dans lequel la société roumaine est plongée où, par manque de dialogue et en raison d'a priori, la haine de l'autre mine la cohésion sociale du pays.

Peut-on parler de culture rom ?

Préalablement, il est à noter que nous définissons la culture comme « un ensemble lié de manières de penser, de sentir et d'agir plus ou moins formalisées qui, étant apprises et partagées par une pluralité de personnes, servent, d'une manière à la fois objective et symbolique, à constituer ces personnes en une collectivité particulière et distincte »(Rocher, G., 1992, p.4).

Peut-on parler d'une seule et même culture rom, qui serait commune à tous les peuples roms vivant dans l'Europe centrale et occidentale ? Peut-on même parler d'une culture rom pour les peuples roms vivant en Roumanie ? Selon Jean-Pierre Liégeois, fondateur du centre de recherches tziganes à l'Université Paris-Descartes et expert en vue pour les institutions européennes et le Conseil de l'Europe sur les questions roms, on ne peut pas parler à proprement dit de « culture rom » car ils forment un ensemble de populations très diversifiées, ayant des langues, des pratiques culturelles et des valeurs spécifiques (Jean Pierre Liégeois cité par Touyard, J. et Conte, C. ,2008).

En Roumanie, il est également difficile de parler « d'une communauté rom » qui regrouperait toutes les communautés présentes sur le territoire car elles sont toutes singulières et surtout, elles se rattachent culturellement à chaque région dont elles sont spécifiques. En effet, la Roumanie est un pays récent, né du Traité de Saint-Germain en 1919 qui unit les anciennes principautés moldo-valaques et la Transylvanie. Véritable mélange culturel, linguistique et social, la Roumanie conserve des disparités nationales intégrées par les Roms selon leur situation géographique dans le pays artificiellement créé.

Dans son ouvrage *Roms de Roumanie : la diversité méconnue*, Martin Olivera, Docteur de l'Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre, tente d'expliquer que les recensements quantitatifs de la population d'ethnicité rom dans le pays ne sont pas entièrement pertinents et que la diversité des communautés doit être prise en considération. Il semblerait que les études de recensement réalisées dernièrement mettent en avant des chiffres souvent inférieurs à la réalité. Beaucoup de personnes d'ethnicité rom ne se déclarent pas en tant que telle lors des recensements. La raison la plus souvent évoquée est celle de la « honte de la tziganitude » de la part des Roms, qui préfèrent estomper cette appartenance par peur de discriminations. Mais il existe d'autres raisons, parfois contradictoires, qui poussent les Roms à s'affirmer roumains ou hongrois plutôt que Roms. Une d'elles est que les Roms, même s'ils sont ostensiblement traditionnels et affirment leur identité, veulent faire une distinction entre le « nous communautaire » et « eux, les autres Tziganes ». En effet, quelle que soit la communauté, les personnes veulent se distinguer des autres Roms qu'elles considèrent comme primitifs, voleurs, mauvais. La vision stéréotypée, fantasmée du « Gipsy », est également partagée par ceux-ci. Inversement, des individus totalement intégrés dans la société roumaine, qui ne se distinguent pas de leurs voisins, vont affirmer leur identité rom et être actifs dans les mouvements associatifs et militants sur la question. Il est donc difficile d'élaborer un « type rom » se déclarant plus volontiers rom.

En Roumanie, il existe plusieurs « groupes-types » dans lesquels pourraient s'identifier les Roms mais malgré cela, les Roms ne s'identifient pas toujours à ces catégories. Dans l'étude menée sur 848 communautés, 500 entrent dans les catégories « autres roms » et « sans réponse ». Cela prouve qu'il y a une absence de sentiment d'appartenance ethnique et paradoxalement, un attachement communautaire local. En effet, les Roms définissent leur communauté en référence à une ville ou un réseau de communes qu'ils présentent comme leur lieu d'origine, c'est-à-dire là d'où leur famille vient (Olivera, M. 2009).

On ne peut donc pas parler de « Roms de Roumanie » ou de « culture rom » propre au pays en tant que catégorie générique, ni groupe social ou entité culturelle mais il est nécessaire de saisir les réalités socioculturelles de ces communautés au niveau local.

Femme comme rôle de médiateur

Cet article tente notamment de mettre en avant l'importance du rôle de la femme comme médiateur entre la société roumaine traditionnelle et sa propre communauté, la société traditionnelle rom. Son émancipation au sein de la communauté est un facteur déterminant dans les possibilités de conciliations entre ces deux entités, souvent en conflit.

La femme rom évolue au sein d'une communauté traditionnelle profondément patriarcale. Le statut de l'homme est supérieur en prestige à celui de la femme ; il exerce le rôle de chef de famille, qui détient la totalité du pouvoir symbolique et décisionnel. Malgré cette infériorité, la femme joue un rôle majeur, bien que paradoxal, dans l'inclusion des Roms. En effet, leur rôle est central car en tant que mères, elles participent à l'éducation de leurs enfants et à la transmission de valeurs. Leur analphabétisme n'est donc pas sans conséquences. Ayant reçu une éducation, elles peuvent alors insuffler un changement de perception et d'évolution des mentalités auprès de leurs enfants. De plus, leurs relations privilégiées à l'extérieur de la communauté, au contact de la société roumaine majoritaire, peuvent être une solution de (ré) conciliation et de compréhension mutuelle.

L'analyse de terrain

Comme mentionné dans la méthodologie, l'article se base sur des documents et sources écrites mais également sur des interviews auprès de différentes figures féminines issues essentiellement de la « communauté rom ».

Mihaela Zatreanu est une activiste rom spécialisée dans le domaine de l'éducation (voir annexe A). Agée d'une quarantaine d'années, elle est une femme consciente de son intelligence et de son élégance. Elle revendique son identité rom mais ne se définit pas comme traditionaliste car elle a embrassé la modernité et évolue dans la société moderne roumaine. Elle est séparée de son conjoint, pour des raisons de violence conjugale, et élève seule son fils de 14 ans. Elle se dit depuis toujours attirée par la modernité. « Je n'aurais pas pu vivre de façon traditionnelle, j'étais trop attirée par les gens émancipés dans mon école, à la télévision. J'étais attirée par l'extérieur, le côté provocateur. » (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015). (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015).

Nicoleta Bitu (Annexe A) a passé la moitié de sa vie à manifester pour les droits des Roms et surtout les droits des femmes. Appartenant à une génération héritière des valeurs communistes et de la chute du régime, Nicoleta était souvent critiquée pour sa « roumanisation » au sein de sa communauté. Elle a été une des précurseurs de la

revendication pour les droits des Roms au niveau national et international. Nicoleta explique : « lorsque tu entres en conflit avec ces valeurs traditionnelles roms, tu es perçue comme un danger, une traîtresse parce que tu commences à parler de choses taboues. » (Bitu, 22 avril 2015). Nicoleta vient d'une communauté rom très traditionaliste appelée *Calderash* (initialement des chaudronniers d'où leur nom), qui sont connus pour la perpétuation de règles de conduite très strictes. « Cette période [de l'adolescence] a été conflictuelle car je me posais beaucoup de questions par rapport à mon corps, à ma sexualité et c'était impossible d'en parler à la maison. Ce conflit interne de femme m'a fait me questionner. À mes 21 ans, j'étais dans une errance totale de mon corps et de ma sexualité » (Bitu, 22 avril 2015).

Andreea Braga (voir annexe A) est la Directrice du centre FILIA de Roumanie, un centre d'étude des genres et du développement qui défend l'égalité des genres dans la société roumaine, profondément patriarcale. Andreea a soutenu un doctorat sur les relations de pouvoir entre les hommes et les femmes roms et non-roms. Dans son travail, elle a mené une série d'entretiens pour tenter de comprendre la relation de violence domestique qui s'établit dans la majorité des foyers roumains. Les conclusions de son doctorat montrent que la violence est présente dans toutes les familles roms ou non-roms. Les femmes ne reconnaissent que l'extrême violence mais sont exposées au quotidien à la violence symbolique exercée par toute la communauté. Cette vision traditionaliste et patriarcale de la famille est donc commune à la société roumaine dans son entièreté, principalement dans les zones rurales, pas seulement chez les communautés roms.

R. est une jeune journaliste rom âgée de 21 ans. Elle est très belle et se dit émancipée. On pourrait facilement la confondre avec une roumaine du milieu urbain et sophistiqué car elle a adopté la mode et les attitudes modernes. Très maquillée, beaucoup de bijoux, faux cils et faux ongles, elle attire les regards. Lors de notre interview, beaucoup d'hommes se retournent sur elle ou tentent de l'aborder. Elle ne répond à aucune des avances et reste imperturbable.

« Dès mes 16 ans, j'ai su que je voulais être une femme indépendante, je voulais avoir mon propre succès, pas comme les autres filles de mon village. Dans mon village, les femmes apprennent à être de bonnes filles et de bonnes épouses et puis quand elles se marient, elles cuisinent et font le ménage (voir annexe C). Tes parents te disent avec qui tu dois te marier. Tes parents te disent « tu n'es pas comme les autres filles [roumaines], tu es rom et tu as des traditions que tu dois respecter ». Les filles de mon village ne font pas carrière. Ma chance est d'avoir grandi à Bucarest, mes parents ont essayé de m'éduquer différemment, de devenir une vraie femme » (Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015).

Le village de Brateiu, dans la région de Sibiu, a une population rom de 41 % (Centrul de ResursepentruDiversitateEtnoculturala, 2010). Nous y avons rencontré une famille rom très traditionaliste travaillant le cuivre et dont les valeurs roms traditionnelles sont extrêmement présentes dans cette famille. Les femmes portent le costume traditionnel rom : longue robe fleurie, tresses et fichu. Les deux filles, âgées de treize et quinze ans, ne peuvent plus aller à l'école, dans le but de les préserver des mauvais comportements des hommes. Ainsi, elles restent à la maison et apprennent comment faire le ménage et la cuisine. Leur petit frère Victor Junior, en revanche, huit ans, va à l'école et reçoit de très bonnes notes dont les parents sont très fiers. Il a également participé à une formation en artisanat et nous montre son diplôme (voir annexe D).

A Giulesti, quartier en périphérie de Bucarest, vit S., 11 ans. Sa famille ne possède pas de papiers d'identités et vivent dans une situation très précaire. Ils vivent dans une pièce composée d'un lit qu'ils se partagent et d'un chauffe-plat improvisé. S., dû à sa non

existence administrative, ne peut pas aller à l'école. Tous les jours, ses parents l'envoient dans le centre de la ville pour mendier. Les femmes de cette famille suivent une autre dynamique car Elena et Virginia, toutes les deux mariées et mères de plusieurs enfants, ont fait le choix de migrer à l'étranger quelques mois par an, de travailler dans le pays d'accueil et d'envoyer l'argent aux maris et aux enfants restés sur place (voir annexe E). Ce choix pour les femmes de migrer vers l'Europe Occidentale est courant. Les Roms voient l'Occident comme la terre promise, qui leur permettra de travailler et de gagner de l'argent. Cette vision semble utopique d'un point de vue extérieur mais il est vrai que les opportunités sont meilleures à l'Ouest, même si beaucoup finissent par mendier en rue. Les études et enquêtes sociologiques s'accordent à dire que la majorité des femmes qui partent abandonnent leur famille et commencent une nouvelle relation à l'étranger (World Bank, 2014). À l'heure actuelle, Elena et Virginia ne sont toujours pas rentrées et je ne peux savoir si elles le feront un jour. Ce phénomène de migration des femmes en Europe de l'Ouest est un aspect très important dans la dynamique de couple mais ne sera pas exploité dans cet article.

A travers les récits de ces femmes, nous allons tenter de déceler les possibilités d'émancipation ainsi que leur stratégie pour concilier les valeurs traditionnelles et patriarcales transmises par leur communauté et leur vie contemporaine de femme libre dans la société moderne roumaine.

La femme rom de Roumanie

Face à la société majoritaire roumaine, les femmes souffrent d'une triple discrimination basée d'une part sur leur ethnicité rom, d'autre part sur leur genre et enfin à cause de leur position sociale et économique faible et leur statut de citoyenne de seconde zone à l'intérieur même de leur communauté. (Liégeois, J-P., 2010). L'Europe, prenant conscience de ces disparités, a recommandé aux Etats Membres de l'UE d'apporter une attention particulière à la situation des femmes roms, en citant les femmes roms comme « un groupe dans un plus grand besoin que les hommes » (Bitu, N. et Morteau, C., 2010).

Il faut avant toute chose souligner l'importance de la communauté et son impact sur les individus d'ethnicité rom. L'étude réalisée par l'Open Society Institute en 2009, *Roma Women known and unknown Family Life and the Position of the Woman in the Roma Communities*, s'est intéressée aux familles roms et à la position de la femme à l'intérieur de ces communautés, sur base d'entretiens et en partant du postulat qu'il existe des différences significatives sur la position de la femme par rapport aux hommes et entre celles-ci. Les chercheurs ont évalué la position de la femme selon trois critères : son éducation, son investissement sur le marché du travail (c'est-à-dire, si elle reçoit une rémunération) et le contrôle de la communauté sur la vie individuelle. Cette étude a identifié trois types de communauté : les communautés traditionnelles où la communauté exerce un contrôle important, où l'éducation est de faible niveau et où le travail rémunéré des femmes est quasi inexistant ; les communautés rurales non traditionnelles où le contrôle de la communauté est moins puissant, le niveau d'éducation est plus élevé et il y a des possibilités pour la femme d'interagir dans la sphère économique mais il n'y a pas d'opportunité qui permettrait un investissement excessif dans le travail, et enfin les communautés urbaines non traditionnelles où le contrôle de la communauté est relâché, l'éducation est similaire à celle des communautés rurales non traditionnelles mais l'expérience de travail des femmes est

plus élevée et il existe de réelles opportunités pour elles de se faire engager pour un travail rémunéré en dehors de la maison.

La communauté est un aspect excessivement important dans le fonctionnement de la société rom. Elle régit le fonctionnement collectif et individuel des membres. Elle convient de ce qui est respectable ou non ; elle perpétue les traditions patriarcales et exerce une pression sur les membres pour qu'ils les respectent. Son jugement maintient les individus dans le respect des traditions et la peur de l'exclusion de cette communauté.

On assiste, dans les communautés non traditionnelles où la communauté n'exerce pas un puissant contrôle sur le fonctionnement de l'individu, à une plus grande égalité entre les genres et à un relâchement des traditions autoritaires patriarcales qui décidaient de tout dans la vie de la jeune femme, comme par exemple le mariage précoce. L'émancipation de la femme peut donc également dépendre du type de communauté dans laquelle elle évolue. L'environnement urbain, proche de la société majoritaire, permet le contact avec la modernité et le relâchement des valeurs patriarcales traditionnelles. Elle permet aux femmes d'entrer en contact avec des modèles d'émancipation.

« Mes parents veulent que je sois une fille respectable, que je ne boive pas, que je ne mette pas de mini-jupes. Je suis obligée de rentrer à dix heures du soir maximum et de sortir en compagnie de garçons de ma communauté d'origine car mes parents n'ont pas confiance et si j'exagère ou que je me montre en soirée, les gens vont dire que je suis une traînée. Il y a toujours l'avis des gens, les critiques qui font revenir les traditions au-devant et mes parents sont sous pression et m'obligent à les respecter »(Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015).

Collectivité et individu

En effet, une des oppositions entre société traditionnelle et société moderne est cette notion de collectivité, de sens. Dans les communautés roms traditionnelles, l'être humain trouve un sens à son existence et existe par le biais de la communauté, la collectivité prime sur l'individu. Le chef de famille est toujours un homme et le pouvoir est masculin. La femme rom trouve sa « place » dans ce groupe mais elle est reléguée au statut de mère, épouse et ménagère. A l'opposé, dans les grandes villes empreintes de capitalisme, telles que Bucarest, les femmes ont la possibilité d'être libres de leurs choix et leurs actions. Malgré cette liberté, on observe une perte de sens dans la vie de ces hommes et femmes menant bien souvent à la solitude typique des grandes villes européennes. L'ère de la technologie et des machines a remplacé l'être humain et celui-ci, dans un monde qui semble tourner sans lui, ne permet pas de trouver le sens de sa vie. L'avènement de la Modernité place l'homme dans une position d'anonymat et d'inutilité. A l'intérieur des sociétés traditionnelles, les codes de conduite sont dictés par la communauté et la religion. Dans les sociétés contemporaines, où on assiste à une « déspiritualisation et une laïcisation », l'homme moderne perd ses repères (Pierobon, 2010, p.11). Ainsi, en prenant en compte toutes les nuances du contexte, on pourrait conclure que le traditionalisme non seulement renvoie à la collectivité, ce qui est rassurant, mais aussi se traduit par l'emprisonnement dans un rôle donné. En revanche, la modernité renvoie à la liberté de choisir son rôle dans la vie mais, parfois, au prix de l'anonymat et de la solitude, quand il devient indispensable de couper les ponts avec sa communauté d'origine.

Importance de l'émancipation de la femme

Avant de structurer les possibles domaines d'émancipation pour la femme rom et ses dysfonctionnements, intéressons-nous au but de cette émancipation. Que peut-elle apporter à la femme rom, ainsi qu'à la communauté ethnique et à la société majoritaire roumaine ?

Premièrement, cette émancipation permettrait une plus grande égalité des genres au sein de la société. Se libérant de son statut inférieur à l'homme, se détachant de son emprise patriarcale, la femme pourra ainsi faire valoir ses droits et devenir maître de sa vie.

De plus, la femme transmet les valeurs traditionnelles auprès de ses enfants. Si elle peut jouir d'un accès à un niveau d'éducation plus élevé et avoir des aspirations de vie plus grandes, elle pourra transmettre ce désir d'apprentissage et de développement personnel aux futures générations.

« Ces valeurs [roms] sont celles du respect, de la confiance, le support et l'altruisme, comment se comporter en société ; en dehors de la communauté et enfin, elle encourage ses enfants dans leurs études » (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015).

Enfin, la femme peut jouer un rôle de médiateur entre la société roumaine et sa communauté car elle jouit de contacts privilégiés avec cette société. En effet, l'école des enfants, les courses au village, les rendez-vous médicaux permettent d'interagir avec les Roumains et ces relations pourraient être la base d'une compréhension mutuelle.

Différents domaines d'émancipation selon les institutions européennes

L'éducation

L'éducation semble être une des pistes clés pour l'émancipation de la femme. Elle permettrait à celle-ci d'obtenir de meilleures chances sur le marché du travail mais aussi d'arriver à une plus grande égalité au sein du couple. L'étude de l'Open Society Initiative montre que « dans les familles où le taux d'éducation est plus élevé et où il y a une expérience d'emploi sur le marché du travail, le statut de la femme est souvent meilleur, elle a une plus grande part dans le processus de décision du foyer et a un statut plus proche de l'homme » (Open Society Institute, 2009).

Par contre, l'éducation n'est pas le seul moyen de s'émanciper et c'est le contact avec la modernité, la télévision, les médias, les interactions avec la société majoritaire qui vont permettre une transition de valeurs. De plus, Nicoleta ajoute « il y a vingt ans je t'aurais répondu 'oui bien sûr' [l'éducation est la base de l'émancipation] mais aujourd'hui, je n'en suis même plus certaine. Le système scolaire n'est pas adapté, pas attractif. L'école ne te donne pas les clés pour réussir. Les relations de genre, l'éducation sexuelle, n'est pas questionnée à l'école, et cela ne te donne pas une perspective différente sur ta perception de femme que celle que tu as à la maison » (Bitu, 22 avril 2015).

« Non adapté, peu attractif ». Ces mots décrivant le système scolaire font écho aux réalités des enfants roms concernant la relation à l'école. Selon une étude de l'European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), en Roumanie 22% des enfants roms âgés entre 7 et 15 ans ne vont pas à l'école (FRA, 2014). Selon l'European Roma Information Office (ERIO), sur les 11 pays européens membres dans cette étude, les filles roms sont moins enclines à finir l'école que les garçons : 54% des filles roms abandonnent l'école avant 16 ans contre 43% des garçons ; avec seulement 37% des filles qui continuent leur

éducation par rapport à 50% chez les garçons (ERIO, 2013). Il est important de préciser que sous le régime communiste de Ceausescu, de 1965 à 1989, les Roms ont subi une intégration forcée et ont été implantés dans le système scolaire. A cette époque, selon Nicoleta Bitu, 90% des Roms étaient lettrés. Ce n'est que depuis la chute du communisme et l'avènement de la société moderne capitaliste que les disparités en termes d'analphabétisme se sont développées.

Quelles sont les causes de ce taux important de décrochage scolaire et d'illettrisme ?

Avant tout, la société traditionnelle se base sur une culture de transmission orale et la culture de l'écrit n'est pas intégrée. De plus, si l'école permet la transmission des valeurs de vie, l'accès à un meilleur travail et statut social, « les Roms voient son utilité uniquement dans l'apprentissage de la lecture, l'écriture et l'obtention du permis de conduire » (Open Society Institute, 2009). Il est néanmoins obligatoire de nuancer ces propos et rappeler que dans les communautés non traditionnelles, l'éducation est vue comme une nécessité pour acquérir le succès.

Le système scolaire n'est souvent pas adapté et l'enseignement fait souvent preuve de ségrégation ethnique, c'est-à-dire de racisme. Sur base de leur identité rom, les enfants vont recevoir des traitements différenciés et pour la plupart, moins cléments. Lors de mon séjour en Roumanie, j'ai eu l'occasion de travailler sur un projet d'éducation aux médias avec une classe d'élèves de neuf à onze ans composée d'une majorité de Roms. Cette classe m'a dès le départ été présentée comme « bruyante, ingérable, très difficile ». Le local qui leur était assigné se situait au dernier étage du bâtiment, dans le fond du couloir. Au terme de notre projet, qui fut une réussite, une exposition a été organisée et le corps professoral et directionnel de l'école a été convié. Personne n'est venu. On peut observer dans ce cas précis, une différence de traitement et d'appréciation ainsi qu'un manque de confiance en la capacité des élèves roms à réaliser un projet abouti et positif.

De plus, il faut préciser que beaucoup d'enfants travaillent dès leur plus jeune âge pour aider leurs parents à subvenir à leurs besoins. La précarité pousse les enfants à abandonner l'école. « Si l'enfant doit choisir entre aller à l'école ou travailler pour avoir de quoi manger le soir, le choix est simple. C'est souvent d'un commun accord que l'enfant travaille. Il y a des cas où c'est forcé lorsqu'ils sont obligés de mendier en rue » (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015).

Comment peut-on expliquer le taux de décrochage scolaire et d'illettrisme plus important chez les fillettes roms que chez les garçons ? En Europe, les femmes ont un meilleur parcours scolaire que les hommes, comme le démontrent les statistiques. En 2006, 81% des jeunes femmes européennes âgées de 20 à 24 ans ont un diplôme du second cycle de l'enseignement secondaire contre 75% des jeunes hommes du même âge, soit un écart moyen de 6 points (Ministère de l'éducation nationale de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, février 2008). Pourquoi la tendance est-elle ici inversée ?

Une des raisons est la protection familiale de la jeune femme contre les dangers d'abus sexuel et les tentations du monde extérieur. Il existe un phénomène en Roumanie où les filles sont victimes d'harcèlement sexuel à l'école par les garçons. Les parents veulent protéger la virginité de leurs filles, culte que nous développerons plus bas, et les retirent de l'enseignement.

« Cela arrive dans chaque école. C'est l'âge de l'adolescence, le corps change et les enfants sont curieux. En Roumanie, il y a du harcèlement dans les collèges, les garçons veulent te toucher. C'est une sorte de jeu, tu essaies de te défendre, c'est assez

embarrassant. C'est un jeu, jusqu'à un point. Ce n'est pas un jeu très drôle » (Braga, 15 février 2015).

Madame B., en évoquant ce sujet, nous dira cette phrase : « Si les familles gardent les filles à la maison, c'est aussi pour s'assurer que la marchandise soit livrée en bon état [à la belle-famille à laquelle la fille est déjà promise] » (Anonyme, 2015).

Demandons-nous également si l'abandon précoce du système scolaire chez les filles roms ne serait pas lié à la préservation des traditions et de l'ordre établi ? En effet, la société rom traditionnelle peut considérer l'école comme inutile pour la femme qui doit seulement apprendre à cuisiner, laver et s'occuper d'un foyer. De plus, l'école pourrait donner à ces femmes d'autres perspectives d'avenir. Comment les hommes pourraient-ils survivre au quotidien si les femmes décidaient de quitter le foyer ? Cet abandon du système scolaire pourrait être le signe de maintenance des traditions et d'occultation de toute destinée différente.

L'emploi

Cette absence d'éducation a pour conséquence directe un manque de connaissances suffisantes pour trouver un emploi sur le marché du travail. Toujours selon l'ERIO, 21% des femmes roms travaillent contre rémunération comparés à 35% des hommes (ERIO, 2013). Mais le faible taux d'éducation n'est pas l'unique facteur empêchant les perspectives d'employabilité. Si beaucoup de Roms sont discriminés sur le marché de l'emploi de par leur ethnie, la femme l'est doublement de par son genre. Cette discrimination est exercée simultanément par les deux communautés. La communauté rom dites « intérieure », et plus particulièrement l'époux, n'est habituellement pas enclin à ce que sa femme travaille car il attend d'elle qu'elle s'occupe prioritairement du foyer et son mari craint pour sa sécurité à l'extérieur, dans un milieu d'hommes. De plus, la société dite « extérieure » roumaine exerce aussi une discrimination et n'emploie pas les femmes car « ce sont des gipsys ».

La femme, exclue du système formel économique, a souvent recours au système d'économie informel.⁸⁹ Une récente étude de l'Open Society Institute relate que 54% des femmes roms en Roumanie travaillent informellement (Open Society Institute, 2009). Il est donc problématique de définir et quantifier si une femme est active sur le marché de l'emploi car les statistiques prennent uniquement en compte l'employée salariée. Ces emplois informels varient de femme de ménage, ouvrière dans les champs, à vendeuse sur les marchés. Ils découlent de la tradition rom d'artisan, d'agriculteur ou de femme au foyer. Cette situation ne fournit évidemment pas les bénéfices sociaux ou toute forme de protection sociale, ce qui est problématique pour la santé, comme il sera mentionné par la suite.

Pourquoi l'acquisition d'un emploi peut-elle être source d'émancipation chez une femme rom ? La raison évidente et univoque serait la source de revenus qui permettrait de réduire le risque de pauvreté. Pourtant, l'ERIO précise que cette observation se limite aux ménages sans enfant. Dans les foyers avec enfants, avoir un travail ne semble pas améliorer la situation économique (ERIO, 2014). Nicoleta Bitu nous dit quant à elle que « l'autonomie financière, c'est-à-dire avoir un revenu stable autonome, facilite l'émancipation » (Bitu, 22 avril 2015).

⁸⁹L'économie informelle désigne l'ensemble des activités productrices de biens et services qui échappent au regard ou à la régulation de l'Etat.

Peut-être faut-il nous attarder sur le mot « autonomie » ? La femme, au-delà d'un salaire, cherche peut-être ce prestige que le statut d'être rémunérée lui confère. Travailler lui permet de s'échapper du cercle familial et du milieu patriarcal dans lequel elle est confinée, et lui fait prendre conscience de sa valeur en tant qu'humain et non plus en tant que mère ou épouse. Le marché du travail formel et informel renforce ses relations avec la société extérieure, et donc avec des valeurs modernes. C'est en cela que travailler est facteur d'émancipation.

Mariage et mariage précoce

Le mariage dans la communauté rom marque le passage du rôle de fille au rôle d'épouse. Contrairement à ce qu'on pourrait imaginer, l'acte de mariage n'est pas signé légalement mais est symboliquement représenté par l'acte sexuel. Une fois sa virginité perdue, la fille, devenue femme, sera promise à son homme pour la fin de ses jours. Le mariage représente également la fin de la scolarisation pour le couple qui, d'une part, devra travailler pour assurer les besoins de sa famille et d'autre part, devra donner naissance à un enfant et s'occuper du foyer. La transaction économique et monétaire est la composante principale d'un mariage. Le choix du partenaire, effectué dans la plupart des cas par la famille, est relié au patrimoine matériel de celui-ci. Unir deux jeunes gens a pour fonction traditionnelle de gérer l'héritage familial et dans certaines communautés pauvres, d'échapper à la misère.

Ce n'est pas le mariage en soi qui est une entrave à l'émancipation de la femme mais bien l'âge auquel celui-ci a lieu. « Les gens disent que je suis déjà trop vieille pour me marier. Dans mon village [Toflea], les femmes se marient à 16-17 ans... Et plus je vieillis, plus les chances de marier un homme bien sont petites. Mes parents ont déjà essayé plusieurs fois de me marier, mais je ne veux pas. » (Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015). Le mariage empêche la femme de continuer ses études et l'oblige à rester à la maison, cela entrave donc son émancipation par l'éducation. Cette union précoce ne permet pas à la fille de se développer psychologiquement et personnellement, de vivre son adolescence. Ces mariages précoces sont pour les défenseurs des droits de l'homme et certains activistes roms « un abus de l'enfant : c'est un obstacle à son émancipation ainsi que celle de la communauté, cela réduit l'accès de l'enfant à ses droits fondamentaux tels que le droit à l'éducation et à un développement normal pour leur âge » (Bitu, N. et Morteau, C., 2010).

Sur la question de la pratique contemporaine du mariage précoce en Roumanie, les opinions divergent. Mihaela Zatreanu assure que ce sujet n'est plus d'actualité tandis que Nicoleta Bitu pense que c'est encore une réalité bien présente. Si ces avis s'opposent, c'est qu'il faut préalablement définir de quel type de mariage il est question et surtout l'âge auquel il a lieu. Pour cela, rappelons, sur base de l'ouvrage *Are the Rights of the Child Negotiable? The Case of Early Marriages within Roma*, de Bitu et Morteau, les différents types de mariage forcé, arrangé ou précoce et leurs facteurs déterminants. Le facteur principal qui influence ces différences est la liberté de choisir et son obstruction ainsi que la définition de l'âge légal comme âge de maturité. La majorité sexuelle légale en Roumanie est établie à 15 ans. Rappelons également que les personnes vivant sous le même toit mais n'étant pas légalement mariées sont considérées comme telles.

Le mariage arrangé implique l'accord des deux parties ainsi que l'accord des parents ou d'un tiers, souvent un représentant de l'Eglise. Le mariage précoce se manifeste selon deux façons dans certaines communautés : la première est de marier une fille mineure à un homme adulte, par l'arrangement ou la force, sans que la légalité soit respectée, c'est-

à-dire en Roumanie, avant ses 15 ans. La seconde est une forme de mariage arrangé dans lequel les parents des deux enfants arrivent à un arrangement d'un mariage futur. Les deux enfants deviennent « fiancés » jusqu'à ce qu'ils atteignent l'âge acceptable. Cette limite d'âge varie selon la culture du groupe, elle est souvent l'âge de l'apparition de la puberté. Madame B., experte des Roms de Roumanie à la Commission Européenne, nous explique qu'à Craicova, le village où elle est née, les filles sont promises à un homme dès l'âge de sept ans et emménagent chez la belle-famille. Ainsi, la belle-mère peut éduquer l'enfant et lui apprendre à devenir une bonne épouse. Cet emménagement n'implique pas spécialement de relations sexuelles avant que les deux enfants aient atteint la majorité sexuelle. Le témoignage de Maria, la femme de Victor, nous confirme cette réalité (voir annexe H) : dès ses douze ans, Maria emménage dans la famille de Victor, car la belle-mère est décédée et « ils ont besoin de quelqu'un pour les aider dans la maison, faire à manger, etc. » (Maria, 2015). Elle va ainsi vivre avec Victor et son père, « comme si nous étions frère et sœur jusqu'à nos 18 ans où nous avons commencé à sortir ensemble » (Maria, 2015).

De plus, il est important de préciser que les mariages inter-ethniques, c'est-à-dire entre roumain et rom, ne sont acceptés que dans les communautés plus urbaines. Dans les communautés rurales traditionnelles, seul un mariage dont les conjoints appartiennent à une même ethnie peut avoir lieu. Cela va même plus loin dans certains cas, et les jeunes personnes sont obligées de se marier avec quelqu'un venant du même village. Cela assure la continuité des traditions et le facteur d'isolation de ces populations renforce cette nécessité de préserver les relations à l'intérieur d'un même cercle.

« Les hommes de mon village sont fainéants, ils sont moins intelligents que moi mais à Toflea, tu devras marier un homme de Toflea, pas d'un autre village. C'est une obligation. Tu nais ici, tu meurs ici » (voir annexe G) (Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015).

Le mariage et le choix du partenaire sont pour la femme rom des choix stratégiques de survie, afin d'atteindre des buts économiques, sociaux ou personnels. La question problématique ici n'est pas le mariage en lui-même mais bien l'âge auquel il a lieu et la liberté de choisir cette union. Pourtant, malgré ses dysfonctionnements toujours présents en Roumanie, on assiste à une évolution globale des mœurs. Toutes les personnes interviewées s'accordent à dire qu'il y a une augmentation de l'âge des enfants dans les mariages et ce, dans toutes les communautés roms confondues. La question du mariage précoce semble avoir évolué positivement grâce au contact avec la modernité.

Soins médicaux, contraception et grossesse

Les préjugés concernant la contraception ainsi que les mauvaises conditions hygiéniques exposent la femme et ses enfants à de sévères maladies. De plus, l'accès aux services de santé publique est problématique et les communautés roms sont systématiquement victimes de discrimination par les différentes institutions publiques.

Eniko Vincze est anthropologue et professeur à l'Université de Cluj en Roumanie. Son article *Social exclusion at the crossroads of gender, ethnicity and class: A Viewthrough Romani Women's* est une recherche basée sur la contribution au développement de la santé reproductive. Vincze considère cette santé comme un droit humain pour les femmes et le considère comme un phénomène socialement et culturellement déterminé. Dans le cas des communautés roms, beaucoup de facteurs entravent cette santé

reproductive dont « le manque d'eau potable et de sanitaires, le manque de documents officiels ou/et d'assurance médicale » (Vincze, 2006).

Le rapport *Breaking the Barriers- Report on Romani women and access to public health care* effectué en 2003 par le Conseil de l'Europe montre en effet que les Roms ont une espérance de vie plus basse, un plus haut taux de mortalité infantile et de maladies ainsi qu'un faible taux de vaccination. Les conditions de vie précaires exacerbent les maladies, ils n'ont pas accès aux soins préventifs, à une nutrition équilibrée, à l'hygiène et aux médicaments (Conseil de l'Europe, 2003).

La femme subit également des difficultés d'émancipation à cause de la conception qu'elle a de la contraception. La communauté rom exprime un avis très clair sur les relations de genre, le rôle de la femme au sein de la famille et de la sphère publique, de son rôle dans les relations sexuelles et son rapport à son propre corps, sur le nombre d'enfants à avoir. Les croyances religieuses exercent une grande influence sur l'attitude par rapport à l'avortement mais également par rapport à l'utilisation de méthodes contraceptives. De plus, les conditions économiques dans lesquelles vivent ces femmes conditionnent leur conception de la maternité. Si elles ne se sentent pas capables d'élever un enfant de plus dans des conditions si précaires et ainsi ne pas pouvoir subvenir à ses besoins primaires, elles seront plus enclines à avoir recours à la contraception.

Les sujets concernant la contraception et l'avortement restent tabous dans la sphère privée et publique, le moyen de contraception le plus fréquent chez les femmes roms restant l'avortement (Magyari-Vincze, E., 2006). « Même si l'âge du mariage et donc de la maternité reste beaucoup plus bas que dans la société majoritaire, on assiste à une très grande réduction du nombre de naissances comparé aux anciennes générations. On peut attribuer ce fait à deux choses : l'accès plus facile aux moyens de contraception mais aussi à un calcul rationnel des ressources économiques disponibles et de la taille de la famille » (Open Society Institute, 2009).

Il est important d'inclure parmi ces facteurs, le facteur de discrimination sociale, ethnique et de genre exercé par les institutions médicales elles-mêmes. « La mère est allée chez le docteur avec son fils malade. La première fois, on lui a dit 'retourne à la maison prendre une douche et puis reviens'. Quand elle est revenue, on lui a dit que son fils était en bonne santé et qu'on ne pouvait rien faire pour elle. Son fils était en fait très malade et il est décédé. Cela se passe avec tous les Roms, ils ne sont pas bien traités ni reçus car ils sont associés à 'pauvres' et si tu ne sais pas flatter ton médecin, tu n'es pas bien traité. » (Anonyme, 10 juin 2015)

Une série de facteurs tels que la conception traditionaliste de la prise de contraceptifs, le manque d'accès aux informations médicales, la discrimination au sein des institutions ainsi que les conditions sociales entravent donc à la santé reproductive, énoncée par Vincze comme un « état de bien-être physique, mental et social du système reproductif » (Magyari-Vincze, E., 2006). Cette entrave compromet la santé de la mère ainsi que celle de ses enfants.

Relations au sein du couple

Nous définissons les rôles traditionnels de l'homme et de la femme sur base de l'observation de terrain et les entretiens menés ainsi que sur l'ouvrage *Gender dimensions of Roma inclusion: Perspectives from four romacommunities in Bulgaria* rédigé par The World Bank en 2014.

L'homme est considéré comme supérieur à la femme, il est le *provider*⁹⁰ de la famille. Il doit ramener de l'argent à la maison, travailler dur et ne pas être fainéant. « Si tu es un homme, tu dois toujours prendre tes responsabilités, t'assurer que l'argent rentre » (Mihai, 11 juin 2015). Cependant, il ne doit pas trop boire ni tromper sa femme, ne pas parier ni trop la battre. Nous reviendrons sur le problème de la violence domestique plus bas dans le développement.

La femme se doit d'être obéissante et fidèle à son époux. Elle doit être une bonne épouse et une bonne mère pour ses enfants. Elle doit également être fertile pour donner naissance à des enfants (The World Bank, 2014). Souvent, la naissance d'un garçon sera préférée à celle d'une fille car, comme nous l'avons vu précédemment, la fille sera envoyée très vite dans sa belle-famille et ne consiste pas en un bon investissement à long terme alors qu'un garçon s'occupera de ses parents jusqu'à leur mort. Pour comprendre la représentation de la femme traditionnelle rom, il est primordial de s'attarder sur le culte de la virginité dont il est question dans la plupart des communautés. La femme doit préserver sa virginité jusqu'au mariage et cette préservation lui assure son statut de pureté, de décence. « Je suis vierge, c'est très important dans la tradition. Si tu n'es pas vierge avant le mariage, tu es considérée comme une pute. Mais c'est très dur dans le monde actuel » (Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015).

Notons tout de même qu'au cours de l'analyse du terrain et des différentes interviews réalisées, un phénomène paradoxal a été soulevé. Il semblerait que la femme, malgré son « statut inférieur » traditionnel, possède en fait une certaine mainmise sur son mari. « La femme connaît très bien son homme, elle sait s'il a des problèmes, s'il est dépressif. Elle va donc savoir comment le manier pour contrôler sa colère » (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015). Mihaela Mihai, quant à elle, s'indigne face à certaines stratégies maritales : « Il y en a aussi beaucoup qui choisissent leur mari parce qu'elles pourront faire ce qu'elles veulent de lui. Parce qu'il est facile à manipuler. Si toi tu veux le commander, la famille de la fille qui est plus connue prendra un garçon du village qui servira toute la famille » (Mihai, 11 juin 2015). On peut donc conclure que, même si en théorie la femme n'a pas de pouvoir dans la sphère familiale, en pratique elle possède une marge de manœuvre qui lui permet de structurer et moduler les relations de son couple. « La femme a un grand rôle à jouer dans le couple mais elle n'est pas le leader. On peut comparer ça à un assistant, sans qui le projet n'aurait pas lieu, mais qui n'est pas le manager » (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015).

Le contact avec la modernité et la société majoritaire influence incontestablement les relations et la réalité est souvent différente des attentes du couple.

On assiste dans les couples moins traditionnels, vivant souvent en zone urbaine, à une plus grande égalité qui peut se manifester dans la prise commune de décisions ou plus simplement, le partage des tâches domestiques (The World Bank, 2014). De plus, la situation économique du pays étant très difficile, il est aujourd'hui quasi impossible que l'homme s'affirme comme l'unique *provider* du ménage. La femme doit de plus en plus contribuer aux revenus économiques du foyer. Comme évoqué dans le chapitre consacré à l'emploi, ce job lui confère un statut supérieur et l'aide à construire sa confiance en

⁹⁰J'ai choisi de ne pas traduire le terme anglophone *provider* car il est à mon sens, d'une justesse n'ayant pas d'équivalent en français.

elle. Concernant la virginité et la pudeur, les mentalités elles aussi évoluent peu à peu. On assiste à des désaccords entre anciennes et nouvelles générations concernant la façon de s'habiller, de porter des vêtements courts mais également la façon de se comporter en société et de fréquenter des garçons. La virginité en elle-même, bien qu'encore taboue, est aussi remise en question.

Il faut également évoquer la violence domestique présente dans énormément de couples en Roumanie. Selon le rapport en 2014 de la Commission sur l'égalité des chances pour les femmes et les hommes, la Roumanie « apparaît comme un des pays européens où la violence domestique à l'encontre des femmes est la plus grave : chaque année en moyenne, pour chaque million de roumaines, 12,62 sont tuées par leurs partenaires masculins » (Commission sur l'égalité des chances pour les femmes et les hommes, 2014). Même si cette violence est souvent associée à « la culture rom », il est primordial de rappeler que celle-ci est un phénomène répandu dans toute la Roumanie, profondément patriarcale et misogyne (Braga, 15 février 2015). Que le couple soit rom ou non, traditionnel ou moderne, vivant dans une zone rurale ou urbaine, la violence morale et physique est exercée.

Voies « informelles » d'émancipation

Dans le développement de cet article, nous nous sommes penchés sur les différents domaines qui pourraient, selon les institutions européennes, favoriser l'émancipation de la femme rom en Roumanie

Comme nous l'avons vu, ces domaines comportent des dysfonctionnements majeurs et d'autres voies d'émancipation sont possibles. L'émancipation de la femme se fait incontestablement en contact avec la modernité et la société majoritaire roumaine et celle-ci peut s'effectuer par la relation aux médias. Le manque d'études concernant l'éducation aux médias chez les Roms de Roumanie ne permet pas de s'appuyer sur des données chiffrées mais suite à l'observation de terrain, il est clair que les familles roms, même les plus pauvres, ont accès à la télévision roumaine. Suite aux visites dans les différents foyers de Roumanie, la télévision semblait être l'objet de toutes les attentions dans la pièce commune. A Giulesti, la famille vivant au milieu d'une décharge sans eau courante possédait également un poste de télévision (voir annexe I). Une anecdote intéressante est que chaque famille visitée, traditionnelle ou non, urbaine ou rurale, pauvre ou riche, regardait un programme de télé-réalité du type *Koh-Lanta* dans lequel des célébrités nationales s'affrontaient. Cette observation nous fait mettre en évidence l'importance de l'éducation aux médias et de la pertinence des programmes véhiculés à la télévision. Cette vision de la société majoritaire peut avoir une résonance particulière pour la femme rom et lui faire aspirer à d'autres choses.

« L'émancipation, cela peut être aussi une mère au foyer qui regarde des émissions de cuisine et qui apprend une autre façon de cuisiner » (Zatreanu, 15 mars 2015). Les médias, l'internet, les réseaux sociaux permettent une ouverture sur le monde et influencent les mentalités traditionnelles.

De fait, l'éducation n'est pas toujours synonyme d'émancipation. Prenons l'exemple de R., jeune femme émancipée ayant fait des études de journalisme à l'Université de Bucarest. Malgré sa réussite dans l'enseignement, le discours de R. est toujours celui d'une femme emprisonnée dans ses traditions. Son discours en tant que femme émancipée, « qui veut avoir une carrière et être indépendante » peut être ressenti

comme construit, comme si elle cherchait à s'en persuader. Certaines de ses réponses laissent entendre une certaine soumission à la communauté et à ses traditions. Elle s'occupe du ménage, de la cuisine « parce que les femmes sont plus douées pour cela » (Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015). Concernant la contraception, R. prend la pilule mais si son mari veut un enfant, même si elle ne veut pas, elle lui en donnera un. « Beaucoup de Roms sont plus libres que dans notre village. Ils me disent « on est au 21^{ème} siècle, pourquoi gardes-tu ces traditions ? ». En tant que femme rom, tu dépends toujours de quelqu'un. Tu ne peux pas choisir ta carrière. Des fois, je me demande pourquoi est-ce que je ne suis pas née roumaine-italienne-française ? J'aurais aimé ne pas être rom, ça aurait été plus facile » (Anonyme, R. 26 avril 2015).

Désir d'émancipation

Si, pour R., l'émancipation a été désirée, ce n'est pas toujours le cas. En effet, le désir d'émancipation n'est pas un phénomène majoritaire parmi les femmes roms. Selon l'Open Society Institute, beaucoup de femmes roms ne voient pas leur situation comme étant problématique et ne désirent pas effectuer un changement dans leur vie (Open Society Institute, 2009). Claire Auzias, historienne féministe spécialiste de la question des femmes roms, livre dans *Chœur de femmes tziganes* son opinion face au désir d'émancipation des femmes : « [la culture tzigane] offre aux femmes [...] toutes les possibilités de transgression et que c'est alors aux intéressées d'en prendre les moyens. L'émancipation des femmes est d'actualité dans la culture tzigane comme ailleurs. Toutes les femmes ne désirent pas être émancipées, pas plus qu'ailleurs » (Auzias, C., 2009). Mihaela Zatreanu et Andrea Braga s'accordent à dire que ce phénomène d'émancipation est souvent inconscient. « C'est un processus, je ne pense pas que tu te dises 'maintenant je veux être émancipée' » (Braga, 15 février 2015). Il faut également souligner l'importance de l'éducation des parents et de leur transmission de valeurs. Le soutien des parents dans l'éducation et le développement personnel de la fille est primordial pour son émancipation. Le besoin de modèles positifs de la communauté rom est aussi important. En effet, les jeunes roms, femmes et hommes, ont besoin de références qui leur prouvent qu'il est possible de réussir dans la société en tant que Rom. Nous n'aborderons pas ici les mouvements roms féministes de Roumanie qui défendent activement les droits des femmes roms mais qui pourraient servir de modèles aux futures générations.

Abandon ou conciliation des valeurs roms traditionnelles ?

La question à se poser est : est-il possible pour la femme émancipée de concilier son mode de vie moderne dans la société majoritaire avec ses valeurs roms traditionnelles ? La femme peut-elle se dire émancipée en perpétuant certaines traditions de sa communauté ? Une réconciliation est-elle possible ou doit-elle renoncer à ses valeurs ? Cette question est complexe car il faut d'abord définir si nous parlons des valeurs telles que le respect de l'autre, l'importance de la famille et des anciens ou si nous parlons de la préservation du statut inférieur de la femme à l'intérieur de la communauté et du couple. Il semble difficile de se détacher du statut inférieur de la femme au sein du couple. C'est une valeur inscrite dans l'inconscient des deux parties depuis leur enfance et un changement ne peut se faire que si les deux parties acceptent dès le départ de considérer leur couple comme un partenariat. Pourtant, toutes les femmes interviewées

reconnaissent qu'il est difficile de se défaire de cet apprentissage de serviabilité et d'obéissance. Souvent l'homme reste le centre de la famille.

Concernant les valeurs de respect familial, une conciliation peut être possible dans le cas où la famille soutient les choix posés par la femme. Dans les milieux très traditionnels, la famille est une entrave à l'émancipation des femmes car elle est en désaccord avec les décisions qu'elles peuvent prendre. Pour respecter et honorer ses parents, la femme doit renoncer à certaines de ses envies. « Je respecte mes parents, c'est ça qui est difficile. C'est que des fois, j'ai envie de tout quitter pour faire ma vie mais après je me dis, ils m'ont tout offert, tout ce dont j'avais besoin. Mes parents savent que je pourrais faire beaucoup plus mais il y a toujours l'avis des gens, les critiques qui font revenir les traditions au-devant » (Anonyme, R., 26 avril 2015). Pour prendre en main son destin, la femme doit s'éloigner de l'emprise de la communauté qui se met en travers de son émancipation et entre en conflit avec ses valeurs. Selon MihaelaZatreanu et Nicoleta Bitu, femmes actives ayant fondé une famille, la conciliation est difficile et il faut bien souvent renoncer aux valeurs traditionnelles. L'important est de se détacher du groupe, de la communauté qui exerce une pression sur l'individu.

Conclusion

L'émancipation de la femme rom de Roumanie est un phénomène grandissant, dans toutes les communautés, qu'elles soient traditionnelles ou modernes, rurales ou urbaines. Consciente ou non, cette émancipation permettra la réconciliation entre la société majoritaire roumaine et les communautés roms, souvent exclues sur base de leur ethnie et leur situation de pauvreté extrême. La femme rom, souffrant d'une triple discrimination basée sur son genre, à la fois à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de la communauté, est la médiatrice entre ces deux entités. Malgré tout, plusieurs dysfonctionnements et pressions tant internes qu'externes empêchent la femme de s'émanciper dans les domaines de l'éducation, de l'emploi et de la santé. Les mariages précoces ainsi que les relations patriarcales et hiérarchiques au sein du couple entravent également ce développement personnel. La communauté rom traditionnelle exerce quant à elle une pression symbolique sur l'individu et préserve ainsi les valeurs traditionnelles. Si l'éducation est le facteur principal et primordial de l'émancipation, d'autres voies dites « informelles » sont envisageables telles que l'accès aux médias qui permettent une prise de contact avec le monde extérieur. Enfin, pour s'émanciper, la femme doit renoncer à certaines valeurs traditionnelles imposées par la communauté telles que les relations patriarcales au sein du couple car c'est seulement sur base d'une relation égalitaire, d'un partenariat, qu'elle pourra prendre en main son développement personnel.

« L'émancipation des femmes n'affaiblira pas la culture rom car la culture rom est comme toutes les cultures du monde : un social en devenir, avec un passé historique et un avenir. La culture rom n'est pas immobile, elle peut bouger ; notre culture orientale a bougé, la leur bougera aussi et a déjà bougé beaucoup. L'émancipation des femmes roms n'affaiblira pas la culture rom, qui est d'une extraordinaire souplesse, mais au contraire, elle la renforcera ; certains et certaines d'entre eux l'ont déjà compris » (Auzias, C., 2009)

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Annexe C
Annexe A

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Annexe B

COLARD, M. (2015). Nicoleta Bitu en conférence dans le village de Toflea. Toflea, Roumanie



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COLARD, M. (2015). Même dans les foyers les plus pauvres, la télévision est un objet primordial. A Giulesti, les familles substituent les cables d'électricité du quartier. Giulesti, Roumaie



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Featured article:

The racialization of Roma in the ‘new’ Europe and the political potential of Romani women⁹¹⁹²

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Abstract

The formation of the ‘new’ Europe gave rise to many promises in what regards European Roma, including cultural recognition, human rights and social inclusion. At the same time, informed by neoliberal policies, it perpetuated and even increased the socio-economic disparities across and within Member States of the European Union (EU). In this context, Roma were racialised as an ‘inferior ethnic group’ associated with social problems or with the threat to ‘civilised’ Europe, blamed and criminalised for becoming (part of) a precarious class. This article argues that the politics of culture, rights and social inclusion undertaken in the name of Roma and at the same time defining them as ‘the Roma’ within the European Union, failed to address the systemic causes of social inequalities, exclusion and advanced marginality. It observes that the subject positions created for ‘the Roma’ by these discursive frames (i.e. non-territorial nation, transnational minority, citizens entitled to universal human rights, vulnerable group) are perverted by racism into ‘arguments’ about Roma as a different (meaning inferior) and sub-human species which does not have a nation(state) or a ‘mother country’, needs positive measures to act as ‘normal’ citizens, and cannot be integrated into the mainstream society because it ‘does not like to work’. Moreover, the paper discusses how this process of racialisation associates Roma with ‘East-European poverty’ and makes use of gendered ideologies. Finally it argues about the political potential of Romani women in the face of the racialisation of Roma as a manifestation of the racism underlying and justifying the neoliberal ‘new’ Europe.

Keywords: racialization, Roma women, European Union

⁹¹ Article previously published in European Journal of Women’s Studies 2014, Vol. 21(4) 443–449, featured in Analyze with the permission of the author.

⁹² This contribution draws partially on my paper ‘Cultural identity politics, social policies and racialization processes regarding Roma’ presented at the workshop ‘Race In/ Outside Post-WWII Europe: On the Politics of Governing and Knowledge Production’ (organized by the CEU Institute for Advanced Study and Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Budapest, 10 June 2014); on the article ‘Roma women’s voices and silences on unjust power regimes’ published in the 2013 special issue of the *ERRC Roma Rights Journal*, pp. 35–45; on the paper ‘Uneven development and Roma marginalization: From economic deprivation to ethno-spatial exclusion’, forthcoming in Júlia Szalai and Violetta Zentai (eds) *Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Communities*, Budapest: CEU Centre for Policy Studies and Open Society Foundations; and on studies resulting from the research on the ‘Spatialization and racialization of Roma exclusion: The social and cultural formation of “Gypsy ghettos” in Romania in a European context’ (see funding note).

From politics of culture and rights, to depoliticized social inclusion policies

In its 1993 'Recommendation on Gypsies in Europe' the Council of Europe argued: 'Europe harbours many different cultures, all of them, including the many minority cultures, enriching and contributing to the cultural diversity of Europe. A special place among the minorities is reserved for Gypsies. Living scattered all over Europe, not having a country to call their own, they are a true European minority, but one that does not fit into the definitions of national or linguistic minorities. As a non-territorial minority, Gypsies greatly contribute to the cultural diversity of Europe. In different parts of Europe they contribute in different ways, be it by language and music or by their trades and crafts.' This approach towards Roma should be viewed within the larger landscape of how, at that time, liberal European multiculturalism nurtured 'cultural diversity' as a crucial element of European identity. Meanwhile, the demand for recognition of how Roma as a non-territorial ethnic minority could contribute to European cultural diversity, started to mix the discourse of protecting them as a minority with that of 'improving their situation'. While granting them minority status these discourses created Roma as a minority of a different kind. Despite the fact that it was meant in a positive sense, this subject position was racialized by actors who picked it up as an 'argument' for stigmatizing Roma as an 'inferior race' ('unable' to create its own nation-state or to act like traditional ethnic minorities, possessing a mother country of their own). Such a politics of difference and recognition, by focusing exclusively on linguistic and cultural rights, and on the symbolic celebration of European diversity, distracted the political focus from the social inequalities which were in turn justified by the reification of cultural differences. Consequently, this politics of culture does not address the systemic economic causes of social inequalities. Nevertheless, it did have the potential to create and maintain self confidence and trust in the capacity for self-organization versus political dependence on the majority's will to include/integrate 'the Other' (howsoever its difference might be understood) into the circle of those who have access to the mainstream society's goods.

As far as the politics of human rights is concerned, this trend mixed appeals to cultural minority rights with claims for universal (civic) rights, and gave space for a series of debates about the relationship between culture and rights, particularism and universalism, and between national and civic understandings of citizenship. The 'Roma rights are human rights' discourse and practices warned national and European political actors and policy makers that anti-discrimination laws and positive measures are needed in order to enable Roma to act as universal citizens in spaces marked by institutional racism. But the appeal to formal equality proved to be weak in counterbalancing the effects of uneven treatment and institutional discrimination, which are embedded in the structural arrangements of an unequal social order that 'rationalizes' injustices caused by racism. However, Roma (and non-Roma) national and transnational organizations created to serve this cause were unable to become equal partners in the political decision-making processes regarding 'Big' EU policies that produced the marginalization/inferiorization of particular territories, groups and persons. Conceived in the (ethnic) minority-majority dichotomy, the politics of human rights focused predominantly on cultural minority rights, civil rights, anti-discrimination and anti-racism, and generated policies for ensuring formal equality before the law and

non-discriminatory treatment. This has not yet been articulated in terms of socioeconomic rights addressing the structural causes of exclusion. But it does have the potential to address institutional discrimination and raises awareness about the need to create material conditions that empower people to make use of their legally guaranteed rights. However, viewed in the broader frame of the European politics of the 1990s and 2000s, the human rights perspective reflected limited liberal optimism about the transformative effects of the formal assurance of rights and remedies of human rights violations through legislative measures, while failing to address structural power relations creating social inequality.

In the second part of the 2000s, the efforts towards cultural recognition or entitlements to rights were overshadowed by the so-called 'policies for Roma inclusion' that became the predominant tendency promoted through European discourses, institutions and funds. The trend to 'Europeanize' Roma culminated in the elaboration and adoption in 2011 by the European Commission and other EU institutions of 'A European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020'. Compared to European cultural diversity discourse and to that which framed Europeanness around human rights, the social inclusion policy framework shifted attention towards how Roma employment could contribute to progress in the Europe 2020 employment targets⁹³. Designed in the context of the European Union and governed by neoliberalism, these policies depoliticize poverty and do not address it as a result of advanced marginality. Rather they suggest that the precarious conditions of Roma (whose indicators show a large discrepancy compared to the majority population)⁹⁴ result from individual failures to adapt to the market economy and can be improved through specific projects focused on the improvement of individual skills. These policies, although some conceive them as based on socioeconomic human rights, predominantly promote a different kind of argument for inclusion: they create a new subject position for Roma (useful labour force for a market economy) and propose a new conceptual basis for solidarity (according to which the inclusion of the excluded costs less than the costs associated with the 'socially assisted'). These policies, at best, generate sectoral projects which require affirmative action measures for Roma as a 'vulnerable group' and possibly trigger a philanthropic solidarity by the majority, but are not able to address/treat in an integrated way the structural (cultural and economic) causes of marginalization and exclusion.

The association of Roma with 'East European poverty'

Even in the 1990s, regardless of the fact that the Roma politics of the day referred to Roma, Travellers and Sinti, EU integration discourse slightly transferred political attention on Roma from Eastern Europe as if 'the Roma problem' were an 'East European issue'. By this it created Roma as an object on which to negotiate the accession of former socialist countries to the EU and through which the distinction between the

⁹³ The EU 'Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020' states: 'Addressing the situation of Roma in terms of employment, poverty and education will contribute to progress towards Europe 2020 employment, social inclusion and education targets' (p. 4).

⁹⁴ See for example in FRA, UNDP (2012), 'The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Survey results at a glance' (fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/2099-FRA-2012- Roma-at-a-glance_EN.pdf). Data for Romania resulting from the UNDP survey conducted in 2011 are available at: www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/ourwork/poverty-reduction/roma-in-central-and-southeast-europe/roma-data/

original EU and the ‘post-communist countries’ was maintained. This is the legacy that even nowadays fuels, among other factors, racist classifications between the rich and poor countries, or between countries whose citizens should be entitled to enjoy the right to free movement and those who do not deserve this, or between the ‘authentic’ Europe and the ‘second-hand’ newcomers.

Nowadays, the association of Roma with the ‘socially assisted’ across borders (a term with negative connotations in a system that pretends to be meritocratic) is a mean of blaming the poor because they are poor and it is a manifestation of the racialization of poverty. By racialization of poverty we mean here the practice of coupling ‘the Roma’ perceived as the ‘racial other’ with ‘the poor’, and explaining ‘Roma poverty’ as a ‘natural result’ of the cultural traits of an ‘inferior race’ trapped in pre-modern (‘non-civilized’) and subhuman forms of existence. This trend is even stronger in cases where a distinction is made among the poor themselves, between the ‘deserving’ and the poor who ‘do not deserve’ social protection (respectively between the majority population, and the Roma minority). Or put differently, between the poor who deserve to live in poverty (like Roma who supposedly ‘do not like to work’) and the poor who became poor through no fault of their own (the non-Roma who are ‘victims of economic restructuring or of the financial crisis’). On the other hand, the racialization of poverty means the displacement of poor Roma from the ‘respectable’ cities and countries, entrapping them into ghettoized spaces that reproduce material deprivation, dependency and humiliation, dramatically reduce the chances of belonging to and participating in the life of the larger society, and uphold relations of exploitation and surveillance.

Under these conditions, as the current political debates around the ‘free movement of people’ show us, the entire anti-Roma-immigration politics and its underlying racism is part of an effort to justify on the side of old EU member states why capital may travel freely across EU member states, while labour (especially the labour force from former Eastern and Central Europe) should not. Anti-Gypsy racism is part of this neoliberal regime promoting, on the one hand, the extension of the ‘free market’ conceived as a product of civilization (in fact, the interests of the Euro area countries) and, on the other hand, sustaining the austerity measures and the marketization processes in the areas that the European Commission names more and more explicitly as ‘peripheral countries’. This current form of anti-Gypsy racism functions to protect the former from the ‘invasion’ of the impoverished populations from the latter perceived as symbols of ‘primitivism’. Parallel with these processes we may witness how the impoverished populations (mostly from Romania and Bulgaria) are racialized, and how the political category of Roma is associated with ‘East European poverty’ by those who had a crucial role in creating and sustaining that poverty. Meanwhile, the political decision makers of the ‘peripheral countries’ (economically benefiting from the system described above) are doing their best to distance themselves from their native population (self-)identified as Roma while blaming the latter for all the failures encountered in their road towards the promised land of the EU.

From gender-blindness to the gendered racialization of Roma

For quite a long time, gender awareness did not characterize Roma politics in any of its forms. In the context of an ethno-cultural paradigm Romani women were conceived of as naturally bearing the role of reproducing and nurturing the ‘nation’ both in the

biological and cultural sense, but were not recognized as political subjects. The socioeconomic paradigm was no better either in terms of addressing Roma women's status in the community or in the broader society: their particular needs, interests and experiences were overshadowed by the seemingly gender-neutral effects of poverty and social exclusion on Roma communities. Thus for a long period, Roma women's public voices were silenced under the shadow of identity politics or social inclusion policies, both of them blind towards internal divisions and towards gendered and racialized class hierarchies between and within Roma and non-Roma.

Ironically, for example in Romania, Roma women's status within their own communities was addressed first by the (otherwise patriarchal) mainstream public discourse in a false feminist tone, which was seemingly deeply concerned about their subordination to community norms regarding early marriage and childbirth. This was and remains a challenge that Roma feminists are still faced with: protecting women's and children's rights within their own communities while deconstructing the way in which such mainstream positions reproduce convictions according to which Roma are an 'inferior race' performing pre-modern/primitive practices of life.

The rights-based Roma discourse began to explore the gender dimension of racial discrimination and Romani women's situation at the end of the 1990s, when the Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies of the Council of Europe decided at its 7th meeting in Strasbourg (29–30 March 1999) to request a consultant to prepare an introductory report on *The Situation of Roma/Gypsy Women in Europe*. The report framed the problem in terms of how Romani women experience the conflicts between traditional culture and modern society, and between acting for cultural rights on behalf of their groups and for women's rights as universal human rights. More recently, the EU framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies made explicit references to Roma women, but not surprisingly this happened within its mainstream discursive frame. Romani women are mentioned in this strategy in the context of reduced employment and increased school abandonment rates among Roma, but also in terms of problematic access to quality health care. Consequently, the promotion of gender equality is not conceptualized by this strategy in terms of women's rights or social justice, while it also fails in addressing the phenomenon of multiple discriminations.

Meanwhile, Roma women continue to be pushed to the margins by the whole socioeconomic system as members of their dispossessed class. Under conditions of severe poverty they are making tremendous efforts to fulfill the household and motherhood related duties allocated to them by a domestic patriarchal regime. The combination of these private and public gender regimes eventually exhausts their bodies and endangers their lives, so it is not surprising that their life expectancy is more than 10 years lower than the life expectancy of majority women, while the maternal mortality rate of Roma women is 0.62%, compared to 0.04% for majority women. Simultaneously, their sexuality is expropriated from two directions: on the one side they are viewed as bearing the obligation for the biological reproduction of their own ethnic group, and on the other side they become targets of racist fertility control and dehumanizing discourses according to which they give birth to children with less value than majority mothers' children (as practices of sterilization or discourses on Roma and non-Roma fertility demonstrate). Furthermore, if the multiple deprivations they are subjected to occur in socially and spatially segregated and ghettoized areas, which render access to any form of social and legal protection impossible, Roma women can also fall victim to sexual exploitation. Under these conditions, they not only suffer the effects of economic marginalization, being placed in the category of 'undeserving' citizens alongside with

Roma men, but – due to their reproductive and maternal roles – they are perceived and controlled more and more strongly as symbols of ethno-cultural boundaries and embodiments of racialized differences.

The potential of Romani women as intersectional political subject

The construction of the neoliberal order shaped by marketization is enacted among other means by racism. In this process racism functions most importantly as an institutionalized arrangement producing material effects in the form of accumulation on the one side, and dispossession on the other side. While the formation of a precarious class is a consequence of how the neoliberal political economy deprives marginal groups of the instruments and capabilities for living a life defined by current standards as decent, racist ‘arguments’ claim that ‘Roma poverty’ or sub-standard living conditions are the outcomes of Roma cultural traits or lifestyle. Consequently, the current marketization processes not only dispossess the disadvantaged of social goods and livelihood opportunities, but also create the subordinated subject(s) of this new social order together with the distinction between the useful, i.e. employable, labour force, and the redundant and therefore dehumanized Roma. The interplay of capitalism and racism materially produces the dispossessed by pushing some people into structurally disadvantaged conditions, and it also racializes them discursively by asserting that they are sub-human or non-persons since they cannot fit into the ideal-type subject position prescribed by the neoliberal order.

While the socioeconomic aspects of Roma marginalization are more and more depoliticized (transformed, at best, into public policy issues without addressing the major systemic causes of mass impoverishment and exclusion), there are signs in Romanian public life of the political potential of Roma women activists. This politicization seems to be happening exactly around their experiences as women, but it has the potential to evolve towards reframing ‘Roma women’ as political subject in an intersectional way. On the other hand, matters embraced by a current radical non-Roma feminist agenda (violence against women, rape, maternity, birth, or women’s sexuality) framed by the principle of ‘the personal is political’ are becoming more and more inclusive towards Roma women’s experiences. Due to their knowledge about and sensibility towards Roma socioeconomic marginalization, Roma feminists have the potential to centre attention on social inequalities and by this to enrich the radical non-Roma feminist agenda (for example by addressing violence against women as part of structural violence). Simultaneously, they might become important actors of repoliticizing poverty, social inequality and marginalization, including the repoliticization of understanding racism and patriarchy as cultural systems justifying and maintaining the social divisions of classes, but also as structural arrangements that alongside with classism are the producers of social inequalities. By doing this, they might also fill the class gap identified in the European antidiscrimination policies by several scholars who observed that social class is the most prominent example of a social category that is strongly connected to inequalities, yet not currently included in the European equality agenda. The political intersectionality assumed by Roma feminists addressing sexism, racism, classism and homophobia should acknowledge the

realities of structural intersectionality⁹⁵. Institutionalized forms of Roma women's representation have the chance to resonate with the experiential or structural forms of intersectionality if – while formulating political and policy demands – they are able to assure the participation of multiple Roma women perspectives in this process. Or, put differently, if they are capable of providing Roma (women) at the grassroots with the power to control their means of production, reproduction and representation. But obviously, this effort in itself would not be enough for generating systemic change: for this they need alliances across gender, and across different social and ethnic groups that could generate political action enforcing national and international stakeholders to really act on behalf of the socially and economically dispossessed classes of present-day European societies.

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⁹⁵ Besides Kimberlé Crenshaw's article 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color' published in 1994 in the Routledge volume *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, crucial points about the political aspects of intersectionality were discussed in a 2006 special issue of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* (for example by Mieke Verloo), or in 2009 by Angéla Kóczé in her piece on 'Missing intersectionality: Race/ethnicity, gender, and class in current research and policies on Romani women in Europe', but as well as in the third issue of *Nevi Sara Kali. Roma Women's Journal/Revista Femeilor Rome/Romane Zuvleange Zurnalo* (www.desire-ro.eu/wp-content/uploads/revista-NSK-3_20-07-11.pdf).

The Critical Ones: Another Tale of Slavery

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Abstract

This paper draws on stories of slavery that emerged from the three-issues journal, *Nevi Sara Kali* (2009-2011), exploring the conceptual construction of Roma feminism from Romania and the systematic historical devaluation of Roma womanhood as a complex and calculated mechanism of social control and inequality. The silence of Roma women has historical causes connected to the general hostility in relation to people perceived as inferior and functions through fantasy, fake images, stereotypes and clichés. The still present idea of authenticity and the romantic image of the eternal Gypsy woman have direct connections to the Gadge / non-Roma portrayal of Roma people in the nineteenth century, as a caricatural visibility of Roma people: the connection between ideological, economic and political oppression put Roma women under a strict social control and the existing stereotypes function as material mechanisms of protection and promotion of Gadge interests and world-view.

Despite the limited amount of written materials, the perspective of Roma feminism echoes the history of Black feminism and intersectionality. Building on the existing literature and on the close reading of the articles from *Nevi Sara Kali* which include the topic of Roma slavery, this paper provides an analysis that reveals the connection between a critical perspective on slavery and the articulation of a Roma feminist discourse by trying to answer the question of the possibility of a coherent vision of social equality through an intersectional perspective on Roma slavery and its demise.

This paper aims to raise awareness of contemporary issues related to the silence around the slavery from Walachia and Moldova and invites reflection on how a Roma feminist world-view truly acknowledges the deep significance of 500 years of Roma slavery.

Keywords: slavery, intersectionality, early marriage, multiculturalism, Roma feminism

Not accidentally, the Roma feminist writer Galina Trefil, uses as a motto to her novel about a Roma woman slave from Walachia, a quote from Harriet Tubman, an African-American woman born into slavery and one of the most important abolitionists in United States, a strong inspiration to all intersectional feminists: “I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive.”⁹⁶

Part of a complicated history of feminism, intersectionality is the theoretical approach that brings together gender and race as analytical categories of social reality. As a conceptual framework that started to be used at the end of the 1980s, intersectionality followed previous research which looked into the connection between race, gender and class. Nevertheless, after the emergence of black feminism in United States, intersectionality became a serious analytical tool. The idea of intersectionality as the analysis of multiple inequalities can be traced much earlier: “one may trace genealogies of the idea of intersectionality back to the entanglement of nineteenth century women’s movements and anti-slavery movements, focusing on gender and race,”⁹⁷ being the main approach and most accurate direction in Roma feminism from Romania.

The starting point of intersectionality is “the convergence of sexism, racism and classism and its effect on the status of black women during slavery, civil rights movement, black nationalism and as well as inside the feminist movements from suffrage to the seventies”.⁹⁸ In the US academic context, there was a rejection of the analysis of oppression of women of color during slavery, a similar process taking place in connection to Roma slavery from Romanian states, a reaction by the scholars which connects their own social status and their participation in the gendered and racialised oppression.⁹⁹

Slavery offered the context for a particular way in which women were perceived by men: if Gadje womanhood was idealized as we can see in Romantic literature and art of the nineteenth century, the negative stereotypes of womanhood were displaced by Gadje men onto Roma women, a symbolic devaluation of non-Gadje femininity that continued until today. This conditioning of perception, produced during slavery, affected Gadje people of noble or modest social positioning but also the Roma slave sub-culture, which was internalizing Gadje ideas about Roma women, for an illusory acceptance and inclusion into the Gadje world.¹⁰⁰ The systematic devaluation of Roma womanhood was not a simple form of proto-antigypsyism, but a complex and calculated mechanism of social control and inequality.

If intersectionality is the tool of choice when addressing the multiple inequalities experienced by Roma women in Romania today, then the analysis of these inequalities can go back in the past and has to look at the connection between the anti-

⁹⁶ Galina Trefil, *The Incomplete Ones: A Tale of Slavery* (2014), Kindle edition, 6.

⁹⁷ Popa, Raluca Maria. “Meanings and uses of intersectionality in public policies”, *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women’s Journal* 1 (2009): 73.

⁹⁸ Alis Costescu et al., “Approaches towards intersectionality”, *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women’s Journal* 3 (2011): 88.

⁹⁹ see bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman?: Black woman and feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁰ for a thoughtful exploration of this aspect, see Trefil, *The Incomplete Ones*

slavery movement and women's activism in the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ Reading the Roma slavery abolitionist literature, one can observe the lack of women politicians, writers or campaigners being directly involved in the struggle for the liberation of the Roma slaves in the nineteenth century Romanian principalities. Nevertheless, women without a name are present in this literature as elements in the development of the movement. As Vasile Alecsandri wrote in 1862 in an article titled "Nicolae Bălcescu în Moldova", the influence of women in the struggle for progress (of which slavery abolition was a main demand) was crucial but kept the whole social debate as a boyar family issue, out of which, correctly thought by Alecsandri, the winners were the same social group:

"In each family, one could find face to face the practices of the past and the ideas of modern civilisation. Therefore, even the holiness of the most intimate relations was exposed to a flowing of a very delicate and mostly critical state of things. And here I am happy to declare, to the honor of the ladies from Moldova, that they had a providential role in the middle of that social drama!

As mothers and sisters, under the counsel of their loving heart, they knew how to prevent, how to extinguish fatal misunderstandings between parents and sons, sweetening on the one hand the sometimes despotic harshness of the old ones, and on the other hand, how to calm the restless speed of the youth. They were the guardian angels of family peace and they contributed a lot, through their admirable tact, to ease the triumph of progress.

<<Be happy! said a wise mother to her husband, be happy if you are defeated, because the winner is our beloved son!>>"¹⁰²

Even if the support in the anti-slavery movement of the Gadge (Non-Roma) women can be questionable historically, intersectionality gave a tested method to Roma feminists in understanding "who can speak for whom, what should be a legitimate and just representation of political interests, or what constitutes a politically relevant social group."¹⁰³ As an answer to the pressure of identity politics and universal assimilationist politics, intersectionality moves beyond the fake choice between universalism or difference, both putting in the centre the mandatory experiences of the most privileged group. From the point-view of most marginal positions, a vision of social equality can be offered through the perspective of intersectionality, which can also be a useful tool in analysing Roma slavery and its demise.

Before the 1860s, Roma women started their life in the Romanian principalities as slaves, working in oppressive situations. They were caught up in unjust situations, their access to the society resources were denied systematically and over a very long period of time. Their relationships to their Roma families and communities, to their

¹⁰¹ Noemi Magyari, "A Project for Social Justice", *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women's Journal* 2 (2010), 161.

¹⁰² My translation, originally published in *Revista Română* [Romanian Magazine], July 1862, Vasile Alecsandri, "Nicolae Bălcescu în Moldova" [Nicolae Bălcescu in Moldova]. In *Proza* [The Prose] (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatura, 1967), 316.

¹⁰³ Popa, "Intersectionality in public policies", 73.

owners and to one another were shaped by “the convergence of race, class, and gender oppression¹⁰⁴ and the continuity of this oppression also gives a political context for Roma feminism today.

P. N. Panaitescu explains the long existence of Roma slavery through the economic logic of the slave owners and their need of cheap labor force that was very much needed in Romanian principalities in the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁵ The Romanian states were involved in the East-West trade but the lack of peasants and especially craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, encouraged feudal masters to enslave Roma people and take away their freedom in order to supply the demand of goods. Viorel Achim writes on this topic that “the importance of the trade route passing through the Romanian states, especially in the second half of the fourteenth century, and the relative prosperity generated by trade for more than a century are historical realities that are beyond question. It is, therefore, natural that there would have been need for labor force on the great estates. The donations and purchases of slaves are proof of this state of affairs.”¹⁰⁶ Even if the importance of economy in the perpetuation of slavery is in many cases neglected, another aspect that is missing in the abolitionist literature and the Roma slavery historiography (as well as in Achim's writings), is the presence of Roma women in the narration. The exploitation of Roma women was essential to the economy of Romanian principalities and fixed them in the service occupations. Survival in times of slavery was a life-long activity and expressed the lack of opportunities for Roma slaves to overcome their given oppressive condition. For the period of slavery abolition, the poverty of “free” Roma women continued the struggle for survival of former Roma slaves, fixed in the same geographical location of the slavery-time ghetto, *Țigănie*. The existence of Roma ghettos and the similar social condition and image of free Roma women demonstrate the continuity of economic exploitation by the former slave-owners.

Roma women historically experienced “the political dimension of oppression”,¹⁰⁷ not enjoying the social advantages extended through time to non-Roma population, not enjoying the benefits of education and being denied the benefits of literacy. The fact that many young Roma women from poor neighborhoods in cities or rural areas are dropping out of school before attaining literacy represents the efficacy of this long term political dimension of oppression.

The 500 years of Roma slavery left deep marks on the Roma communities that can be observed even today. The need for survival in the most difficult conditions (when even the value of being alive was not applied to Roma slaves) took different forms which affected Roma women differently than Roma men or Gadge population. One historical

¹⁰⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ P. N. Panaitescu, “Le Role économique et social des Tziganes au Moyen Age en Valachie et en Moldavie”, in XVII-e Congrès International d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Préhistorique. VII-e Session de l'Institut International d'Anthropologie. Bucarest, 1-8 Septembre 1937 (Bucharest, 1939), 933-942; P. N. Panaitescu, “The Gypsies in Wallachia and Moldavia. A Chapter of Economic History,” *JGLS* (3), 15 (1941): 58-72.

¹⁰⁶ Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 30.

¹⁰⁷ Collins, *Black feminist thought*, 5.

mechanism of survival to racism and slavery was the practice of early marriages, a practice that was heavily analysed and criticised by Roma feminists.¹⁰⁸ During slavery, in order to avoid the sexual abuse of slave owners, who had the priority over the bodies of young Roma women, marriage as early as possible was the most accessible solution for Roma parents, in order to diminish the sexual interest of the slave-owner. On the other hand, the early marriage was not a new practice for Roma population from the south of Danube before slavery, child marriages have existed for centuries in India, from where the Roma population migrated. During slavery, the practice intensified in the north of Danube as a form of protection for young girls against sexual abuse. But also, in the same social context, giving birth to as many children as possible, as early as possible, was constructed as an imposed identity or destiny for Roma women,¹⁰⁹ for pure material purposes and for the benefits of the slave-owners, who wanted as many slaves as possible.

Nowadays, the practice of Roma early marriage has to be connected to early marriage practices globally and not presented as an anomaly, it has to be connected to how marginalisation works economically and historically from a global perspective. Presented only as a cultural practice or as a Roma tradition connected to Roma slavery by its defenders, early marriage of Roma girls is nothing more than a falsification of tradition. Seen as a general practice of traditional Roma communities, early marriage actually differs from community to community and from region to region, as well as in terms of the social status of the families which practice it. There is no single narrative concerning its reasons and history or values within the community.

Also, by looking at early marriage only from the perspective of the human rights narrative, researchers and activists are limited in perceiving it only as a damaging cultural practice, as a human rights violation which goes against European norms and values, with the effect of constructing those norms and values as the only ethical possibility. A UN study on early marriage mentions that “there are also negative consequences for society at large, from overpopulation to perpetuation of gender oppression”,¹¹⁰ as early marriage would influence the larger population and encourage those who do not practice early marriage to oppress based on gender. Early marriage is addressed only from a moral perspective, with no direct implications for the affected girls, families and communities, as a new condemnation for a *primitive* and *unconceivable* social group, a perspective which barely changes anything in the lives of those affected. Early marriage is usually presented in stereotypical ways by constructing a dichotomy between educated and civilised Roma and Gadje and the cultural *primitive* traditional Roma communities. This condemnation of the traditional Roma communities as cruel and unthoughtful, devouring their young members, extends the already negative

¹⁰⁸ Morteau, Crina Marina, “A General Perspective on Early Marriages in Romania”, *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women's Journal* 1 (2009): 101.

¹⁰⁹ Larisa Poșircă, “Managementul riscurilor culturale în integrarea femeilor rome pe piața muncii” [The Management of Cultural Risks in Roma Women's Integration into the Labor Market], *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women's Journal* 1 (2009), 188

¹¹⁰ Child, *Early and Forced Marriage: A Multi-Country Study - A Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OCHCR)*, 15 December 2013, 39. Accessed September 24, 2016. <http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/UN%20report%20final.pdf>

portrayal of Roma non-assimilated communities, but this time with a veil of outside concern and knowledge concerning those communities.

Early marriage is an interesting case of perception: through its connection to Roma slavery, it can bring us back the unfinished practice of emancipation as it was exercised by non-Roma abolitionists: as a process of extraction from barbarism of a population morally underdeveloped which has to be forcefully Romanianized, to abandon its language and culture, to be assimilated by the larger Gadge population. We have to keep in mind that as during slavery, Roma nation is a cultural construction of the media of the time, the state and its bureaucrats (even if we talk about researchers, sociologists or Roma representatives), a moral construction that can be quite far from reality.¹¹¹ This perception is also influenced by the isolation of Roma people from society, the lack of their valorisation and promotion, the blockage of their participation in society. This isolation produces the fake dichotomy between two parallel worlds: Roma and Gadge culture, Roma tradition and Gadge modernity, Gadge feminism and Roma minority.¹¹² In this context, the practice of early marriage, and even slavery as such,¹¹³ can be perceived as a main trait of Roma culture and its caricature *barbarism*.

Early marriage, even if perceived through its connection to protection from slavery, is presented still as a specific Roma tradition over centuries, because slavery is perceived as a Roma business with no implication from the Gadge slave owners and their heirs. The application of human rights standards does not take place in Roma communities and this argument is used in a superficial way and in a perverse manner: the human rights standards are deliberately used as arguments against Roma people who are supposed to solve their own issues in their own communities which are continuously ridiculed and humiliated by media, the state and progressive activists alike.

What is missing from the neo-progressive perspective is precisely the self-reflexivity of the Gadge, as it was missing during the Roma emancipation period together with the complementary look back from a Roma point of view, an exercise of gadgeology. Trefil writes in her novel the story of Marioara, but her story is also the collective story of Marioara's mother and her whole family, a genealogy of pain that is described by her grandfather in a conversation which give voice to the relations between Roma family members and the Gadge world, a world where there is no place for the Roma and can only become a ruin:

“My poor daughter screamed when she was sold,” her grandfather had murmured, eyes misting over. “My poor, dear daughter just screamed...and screamed.... And, in those screams, there echoed the cries of all our dead...going

¹¹¹ European Roma and Travellers Forum and the Informal Platform of Romani Women “Phenjalipe”, *Making Early Marriage in Roma Communities a Global Concern*, 2014, 9. Accessed September 24, 2016. <https://cs.coe.int/team20/cahrom/7th%20cahrom%20plenary%20meeting/item%2004%20-%20ertf%20and%20phenjalipe%20joint%20paper%20making%20early%20marriage%20in%20roma%20communities%20a%20global%20concern.pdf>

¹¹² Morteau, “Early Marriages”, 104.

¹¹³ Especially after the Berevoiesti case, 2016, where with the support of Romanian local authorities, Roma families were involved in modern slavery as slave owners. Nevertheless, this case provoked a media frenzy which reconstructed slavery as a Roma cultural value, completely neglecting the implication of Romanian slave owners in 500 years of slavery

back centuries.... When I die, I will curse this land for what it has done to our family. I will curse it with the last breath I breathe!"

"This is our country, Grandfather. We were born here. It is not right to curse it."

"A land that calls me a slave and sells my wife and my children off one by one would not be my country, even if I was born here a hundred times...and I will pray that it's swallowed up by its own hate and left to ruin every day until I am rotted and my belongings burnt!"¹¹⁴

As Letiția Mark explains, "the long period of assimilation, annihilation, ignorance or refusal and discrimination had a negative impact on their (Romani people) social and political life." The process of assimilation into Romanian society, a mandatory but artificial feeling of belonging, which was not easily inserted into the Roma identity, started during the period of slavery abolition, as a required condition for being a free person. In order to be perceived as a non-slave, Roma people had to renounce their language, way of dress and identity. This idea of Romanianization as part of the process of slavery abolitionism was not thoroughly implemented by the authorities, in many situations the authorities were overwhelmed by the new conditions which were so foreign to them. Another material effect of slavery abolition was the massive migration of liberated slaves to the West. The Romanianization process was continued for a long period of time, and as Mark observes, the rediscovery of identity is only a recent development in Roma history: "Roma self-affirmation after the collapse of communism consists among others in re-discovering Roma identity and re-evaluating the non-material Romani patrimony, like the Romani language, the organisation of family, the maintenance of traditions. For Roma intellectuals this patrimony constitutes the base for claiming recognition and dignity while rejecting the interiorization of the stigma put on them by the "Others".¹¹⁵

Multiculturalism is read by Mark as a discourse which goes beyond tolerance, because Roma people were "tolerated" in the Romanian space during slavery. They were tolerated by monasteries, by rulers and by slave-owners. The institution of slavery was perpetuated with the mechanisms of brutal oppression and coercion, as the literature and historical documents show. Tolerance and respect for Roma people was not the main engine of abolitionism, as Mark suggests, but the anachronism of this institution which was not fit for a new modern nation, as it was understood in the West. The local awakening of the abolitionists, Moldavian or Wallachian politicians and boyars, is perceived only as a drunkenness of words, without a real object, as their influence was extremely limited. By reading multiculturalism (and multicultural feminism alike) through Roma slavery, one observes the maintenance of the same Gadge standard, even in the form of a diverse and integrative culture, which still neglects or undervalues Roma culture, seen only as a vulgar, kitsch or ghetto subculture. When it is not completely ignored, neglected and shamed, Roma culture is added in a redefinition of culture as racially and ethnically diverse through the contribution of an *inferior native* coloured population. The multicultural discourse is still constructed on the European white

¹¹⁴ Trefil, *The Incomplete Ones*, 11

¹¹⁵ Letiția Mark, "Re-descoperirea valorilor identitare" [Re-discovery of Identity Values], *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women's Journal* 1 (2009), 118

colonial standard, but it brings the concept of hybridity as the incorporation of the marginalised groups into this standard.¹¹⁶ Mark sees the argument of historical oppression as central in recovering equality, which was denied to Roma women, and in correcting the social disadvantage between the Roma and the Gadje as well as the need for reflection on differences.

Roma people are still seen as unitary, with no differences between them: they are perceived as authentic and traditional, coming from another world or from a mythical past - this perspective denies one thousand years of cohabitation in Europe, it forgets the tough relationship between the Roma and the Gadje, it forgets the forced assimilation, it forgets 500 years of slavery in the Romanian principalities, it forgets the genocide and daily exclusions. In an extreme form of amnesia, Roma people are discovered now, they are filmed, photographed, wrote about and praised as the exotic and the primitive, the *neo-noble savages*. This sudden interest is ephemeral and mercantile, if it is not pure entertainment. The idea of authenticity and the romantic image of the eternal Gypsy (especially) woman have direct connections to how timeless Roma people were portrayed in the nineteenth century, they demand Roma women to act in this pattern to satisfy the desire of the consumers of Roma images, to wear colourful clothes, to sing and dance, to bear children in their arms, to beg, to expose their rags, otherwise the Roma women do not receive the medal of authenticity.¹¹⁷ These images give a fake visibility to Roma people, in media, TV shows and festivals especially, as a show of comedy, burlesque, a travesty, spoken in an imitation of the pejorative linguistic stereotypes and full of caricatured behaviors.

The diversity of the various Roma groups, with its origins during slavery, a classification according to the identity of the slave-owner and the fixed trades according to an economic slavery rationale, is constantly neglected in the abolitionist literature and the modern representation of the Roma woman. A simplification, schematisation or conformity is perpetuated in representation until today: the negative (and sometimes positive) stereotypes infuse the area of legends, sayings, fairytales and romantic clichés: “the artistry and magic of the Gypsies, the free and happy Gypsy, the exotic and erotic beauty of the Gypsy women, the enchantment, the witchcraft, the magic and the mystery of their dark lives.”¹¹⁸ The nineteenth century literature which focuses on Roma women present them dominated by old superstitions, violent death and consuming passion. Even if there is a large amount of writing, the images are very similar and detached from Roma people. What we are left with is a Gadje fantasy of what Roma women should be like and this line of thought is still functioning, even if its romantic undertones are not so much present in contemporary narratives.

The still popular images of Roma women as romantic stereotypes, easily under the control of the modernist painters (such as Nicolae Grigorescu and Theodor Aman), originate in the image of the Roma woman of the slavery period and have the effect of controlling Roma women through the ideological dimension of oppression. Their romantic aspect incorporates the nostalgia for a bygone era, when the portrayed women were slaves under the absolute power of the non-Roma slave owner. Ideology is present in these popular representations as a body of ideas which reflect the sole interest of a

¹¹⁶ Id., 118-128

¹¹⁷ id., 124

¹¹⁸ id., 125.

specific group of people (which in this case are not Roma and are not women). The high Romanian culture is infused by this racist and sexist ideology, transmitted historically also during state socialism as a form of adopted modern nationalism, a hegemonic (read as natural, normal and inevitable) perception of the past. In what was praised as the very first social novella, Vasile Alecsandri's popular "History of a Gulden", the Roma woman is presented as the quintessential slave who is completely available to the non-Roma noble (in this case, a noble Dutch coin who tells the story): "what measured and agile figures one can find between their (Gypsy) women"; "since I am in the Romanian principalities, I have never found such dainty, so well jointed and, in one word, so agreeable features such as those of Zamfira." The unspeaking character of the novella, the Roma slave Zamfira, is only sixteen, having, as Alecsandri, a slave owner himself, writes, "that childish freshness so priceless in the adornment of a woman, but then all her movements, her looks, her voice had something special, an air of charming wilderness, which would make her similar to an agile deer at the moment of feeling the presence of the hunter in the forest." Her objectification is completed in the description of the novella in images such as: "her raven hair was braided with silver coins and flowers; she was wearing a choker made of red and white beads and rubles, which was bouncing on her breast at each step, creating a delicate clatter and distinct beaming under the rays of the sun."¹¹⁹

Roma women as fortune tellers, exotic dancers, beggars, door-to-door sellers, mothers of many children (the profitable breeders of slavery), noble and accessible savages of the Roma camp, or contemporary non-citizens, women without papers or hated state benefit receivers – all these stereotypes are applied to Roma women as factors of their oppression. Far from the deceiving "positive stereotypes" of Roma freedom in late modernity, the connection between ideological, economic and political oppression put Roma women under a strict social control and their social position is one of subordination. All these stereotypes function as material mechanisms of protection and promotion of Gadge elites, their interests and their world-view.¹²⁰ The historical exclusion of Roma women, with its origin and practice in slavery, is continued today and is present also in the ways that Gadge popular culture and polices imagine Roma women.

The labor of Roma women during slavery and afterwards gave them a common experience by being involved in two specific fields: agriculture and domestic work. Roma women were ghettoized in domestic work during slavery, and this proximity to the Gadge elites and also the distancing from Roma men through the particularities of the domestic work, including the sexual aspects of this proximity to the Gadge masters, gave Roma women a point of view on the mechanisms of slavery from inside, and created other types of resistance, necessary for their very specific survival. Being inside and also completely outside the Romanian boyar families, Roma women had to take part into strong ties with their masters and their children. The topic of not belonging to the Gadge world but being part of it at the same concerned also Gadge writers and abolitionists and sometimes this paradox was used in literature to create romantic stories about Roma women who tragically (and unsuccessfully) try to move beyond their slave condition and fall in love with the Gadge seducer and master. This paradoxical social position is similar to that of the African-American domestic slave worker and Collins called it the

¹¹⁹ My translation, Vasile Alecsandri, "Istoria unui galbîn" [History of a Gulden] in Proza [The Prose] (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatura, 1967), 20-21.

¹²⁰ Collins, *Black feminist thought*, 5.

“curious outsider-within social location”,¹²¹ a singular marginality that gave birth also to a very specific perspective¹²² of Roma women on this condition but also triggered a reaction from the Gadje families, especially the young women, who were seen as responsible for creating the social context for the abolitionist movement as Radu Rosetti, for example, explained: “Completely odious was the way in which were used the girls and women of those wretched men [Roma male slaves]. Starting from the principle that the body of the slave is a master's thing, Gypsy women, girls and fully married in front of the Altar women, were seen by the master as true meat for pleasure. They were used in this sense, with the knowledge of their parents and husbands.”

One particular custom from slavery, euphemistically called “the rubbing of the feet”, was performed by Roma women house slaves: “Until the rule of Mihai Sturza, the habit in the boyar houses from the countryside was to send to their guests when they were going to bed a young woman slave to rub their feet, to sleep faster and to have a calmer rest. And this practice stopped only when the boyar daughters, who were European educated in national or foreign pensions or by distinguished foreign governesses, opposed it decisively.”¹²³ But mentioning how Roma women were used by their masters and giving the details of the rubbing of the feet, Rosetti comes to a conclusion which sets the basis for contemporary negative stereotypes of the Roma people:

“Four hundred years of such abject obedience degraded so much those wretched people, killed to such a degree any feeling of human dignity in them, that they would see this horrible insult as natural, against which I do not know any example of opposition, revolt or attempt of revenge. The beating at the ladder was usual in all boyar houses, in those of the small boyars as in those of the big boyars, but I must add that on the other hand, in many of them this so-called Gypsy medicine was used moderately and on the other hand, the lived centuries of slavery made Gypsies lazy, drunkard, dirty people who opened their mouth only to lie, who were always ready to steal anything that they can steal to get their drinks.”¹²⁴

Understanding the logic of the Gadje thinking, one can track the genealogy of contemporary stereotypes to the times of slavery. The prejudices against Roma people constituted a permanent feature of Romanian history, considering especially the five centuries of slavery followed by the persecutions and deportations by the Antonescu regime, two crucial elements in the construction of the historical Roma identity.¹²⁵ The absence of Roma people from high-culture as well as from the studies and research on Roma issues can be explained through the silencing of certain oppressed groups by other dominant groups which impose their own perspective on all the aspects concerning the silenced. The silence of Roma women has historical causes connected to

¹²¹ Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought.” In *Social Problems* 33 vol. 6 (1986): 14–32

¹²² For a perspective on African-American women, see Alice Childress, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life*. Boston: Beacon, 1986.

¹²³ My translations, Radu Rosetti, “Amintiri. Ce am auzit de la alții.” [Memories. What I heard from others.] In Vasile Ionescu, ed. *O mie de ani de singurătate. Romii în proza românească [One thousand years of loneliness. Roma people in Romanian prose]*, București: Aven amentza, 2000, 6.

¹²⁴ Mark, “Re-discovery of Identity Values”, 125.

¹²⁵ Poșircă, “The Management of Cultural Risks”, 185

the general hostility seen as a natural and given element in relation to people perceived as inferior. In this location, silencing functions through fantasy, fake images, stereotypes and clichés. But the most used (and efficient) form of silencing is the denial of victimhood, as Alexandra Oprea observes:

“The denial of victimhood to Romani women is part of the general distortion of Romani experiences. Not only is police brutality merely “a fight”, but genocide was merely “persecution”, slavery was merely a product of the times, and instead of constructive expulsion Romani migrations are often attributed to their being “nomadic”. Discrimination in the market place against Roma equals “they don’t want to work” (i.e., lazy). Note that this does not mean that Roma are never seen as victims; what it does mean is that they are most likely to be seen as victims when the victimizer is also Romani. For example, Romani children who must beg in order for their family to survive are seen as “trafficked” by their parents. There it is less as a result of sympathy for the victim (Romani children) and more as a result of animosity toward the victimizing community and a reluctance to acknowledge the structural racism that leads to begging in the first place.”¹²⁶

For Mark,¹²⁷ the topic of silence hides the sadness of exclusion and of reduction to silence of a whole population which is paradoxically portrayed as too vocal, too noisy, in order to separate the Gadge from the negative loud Roma way of speaking and acting. The remedy for this situation can be found in a famous quote by Audre Lorde that was chosen to open the third issue of *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women’s Journal* in three languages (English, Romanian and Romani): “The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”¹²⁸

When thinking about enslaved Roma women, one has to take into consideration that all social groups have a particular world-view based on their historical experiences, a world-view that evolves in relation to other world-views and their new experiences.¹²⁹ Even if this particular perspective is not accessible or is not the main narrative concerning a particular period or group experience, this perspective exists and sometimes can be found hidden under layers of social deception.¹³⁰ For Roma people, different cosmologies, according to the diverse Roma groups, can offer explanations for slavery, which can be very different than those provided by the slave owners. Even if slavery literature remembers only the Gadge perspective, even if this perspective can be emphatic and can sometimes represent an effort to understand the atrocity of the slavery institution, it always misses the Roma perspective, which is still undocumented and completely ignored by historiography. Nevertheless, this world-view existed and still exists, producing a specific ethos which helped Roma communities to survive against all odds through language, religion, family structures and communitarian

¹²⁶ Alexandra Oprea, “Reclaiming victimhood, rethinking agency”, *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women’s Journal* 3 (2011), 185; for a constant denial of Roma victimhood for the period of slavery, see the writings of Viorel Achim, especially Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*.

¹²⁷ Mark, “Re-discovery of Identity Values”, 125.

¹²⁸ Audre Lorde, *The transformation of silence into language and action*, paper delivered in 1977, quoted in *Nevi Sara Kali: Roma Women’s Journal* 3 (2011): 3. Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1997).

¹²⁹ Mechal Sobel. *Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

¹³⁰ Collins, *Black feminist thought*, 10.

structures. Even if this ethos was so crucial for surviving through slavery, genocide and assimilation politics, and it had found diverse expressions from various Roma groups and individuals, this knowledge was hidden and suppressed by the Gadge, even in the very act of “discovering” the Roma people on Gadge terms. Roma knowledge, as a form of resistance, opposed historical injustice but was also silenced and subjugated by the Gadge world-view on the Roma.

As mothers, medicine women, women of faith and teachers in the urban Roma ghettos (*mahalale*) and isolated rural communities, Roma women had a crucial role in maintaining and updating the Roma ethos and world-view. Their participation in creating a distinct Roma culture as a compulsory form of survival, with its strict separate roles for men and women (as they were prescribed within the institution of slavery and its controlling mechanisms), produced historically an independent Roma women-centered world-view. Through their lived experiences, in strong connection to their extended families and communities, Roma women constructed individually and collectively specific ideas of what it meant to be a Roma woman in different time periods. Through these experiences and involvement in the life of the community, Roma women could find collective expressions and own definitions of the self and of their community, definitions which had the capacity to resist the all-present Gadge definitions of Roma womanhood, those negative images and definitions which had the role to assure the persistence of social exclusion, silencing and shaming. The recovery of this hidden culture of resistance produced and kept by Roma women was one crucial purpose of Roma feminism since the 1990s in individual or collaborative developments. In the Roma feminist literature, the mentioning of the Roma slavery is not accidental or just a historical footnote, but a critical element in defining the construction of Roma womanhood on non-Gadge terms.

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Words that don't come easy.
Intersectional and post-colonial feminist understandings
about Roma in East-European societies

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Abstract

As an anthropologist, during the last two decades, I conducted fieldwork among Romanian Roma dwellers and/or migrants in various national contexts. As a feminist, I paid much attention to gender relations and to intersectional issues. I often focused my attention on women's agency. I can paraphrase Gayatri Spivak's question by saying that I was and I am interested on how, when and in which political conditions the Roma women can speak... or be silent/silenced. My fieldwork experience as well as the postcolonial and critical theory readings I have done¹³¹ led me to ask questions about racism and sexism which embrace all my women and gender relations centered research on Roma. This text is a personal epistemological *manifesto* emerged from this interrogation. In its lines, I examine how a *Gadji* (non-Roma) feminist anthropologist, like me, could discuss the race and racism issues in contemporary societies that Roma are part of? Its writing is also produced by a certain frustration of not being heard enough among European peers when stating orally the following arguments.

Keywords: intersectionality, post-colonial feminism, Roma women, Eastern Europe

The anthropologist and the Roma

Many of the last 25 years scientific reports on Roma deprivation (World Bank, CoE, UNDP cross-country researches, myriads of national surveys etc.) can appear as simply using different definitions and categories like "Roma women", in order to consider gender and ethnicity as radically different from "ours". Here are two examples of these typical assumptions we can read in this kind of research reports:

¹³¹I express here my gratitude to *PostCit* – « *Penser la différenciation raciale et postcoloniale* », the research group in University of Geneva, who gave me the opportunity to encounter inspiring people and readings since 2011 <http://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/incite/bienvenue/groupe-de-rech/postcit/>. My thanks go equally to my friend and colleague Julien Debonneville, with whom I had many passionate discussions about anthropology and postcolonial studies during all these years and who had revised an early version of this text with a critical eye.

- "the precarious health of Roma women who give birth and raise numerous children can influence their health state and medical care access" ¹³²

- "the low education level and lack of professional qualification of Roma women get lower their chances to enter the labor market and implicitly lead to the traditional life continuum"¹³³.

Feminist or not, most of the anthropologists do not feel comfortable with this type of scientific discourse because it generalizes, homogenizes and reifies sharp divisions and categories, it uncritically uses notions like 'tradition', 'Roma', 'women', 'health' or 'education' and disregard the specific local economics and political contexts and the complexity of concrete daily social relations. Its logics in terms of averages, clusters and typologies seems to obscure significant insiders' stratifications of social status, experiences, micro/level ties and resources - which conflicts, in a more general approach, with an epistemological and methodological *credo* of the social and cultural anthropology. In addition, these statements don't consider the "embedded agency" - the ways people act within cultural contexts to change the contexts they live in:

"looking at and listening to real people doing real things in a given historical moment, past or present, and trying to figure out what they are doing or have done will or will not reconfigure the world they live in" (Ortner, 1996: 2).

According to British anthropologist Michael Stewart, who intensively studied by ethnographical fieldwork a Roma group in the 80's Hungary (Stewart, 1997), the "under-class" term (to be found in Anglo-American sociology and sometimes equivalent to "out-caste", then recuperated by Hungarian sociologists Ladanyi and Szelenyi) is not appropriate for describing the post-socialist deprivation pattern of Roma groups. He considers it as "*problematic because it exaggerates the reality of separation and in so doing it reproduces the very ideology by which the exclusion of 'the Gypsies' tends to be justified*" (Stewart, 2001: 133). Inspired by Antony W. Marx's book (1996) about the differences between US, South Africa and Brazil racisms, Stewart is very skeptical about the racist discrimination experienced by Roma - in his view, these groups' deprivation, exclusion and marginality in East European countries are to be considered by what he calls *renewed paradigms* (my underlining). According to Stewart, race is a modern, scientist distinction born within the wide European colonial context and not the one that Roma and non-Roma people use in their daily interactions. He points out that racial definition of the excluded is not fixed but a movement, a historical process, a construction depending on state, on racial regime, on the broader context where poverty appears as an issue, etc. Like most of the anthropologists and other social scientist (see for example, the ongoing MIGROM European multi-national team project¹³⁴), Stewart suggests that we should mostly consider different researches, if possible based on ethnographic fieldwork, showing that Roma people not only survive but successfully organize their activities, by coming up with "original solutions to unexpected problems", and in doing so, creating culture in different ways.

Echoing Stewart's argument, most of the anthropologists with a deep knowledge of Eastern European contexts (e.g. Kligman, 2001 or Olivera, 2009) are very skeptical about the way in that Roma are defined as a racial minority. They also criticize the way that top-down so-called "integration" or "inclusive" European and/or national policies participate to the marginalization of Roma in those nationalist oriented societies.

¹³²Cace, Preoteasa, Tomescu, Stanescu, *Legal si egalpepiatamunciipentrucomunitatile de romi*, 2010

¹³³EU inclusive data and exchange of good practices regarding the inclusion of Roma population- between Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain, Soros Foundation Romania, 2012

¹³⁴<http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>

However, it seems to me that the social inequalities characteristic of the late modern and global societies, cannot leave any social anthropologist indifferent. If one is careful not to essentialize the ethnicization of poverty, as Gail Kligman (2001) calls for, one can try to understand how ethnicity tends to essentialize and move into “race” in poverty contexts, how gender, age, class and race intersect and create new and deeper discriminations. Thus, in my view, in that 2001 article, Stewart seems to avoid and obscure the power problem. In my opinion, power related questions like the following must imperatively be raised and challenged by anthropology. Who has the right to speak (create definitions, categories, clusters, statements and researches) and who is silent? How State and supra-state governing societies affects people?¹³⁵

Another aspect, which seems to be forgotten in Stewart’s view about racism, refers to emotions: being hurt, suffering, feeling humiliated. Of course, first thought goes to Roma WW2 deportation survivors and their memories. If much work was done to reconstruct the collective memories of deportation (*porajmos* and/or *samudaripenin romanilanguages*) anthropologists and other social scientists don’t seem to give a knowledge status to the emotions associated to those memories. And still I’d like to ask: if an ordinary Roma woman watching TV finds out that the president of the state she lives in insulted a journalist by yelling to her ‘*igancă împușită*’ [stinky gypsy¹³⁶] and feels hurt and racially stigmatized, if a poor Roma woman begging in Geneva feels awkwardness and disrespect when large photos of her miserable Romanian home are exposed in city open spaces as anti-racist politically engaged art¹³⁷, do these feelings interest the anthropologist¹³⁸? I think they should.

These limits of our science led to a simple insight: most anthropologists are privileged white, non-Roma (*Gadje*), middle class and men, they don’t experience power - in terms of race, class and gender - and emotions like being hurt and humiliated in the same ways that their Roma informants. In my opinion, this social distance has to be realistically criticized and ceaselessly challenged.

Global colonization and racism in the era of digital media

If Roma manage to deal with scarce means in complex social situations, if they are not (only) victims of the post-socialist economy but often successfully agents of it, there is also evidence that in the present age of multimedia and global village (Appadurai, 1996) politics - and their effects - cannot be only a limited community matter anymore (at the village or the neighborhood level). Precisely, the categories - here Roma /Gadje - are multilevel produced. This is the very product of the contemporary global forces: the crisis of social recognition of the work force; the popular success of the paradigm of cleavages between the ‘white us’ and ‘colored them’ after the 9/11/2001; and consequently, the pressure to point out new/old scapegoats. Researchers like K. Verdery and G. Kligman consider that the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe is

¹³⁵ Largely inspired by Michel Foucault’s works, contemporary scholars well known by feminists, like Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, ask these questions. In parallel, two decades before Foucault’s main publications, in an existentialist vein and screaming of racial injustice, Frantz Fanon’s writings express identical questions (see for example Butler, 2004 and Fanon 1975/1952)

¹³⁶ The incident took place in 2007, in Bucharest. It was largely covered by the mainstream media, not because of its racism but in order to politically delegitimize its author, president Basescu.

¹³⁷ I particularly refer here to Eric Rosset, Photographic exhibition *Roms*, Geneva, 2015 http://www.ville-geneve.ch/fileadmin/public/Departement_3/Documents_d_actualite/Roms-mairie-flyer-2015-ville-geneve.pdf

¹³⁸ In anthropology, emotions are not a mainstream object of interest. The reflexive turn, the feminist ideas and the cognitive anthropology challenged partially this position of marginality of emotions, see for example Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990.

characterized by a new cleavage which recuperates old enemies and transforms them into new "dichotomies of the self against other" (Verdery, 1996: 95). In this context the process of "othering Roma" (Kligman, 2001) is a form of racialization as it materializes in various discriminatory practices.

Thus, the "race" appears not only as an issue of the 19th century scientific evolutionary classification (rooted in Darwin's theory and applied in Imperial colonialism), as Stewart puts it, but as an on-going product of this multi/level circulation of representations, moral categories and discourse.

Post-colonial and subaltern studies have developed since the end of '70s. They were meaningfully inaugurated by the work of the US Palestinian intellectual Edward Said (*Orientalism*, 1978). Rooted in the classical authors like Marx, Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, and promoted in Western universities mainly by Black American feminists and Indian scholars, post-colonial studies are both fruitful and contested – yet important for the contemporary humanities and social sciences (Child and Williams, 1997). They aim to criticize the mainstream history made by colonizers, the hegemonic epistemologies creating categories, definitions and knowledge paths, to give a voice to silent colonized subjects, to produce alternative stories and understandings, to reread collective memories, cultures and representations. As already affirmed, giving a voice to silent subjects particularly concerns women.

In addition, (post) - colonial not only refers to people once colonized by military forces and administration within territorial conquest and slavery. It equally refers to on-going othering marginal people through a colonial-like movement: expanding capitalism, civilizing the 'savage' poor, assimilating the difference, underlining social hierarchy and dividing classes, stigmatizing alternative collective beliefs and behaviors, ethnicizing poverty and delinquency, punishing the poor etc. (see Wacquant, 2010). Furthermore, one can say that, in a myriad of forms, a huge number of people are colonized by the new public management, by the individualist and competition values, by the power of finance, by the numerous and sophisticated means of control and repression of the states towards bodies, intimacies or private lives, etc. As the same Gayatri Spivak puts it "we live in a post-colonial neo-colonized world" (Spivak, 1986). Numerous contemporary situations fit into this scheme and need to be analyzed in their contexts and particular forms in terms of experience, timing, memory and definitions of colonized subjects.

Nevertheless, not all colonization processes are equivalent to each other. Roma and non-Roma, in Eastern European societies, do not share the same degree of colonization. Besides, the colonization acquires sophisticated means in particular historical moments when representations circulate faster and influence deeper the construction of the reality. Thus, if the Hungarian Roma in the 80's, studied by Stewart, had very little chances to face a discriminatory discourse towards them by occasionally watching TV, things are significantly different 30years later¹³⁹.

For example, in Romanian cultural and political weekly journals of the 90's and the beginning of 2000, the discourse focused on criticizing the "weak state" unable to control and assimilate "problematic" minorities; problematic because too different in their native cultures. In this discourse, anti-terrorist struggle, islamophobia, racialization of migrants (from all around Europe and the world) and Roma condition in Romania are strongly connected. This mainstream discourse, echoing the government

¹³⁹ The British-Jamaican Black sociologist Stuart Hall is the pioneer scholar examining how, in television era, the racial discrimination is embedded in public discourse.

position, declined in simple or more complicated forms, is very powerful by its pervasiveness. It shapes the view of journalists, media producers and cultural industry managers and authors; it is largely diffused through on-line forums and social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Since the middle of 2000, soap operas, pop music and dancing shows reset and retransmit this essentialist dual view about the Roma/Gadje distinction. This is a perfect example of the elite discourse meeting popular traditional categories, shaping the othering Roma and then, (re)producing new forms of racism.

Moreover, I suspect, nowadays, its mechanism transgresses any regional, linguistic or national borders: the media contamination makes the police in Ireland arrest brown skin Roma parents of whiter skin and green eyes child two days after the same incident happens in Greece; the discourse about the Roma in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria or Greece collides the one about Muslims in France, African-American in the US or about other indigenous people and ethnic minorities elsewhere (like Canada, Australia, Brazil, Russia or China).

Intersectional and post-colonial feminism: bringing power and emotion into equation

If you're Roma, woman, young and poor, living in a rural poverty pocket of one of the numerous post-industrial areas of Eastern European countries, you're more likely to be subject to such multiple intersected types of colonization. But are Roma women really 'vulnerable' subjects within this colonization process?

In my perspective, gender is more than a difference between sexes, or the social form taken by what scientists consider biological sexes; it is a hierarchical division producing different kinds of inequalities within a given society. From an anthropological point of view, gender concretely materializes in the vast majority of human societies (including Roma and non-Roma in Eastern European countries) as characterized by various forms of masculine domination: religious and political institutions, economical organization and values are held by men, while the women's domain is characterized by limited access to property, lower political and economic status, external control of fertility and reproduction or amounts of domestic and care work considered 'natural'. Gender is a fundamental power relation, not a part but a principle of social organization (like age, class etc.). In addition, by recapturing the "agency" issue already defined, shouldn't we use the word 'subaltern' instead of 'vulnerable'?

Moreover, subalternity is not one single domination issue. As Ortner(1996) puts it "gender is a serious game but not the only game in town", which means that an individual simultaneously lives many power relations, mainly race, class and gender ones but also age, sexuality, etc. These relations can't be separate or simply added one to another, they are embedded, cross-cut, co-extensive, integrated, intersected (Crenshaw, 1991). Defined by Black American and Third World feminist scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Chandra Mohanty Talpade, Audrey Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, intersectionality is since the 90's a heuristic concept in feminist and cultural studies, as well as in ethnic, racial and migration studies etc. Its interesting facets (even if difficult to transpose into research methods) make me think that I cannot be feminist without being anti-racist. In this respect, I am convinced that we, *Gadjia* women in academia, tend to see Roma women "under Western eyes" (Mohanty, 1984), meaning poor and uneducated (like the research reports quoted previously) and this perspective must be urgently deconstructed.

If power issues are recaptured by the post-colonial and intersectional feminist approach, what about emotions, or maybe, in other words, “experience”? Feminist notions like “stand-point theory”, “situated knowledge”, “assuming a vision”, “being affected by”, “embodiment of truth” are very useful to integrate experience and emotion into knowledge. They argue for an empathic and ethical account of *different* subjectivities and points of view, for a human relational approach within science. Like the feminist philosopher of sciences, Donna Haraway puts it “*feminists have stakes in a successor science project that offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world*” (Haraway, 1986). The majority of texts written by those Black American and Third World feminists speak explicitly about emotion, experience and subjectivity. I include the feminist Roma scholars’ writings recently published (e.g. Oprea, 2012 and Bitu, Vincze, 2012).

Then, what about a feminist anthropology?

In my view, anthropology must be committed to un-veil hierarchies and power relations inside, between groups and within different parts of society. Anthropology might allow us to decode the work done by societies to pretend natural what is social – like gender, race and class which are so often naturalized. For me as an anthropologist, the postcolonial studies, and particularly the notion of intersectionality, are useful in three respects. Firstly - to understand the articulation of ethnicity and gender in local contexts. Secondly - to understand how homogenizing categories and the centre-periphery dynamics affects groups of populations who are systematically very low in the social classifications. Thirdly - to understand their embeddedness with superstructures of states and capitalism.

Instead of thinking that between anthropology and feminism there might be an “awkward relationship” (Strathern, 1986) I do share Lila Abu-Lughod vision:

« From its experience with this crisis of selfhood or subjecthood, feminist theory can offer anthropology two useful reminders. First, the self is always a construction, never a natural or found entity, even if it has that appearance. Second, the process of creating a self through opposition to an other always entails the violence of repressing or ignoring other forms of difference. Feminist theorists have been forced to explore the implications for the formation of identity and the possibilities for political action of the ways in which gender as a system of difference is intersected by other systems of difference, including, in the modern capitalist world, race and class » (Abu-Lughod, 1991 :140)

Many anthropologists claim neutrality of their descriptions and analysis and pretend to be objective and relativist when speaking about men’s violence in wars, genital mutilation, domestic violence or prostitution. I do not. However, my wish is to keep in mind the comparative perspective dear to anthropologists. Thus, I consider concepts like “sexual democracy”(Fassin, 2006) and “sexual clash of civilizations” (Fernando, 2013) to help one to disclose these phenomena from their apparent ethnical determination and think about white hegemony. In this respect, the argument presented by the French sociologist Eric Fassin is that

« if sexual democracy is about sexual freedom and equality between sexes, its application to the exclusion of « others », that is its racialisation, can eventually transform these lofty ideals into a practice that hinders sexual liberty by racialising sexual discrimination » (Fassin, 2010:523)

Thus, as a feminist anthropologist, I became as interested in *Gageness* (adaptation from 'whiteness') as in Roma studies. An equal attention to *Gadge* as particular producers of hegemonic visions allowed me to identify that, for example, the moments when women's rights appear in governmental discourse are those when early marriages in Roma communities are stigmatized. It is exactly what Fassin understands by the selectiveness of the "sexual democracy".

In addition to these aspects, I also have to confess here that anthropology provides me with critical tools against some tendencies of postcolonial approach to the re-traditionalisation and fundamentalization of the Roma - which can reify them as a homogenous group. This is the reason why I tend to be critical towards Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism". My distance can be read as a *gagikano* point of view and I fully accept this critique. Nevertheless, I try to defend an ethnographical sensitivity to variability and diversity of particular situations as well as a care for different subjectivities and forms of empowerment.

As a conclusion, I would like to sum up my answer to the question asked in the very beginning of this article - how a *Gadji* feminist anthropologist, like me, could discuss the race and racism issues in contemporary societies Roma are part of? First, being equally interested by agency and by structures, by feelings and by logics. Second, putting power(s) in the middle of the figure: criticizing the top-down European politics of anti-racist integration, through the ethnographic lens and practices, like Stewart and other scholars do, without missing to better understand how individuals and groups are part of complex power relations from multiple supra-community levels. Third: being interested in the new media circulation of representations. Forth: using the understandings from the postcolonial and intersectional turn in social sciences, while developing new meanings and directions of feminism in anthropology. And, last but not least, being more silent, humbler, more listening, leaving space for Roma feminist scholars and/or anthropologists to discuss race and racism and being curious about their experience and findings. Especially this last point is a strong emotional thought that could seem contradictory with the very writing up of this article - that's why words don't come easy.

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The Queen of Sheba Would rethinking the Quranic story support female public leadership in Islam?

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Abstract

The story of the queen of Sheba is a story about an impressive female queen, who has been praised in Quran and acknowledged as a distinguished leader. This celebrated queen is for sure a counter example that challenges all notorious fundamental Islamic arguments held against female public leadership. Unfortunately, the clear gender egalitarian message in the Quranic story didn't get much positive attention from the majority of classical and even modern exegetes. This paper is a linguistic analytic attempt to reevaluate the story from an Islamic feminist point of view. The paper asserts, contrary to mainstream Islam, a full as well as an unconditional acknowledgment of women public leadership.

Key words: the queen of Sheba, Islamic feminism, the Quran.

The Quranic story of the queen of Sheba consists of different scenes and doesn't appear to be that interested in providing too many details, beyond making a strong case for female public leadership. The story starts with the hoopoe bringing Solomon an exciting news about a people who - as he described - were into worshipping the sun instead of God, who knows everything including, "*what you conceal and what you declare*" ¹⁴⁰(27: 25). However, what seems to have got the attention of the hoopoe even more is their absolute obedience to their queen. Solomon orders the hoopoe to take a letter back to them and to wait for their response. As the hoopoe did, the scene moves to the queen of Sheba as she seems to have read the letter and as she seems to be consulting her court about the letter that she described as "*noble*" (27:29)¹⁴¹ and as written, "*In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful*" (27:30)¹⁴². The story continues by this queen sending a gift to Solomon and eventually by her visiting his palace. After challenging her by moving her thrown miraculously to Solomon's palace, and by tricking her by way of building a crystal way that looked for her like water, she reached a point where she realized that this supernatural supreme power Solomon demonstrated could not be accessible without help from a mighty being. The story ends by her acknowledging of the mistake she did by worshipping other than God, and by her submitting to Allah, like Solomon.

¹⁴⁰<http://quran.com/27>

¹⁴¹<http://quran.com/27>

¹⁴² Ibid.

Now, what matters most is the detailed analysis of the story which can help us uncover the Quranic attitude of this female leading character. In the following I will be providing linguistic evidence supporting a full acknowledgement made in Quran of female public leadership. Also, I will uncover a clear misogynist approach to the story found in the majority of medieval and even in modern interpretations.

First, what deserves to be considered is the way the hoopoe described her when he came back to Solomon as he said, *"I have found a woman owning them, and she has been given of everything, and she has a great throne."* (27:23)¹⁴³. The Arabic expression "tamlikuhm" that describes her status comes from the root "mlk" which means: to own something. Using this expression reflects with no doubt her powerful authority over her people; also describing her as a woman that has been given of everything suggests a unique high rank. However, what matters most is not only the impressive content that this expression might suggest by itself, but also the fact that this expression is the same expression the Quranic text used to describe Solomon himself! In the same chapter we read about Solomon describing himself this time as someone who, *"has been given from everything"* (27:16)¹⁴⁴. The fact that the queen of Sheba was described in the Quran by the same way a mighty prophet like Solomon was described is a huge gender egalitarian message that -as we will see - will go for centuries with no appropriate recognition.

Not only does the Quranic text praise this female queen and draws an early attention to her as a peer of Solomon himself; in addition, more details about her extraordinarily wise leadership style will be provided. The Quranic text provides us by some carefully chosen details from the story. First, a reference is made to the strategy she adopted to deal with Solomon's letter as she turned to her court for an advice, *"advise me in my affair. I would not decide a matter until you witness [for] me."* (27:32)¹⁴⁵. This scene portrays her as a wise democratic leader that insists on including her people in the process of making decisions. Even the way the court responded to her request suggests an unmistakable acknowledgment of a full trust and submission to her ability of making decisions, *"They said: "We are men of strength and of great military might, but the command is yours, so see what you will command."* (27:23)¹⁴⁶. More importantly, even after she was reminded of the mighty military ability they have, she didn't resort to power, instead she resorted to a general wisdom concerning the way kings like Solomon do as they take over a town, *"She said, "Indeed kings - when they enter a city, they ruin it and render the honored of its people humbled. And thus do they do."* (27:34)¹⁴⁷. Furthermore, not only did she refuse to resort to power, but she came up with a plan to check Solomon's intentions and to examine whether he is a king? A faithful preacher? Or a messenger? In her investigation to uncover whether Solomon would be more interested in occupying her kingdom or in preaching a new religion-as his letter claims-she came up with the idea of sending him a gift. The fact that Solomon has initiated his letter by the name of God could have been the reason that made her think of him twice before taking any decision. Therefore, in a clever attempt to test Solomon's intentions and whether he would be acting more like a king interested in wealth, gold and tyranny, she decided to send him a gift, *"But indeed, I will send to them a gift and see with what [reply] the messengers will return."* (27:35)¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Translated by Abla Hasan.

¹⁴⁴ Translated by Abla Hasan.

¹⁴⁵<http://quran.com/27>

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸<http://quran.com/27>

The strategy adopted by the queen of Sheba as based on consulting her court, her resorting to traditional conventional wisdom, her careful contemplation before resorting to power, her comparison between all possible options, her smart attempt to explore and know more about the enemy before taking any decision, all of those facts reflect her smartness and her unique leadership style. In addition, ending the story by her admitting her wrong religious belief after losing the challenge with Solomon indicates that the queen of Sheba must have been a woman so hard to be tricked and so hard to think of herself as a woman who can be easily deceived. Therefore, Solomon's strategy worked, since it spoke to her point of strength, i.e., the ability of making wise decisions. More importantly, the story teaches us one big lesson when acknowledged one fact about the queen of Sheba, i.e., she was able to prove herself right against all her court.

However, contrary to this distinguished Quranic image of the queen of Sheba, interpretations of the story seemed to have failed to stay faithful to the content of the text. The fact that both Solomon and the queen of Sheba were described by using the same expression was commonly overlooked. What seems even more puzzling is the fact that same expressions seem to have been variably interpreted by exegetes when applied to Solomon and when applied to the queen of Sheba. This unjustifiable variation makes us suspect that these expressions were not allowed to speak for themselves, rather they were merely projecting local cultural presumptions about the so-called: God given gender roles.

As we will see in the following examples, while the Quranic text was praising the queen of Sheba and asserting her exceptional charisma as a leader, interpretations were conveying a different message that insisted on drawing gender-based doubts when it comes to female public leadership. Even in cases where the Quranic text used the same expression to describe Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, exegetes seemed to have adopted a double standard way in interpreting the same expression. For example, both verses (27:16) and (27:23) seem to be sharing the same expression, once as ascribed to Solomon, "*And Solomon inherited David. He said, "O people, we have been taught the language of birds, and we have been given from all things. Indeed, this is evident bounty."* (27:16)¹⁴⁹, and then as ascribed to the queen of Sheba, "*Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne.*"(27:23)¹⁵⁰. Interestingly enough, investigating the way the same expression was interpreted by different books of tafsir reveals an easily identifiable gender bias. According to the majority of available interpretations, what the queen of Sheba was given doesn't go beyond wealth, luxury, everyday needs, etc. However, when the same expression applies to Solomon, interpretations seemed to include his knowledge, high virtuous rank, wisdom and his charisma as well. All are mentioned in a clear attempt to make the queen of Sheba look like less of a leader than Solomon. For example, "*She has been given of everything*" was interpreted by Al-Qurtubi, "*as everything the kingdom needs*"¹⁵¹. Similarly, Al-Tabari interpreted the expression as referring to providing her, "*by everything needed in the worldly life, like: weapons and machines*"¹⁵². In tafsir Al-Hanbali, the interpretation of "being given of everything" was reduced when ascribed to the

¹⁴⁹<https://quran.com/27:16>

¹⁵⁰<https://quran.com/27:23>

¹⁵¹Al-Qurtubi. *Al-Jami'li-Ahkam Al-Quran*. Vol 16. Al.Risala. First edition. 2006. P139. The quote is translated by Abla Hasan.

¹⁵²Al-Tabari. *Jami' Al-Bayan*. Vol 18. Dar Al-Hajr. 2001. P 39. The quote is translated by Abla Hasan.

queen of Sheba to “*her fitting worldly requirements*”¹⁵³, but “being given of everything” was interpreted when ascribed to Solomon as “*everything kings and prophets are given concerning worldly as well as hereafter affairs*”¹⁵⁴. In short, interpretations seem to have understood by the expression as applied to the queen of Sheba her ownership of what a king might need to rule a kingdom. The surprising turn however is when the same expression is used in the context of describing Solomon; this time the same expression will be referring- in what looks like a complete consensus- to Solomon’s ownership of all leadership qualities required for any successful leader. This incoherence of interpretation does appear even in the same interpretations sometimes. For example, in tafsir Al-Tabtabaei, he interprets “*to be given of everything*” when ascribed to Solomon as, “*all blessing anyone can get like prophethood, knowledge, authority, kingdom and all material as well as moral blessings*”¹⁵⁵. The same expression as ascribed to the queen of Sheba means for him, “*Everything a great kingdom requires like: power, authority, wide extension, treasures, fighters, and obedient people. And he made a particular reference to her great thrown*”¹⁵⁶.

Not only all kinds of discrepancies can be discovered as we move on with our analytic study of the available interpretations of the story, a threatened misogynist unmistakable tendency starts to be more easily observable as all attempts are made to deny any feminine leadership rule the story might be asserting. Unfortunately, the empowering message seemed to have challenged the patriarchal manipulation of power; therefore, all kinds of underestimating the role the queen of Sheba played were systematically adopted and used in mainstream interpretations. In his comment on the verse Al-Alusi says that the verse doesn’t indicate the permissibility of assigning public authority to a woman because, “*those people were nonbelievers*”¹⁵⁷.

More clearly speaking, the common overwhelming objection to any feminist interpretation of the story comes mainly from what I refer to as “the unauthenticated contrasting of Quran by Sunnah fallacy”. In our particular case, the hadith usually referred to is, “no people will prosper as long as they assign their leadership to a woman”¹⁵⁸. However, “the unauthenticated contrasting of Quran by Sunnah fallacy” is a puzzling case that goes beyond the interest of this paper, since Sunah is supposed to explain Quran not to contradict it as believed by almost all Islamic schools. What matters most for my discussion is the way this particular hadith was used to deactivate the gender egalitarian message of the story. In some interpretations, the aggressive language sometimes intensifies, as we see in the following explanation to her hesitation of resorting to power, “*it was because thy assign their leadership to an animal, with a shaking bosoms*”¹⁵⁹

In addition, the so many unauthenticated details inserted in the story in many books of tafsir helped nothing but distracting the reader from the pioneer applicability of the story. Unfortunately, instead of focusing on the paradigm shift the story of the queen of Sheba is initiating, unauthenticated distractive details, such as her marriage to Solomon,

¹⁵³Al-Hanbali. Fatih Al-Rahman. First edition. Vol 5. Al-Nawadir. 2009. P127. The quote is translated by Abla Hasan.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p 119.

¹⁵⁵Al-Tabtabai. Al-Mizan. First edition. Vol 15. Al-A’lami. Beirut. 1997. P 352. The quote is translated by Abla Hasan.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. P 356.

¹⁵⁷Al-Alusi. Ruh Al-Ma’ani. First Edition. Vol 10. Dar Al-Kutub Al-A’lmiah. Beirut. 2010. P 185. The quote is translated by Abla Hasan.

¹⁵⁸ The hadith “No people will prosper if ruled by a woman”. <http://fatwa.islamweb.net/>
<http://fatwa.islamweb.net/fatwa/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=Fatwald&Id=32552>

¹⁵⁹Al-Mawardi. Al-Nukt wa Al-A’uun. Vol 4. Dar Al-Kutub Al-A’lmiah. Beirut. 2010. P 208. The quote is translated by Abla Hasan.

her demon ancestry, and even her hairy legs have occupied the way the story was thought of. What seemed to have completely gone missing was the applicability of the story and the possibility of rethinking the traditional presupposed God given roles. In her explanation to this unjustifiable juristic marginalization of the story of the Queen of Sheba, Stowasser suggested that this *"may have to do with the fact that her qur'anic story deals with events prior to her acceptance of Islam"*¹⁶⁰. Another way of understanding the jurist's indifference was accurately explained by Kecia Ali, who rightly elaborates on this point by saying, *"Today, when we speak of the ethical with regard to gender in Islamic law, we often mean egalitarianism. It is vital to recall that these jurists did not idealize an egalitarian order. Instead, they believed that some people were, though not inferior as believers, properly subordinate to others in the life of this world."*¹⁶¹ In her critical approach to the way imams adopted when it comes to women rights, Fatima Mernissi refers to a bias selectivity in approaching even the divine text as she says, *"the imams, who devote their life to explaining the divine will, could have developed an egalitarian Islam based on the verse that Umm Salama obtained from Heaven (33:35), which established the principle of equality between the sexes. But instead of citing that verse, they brandished verse 34 of the sura on women"*¹⁶². In addition, another explanation of the deactivation of the logical as well as the legal outcomes of reflecting on a story like the story of the queen of Sheba might be found in recalling the historical dominance of the totalitarian approach to the Quran and the historical political- religious alliance that, as Ziba Mir Hosseini rightly observes, ended by a distinction between, *"faith (and its values and principles) and organized religion (institutions, laws, and practices)"*¹⁶³. This division paved the way only for some views to find their way to the surface. This alliance albeit unable to change the text itself was able to highlight only what seemed more appropriate and more politically fitting. In times of conflict, only voices of the elite were heard, including the religious elite, leaving behind the religious opposition either unheard, persecuted or sometimes totally excluded. The unmistakable humanitarian message in the Quran in favor of freedom, gender equality and human dignity had sometimes to be suppressed as the Arabic empire was expanding in all directions and as slaves and concubines were pouring in from all over the world. Although one should acknowledge that Muslims would have been centuries ahead of any expected human development if they had ended slavery, this doesn't change the fact that the potentiality for such a liberal reading of the text was already embodied in the text itself and the step needed to end slavery was only one logical step. In his analysis of the reasons that can explain the lack of originality in Islamic later schools of jurisprudence and the repetition of the already provided opinions of preceding scholars, Adnan Ibrahim refers to what he calls the punishment of Ijtihad that everyone was trying to avoid.¹⁶⁴ However, in my analysis of the source of the problem, I believe we should also keep in mind that the political pressure on thinking about religion took on a very complicated nature that ended by altering and radically transforming the motivations and goals of religious training and education. Late theological schools didn't encourage critical thinking the way they encouraged ways of reasserting and glorifying the already existing arguments. This observation can be better understood if we take into consideration the evaluative

¹⁶⁰Stowasser. Barbara. Women in the Quran: traditions and interpretation. Oxford University, 1994, p 65.

¹⁶¹Ali. Kecia. Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam. On ed. Harvard University Press, October 2010. P190.

¹⁶²Mernissi. Fatima. The veil and the male elite. Basic books. 1991. P 154.

¹⁶³MirHosseinin. Ziba. Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism. Critical Inquiry. The University of Chicago. 2006, p632.

¹⁶⁴To Judge or to Understand. By Dr. Adnan Ibrahim. 13/11/2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zR73kAQewYU>

system and the standards used to accept or reject scholarly works. Except for Arabic golden ages, academic standards stressed more supporting theologically established arguments rather than innovation, which was always suspected in terms of fitting the overall theological training plan. This becomes more notable as we move with the Arabic history towards the collapse of the Ottoman Empire which officially launched the modern Arabic dark ages.¹⁶⁵ Jamal Al-Bana, a reformist who personally suffered from the Al-Azrah institutional tyranny which ended by banning his views and some of his books refers to "*One thousand years of imitation ended by rust in the Islamic mind*"¹⁶⁶.

To sum up, the story of the queen of Sheba is a Quranic challenging counterexample to all assumed traditional understanding of women public leadership, still adopted by the majority of schools of Islamic jurisprudence¹⁶⁷. The linguistic as well as the contextual analysis of the Quranic text is for sure our most powerful tool to challenge the objection to the feminist side of the story based on claiming that the queen of Sheba was a pagan queen. As I argued in this paper, the easily distinguishable references in the Quranic text indicated an acknowledgement of the extraordinary leadership skills the queen of Sheba was able to prove. More importantly, the text never paused once to question her authority- which should have been the ideal place to do so- if the Quranic text had anything to say against female public leadership.

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¹⁶⁵ I am grateful to my dear student Nadir Hushi, an Omani student in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for a valuable conversation in a class discussion.

¹⁶⁶Al-Bana. Jamal. Muslim Woman between the Liberation of the Quran and the Restriction of Clerks. Cairo: Dar Al-Fiker Al-Islami, 1998, P 176.

¹⁶⁷<https://islamqa.info/en/71338>

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Gypsy Economy: Romani Livelihoods and Notions of Worth in the 21st Century

Edited by: Micol Brazzabeni, Manuela Ivone Cunha & Martin Fotta
New York: Berghahn Books, 2016

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Gypsy Economy is undoubtedly a strong contribution to the anthropology of economy outside the formal sector. This edited volume builds on a rich literature concerned with the specificities of the economic practices of various Roma and Gypsy populations over the past three decades. It examines an impressive array of contemporary economic activities of Roma and Gypsies from Eastern European countries as well as from the Iberian world broadly conceived of Portugal, Spain, and Brazil. The authors not only describe different ways of making money, but they also highlight Gypsies' frames of reference and motivations for their income generating activities, which are carefully contextualized in the recent transformations of market societies. Based on extensive fieldwork each of the 11 chapters of the volume affords the reader an incisive analysis embedded in rich ethnographic details.

"Gypsy economy" is the core concept of the book and is used in two ways. Firstly, the term covers moneymaking practices and orientations of various Roma and Gypsy groups. Secondly, it is an analytical term which allows for an examination of how people who create certain modes of living position themselves in relation to the current economic system, to the states, markets, finance and the interrelations between these. Though the volume elucidates Roma and Gypsy economic activities, its contribution goes beyond these groups. It sheds light on the situation and strategies of an increasing population currently facing various aspects of neo-liberalism, such as free markets, informal employment, privatization, and scarcity.

Three main themes reoccur throughout the volume: niche, marginality, and personhood. 1) Older conceptualizations of the term "niche" focused on the 'demand' side, i.e., on non-Gypsies. The contributors of this volume address the 'supply' side drawing on Guyer's (1997) understanding of the economic niche as a 'specialist production.' This entails an understanding of the economic activities from Gypsies' standpoints while acknowledging that these might be different from those of non-Gypsies. 2) Marginality and marginal economy are also used creatively. The authors recognize the marginal positions of the Roma and Gypsy populations, especially pertaining to Central European countries, but they insist on the importance of individual ethnographic assessment without giving definite conclusions. The nature of current economies, the authors posit, characterized by blurred boundaries between formality and informality and the increasing replacement of regular employment with precarious practices calls for a re-conceptualization of the standards of organizing societies. As such, the authors focus on forms of social action to which these groups subscribe and avoid discussing the economic activities of the Roma and Gypsies as inexorable effects of long centuries of discrimination. Such approaches, particularly prominent in expert

policy assessments, limit the political potential of anthropology (Turner 1979). The authors' response is to oppose the various strands of anti-Gypsism, which dehumanize these populations by bringing to the fore their own forms of self-ascriptions as well as their capacity for economic and cultural actions. 3) Personhood is examined through the lens of performance. On the one hand, this allows for an understanding of the way social actors enact and represent their lives. On the other, performances can be seen as events or processes through which Gypsy personhood is constructed.

Though the book is not organized thematically, the editors suggest that the chapters fall into four major themes: monetary flows, economic strategies and market interactions, performance, and wealth and value. The two opening chapters deal with usury among Roma in Slovakia and Hungary. In Chapter 1, Tomáš Hrustič demonstrates how usury, which pervades the entire *taboris* local economic system, can be advantageous to both lenders and borrowers. For the former, this practice is a form of investment, which brings them social and economic power. For the latter, while this practice leads to increased poverty it remains the only way to secure subsistence in the short run. In Chapter 2, Judit Durst aptly demonstrates the economic logic of usury as well as various moral reasoning for sanctioning certain types of lending, while rejecting others and their consequences for the social relations of involved economic actors.

In Chapter 3, Sara Sama Acedo argues that economic practices of horse-trading Ciganos in Portugal are best understood as 'interstitial.' Two sets of relationships— intra-ethnic spatialities and forms of territorial exclusiveness among various Ciganos groups and the relationship between the Ciganos and the state, which classifies the Ciganos as 'nomads'—are crucial to understanding economic interstices and the creation of new economic practices within new locales. In Chapter 4, Jan Grill examines the oscillation between menial and unstable physical labor and activities of 'fixing up money' among Slovak Roma migrants in the United Kingdom and Slovakia, from the socialist period to current times. This oscillation, Grill argues, sheds light on coexisting formal wage labor and other informal economic activities, which helped the Roma manage their livelihood during austere socio-economic times.

In Chapter 5, Marco Solimene examines the practical and symbolic implications of scrap-metal collection among Bosnian Xoraxané Romá in Rome. This economic activity, Solimene argues, allows the Romá to negotiate their group identity in relation to both Italians as well as Romanian Roma. Being embedded in the Romani symbolic system, the scrap-metal collection helps the Roma evade the Italian bio-politics, which reduces them to what philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998) called the *homo sacer*. In Chapter 6, Gergő Pulay addresses the norms and principles behind economic activities of Romanian Spoitori Roma in the Ferentari neighborhood in Bucharest. The Roma take advantage of the street economy of this mixed area. Their aim is to become 'businessmen,' and as such avoid becoming 'fools,' through economic practices they call 'collaborations' and 'combinations.'

In Chapter 7, Martin Olivera discusses the economy of Gabori Roma in Transylvania and the ways they create material and symbolic independence from the non-Roma. To this end, he argues that the economy is not only part of the reproduction of social order, but also part and parcel of the production of Roma's society. Such an analysis moves beyond the image of Roma as economically deprived and politically dominated to highlight Gabori's logic of abundance and possession of the world.

In Chapter 8, Florencia Ferrari makes the only contribution to the volume that focuses on female moneymaking by analyzing palm-reading among Calon Gypsy women in São Paulo, Brazil. She carefully describes the intensely affective interaction between a

Cigana and a non-Gypsy Brazilian during the palm-reading process to show how different meanings and understandings of this activity are part of diverse 'cosmologies.'

In Chapter 9, Cătălina Tesâr analyses the meanings and representations of extravagant consumption behavior, materialized in the construction of houses, among Romanian Cortorari Gypsies. She argues that the ongoing construction of their houses is linked to both the presentist as well as the future orientation of Corturari life-cycles, which is specific to Corturari understandings of the person and relatedness. In Chapter 10, Martin Fotta examines moneymaking among the Calon of Bahia, Brazil. Unlike the usurious practices of Slovak and Hungarian Roma, the Calon lend money to non-Gypsies. Fotta draws on an anthropological theory of value to argue that there are two core sources of value—*vergonha* (shame, honor) and *força* (strength)—driving this economic practice. Though expected to work together as embedded in social persons, these values are oftentimes contradictory and contested. In Chapter 11, Nathalie Manrique gives a fascinating account of wealth, hierarchy and identity among Gitanos in Andalusia, Spain. The Gitano society is underlined by the logic of gift, with generates a hierarchy of living beings with the most generous to be the closest to a 'Gypsy for real.' She demonstrates how the Gitanos's identity is mainly constructed through the refusal to accumulate goods. Wealth is not wanted by the Gitanos as it may generate imbalances in the named hierarchy, which allows them to maintain their Gypsiness.

The book ends with an *Afterword* by renowned anthropologist Keith Hart who points to the theme of statelessness, as a core element in the study of Gypsy societies everywhere. *Gypsy Economy* and studies of Roma in general have for Hart the potential to generate explorations of a crucial question for our times, i.e., how to organize society without states. Beyond inviting such important intellectual quests, the book is also a model for scholars eager to undertake comparative projects aligned with anthropology's aspiration to generalizations about the human condition. It will appeal to students of Romani Studies as well as to a broader readership interested in economic practices outside formal economies.

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Proud to be roma

By Anina Ciuciu

Published by Pandora M, 2014, Bucharest (originally in French *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste* at City Editions, 2013)

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The aim of the book is simple: to open our eyes about Roma minority through the eyes and hard experience of a Roma young woman. The book tells a real story: little Anina Ciuciu's arduous journey from a life of misery and discrimination in Romania to a LIFE of equality in France. The author tries to make the readers understand how tough is life for Roma minority because of discrimination and hate from the majority-Romanian population in Romania and also in France and I think she managed this very well.

I think that for Roma readers this book is very important because they can understand better than us Anina's struggle, but the lecture is vital for non-Roma people as well as they need to listen to Roma voices and learn more about their hard experiences.

Anina has lived in France since she was seven years old and until recently she suffered a lot for being part of an ethnic minority. She entered the Sorbonne University as the first Roma student admitted in this prestigious university. Now she is working at The European Court for Human Rights.

In the beginning of the book, she speaks about how life was for the Roma minority in 1990 in Romania, the year when she was born: the daily fight for food, the lack of utilities and solidarity between Roma and Romanian people. And then this: her father had to "look" like a Romanian in order not to lose his job! It is hard to believe that all this still happens today and there is more to it. Above all this, the existence of good things like the constant support inside the family, the caring and the love from her parents shows us that Anina and her sisters had the chance to a new life thanks to their parents.

Her memories concerning the struggle she and her family went through because they were Roma are vivid, present throughout the book: "my life and that of the people of my own kind is and it always will be a struggle against injustice and biases: I am Roma, Roma from Romania".

The long and dangerous journey from Craiova, Romania to France in a small van crammed full with 15 persons, 10 children and 5 adults, is presented in detail and at a slow pace so that the readers can imagine how it really feels to be in Anina's place.

The language used in the book is simple but real and strong. Anina is a real voice... a voice of many and for many Roma people. And her book is one that can open our eyes to see Roma people different: as they really are!

It is not easy at all to find the courage to write, but Anina did find it and I feel she wrote this for all Roma: to encourage them, to support them stand up and fight against racism and to believe in their dreams. The book is written for us as well: to put our bias aside, to listen and not to judge without knowing, to find out and understand our privileges and to question our place in this fight: bystanders, pure racists or active fighters against racism.

Finally, I want to leave here a quote from Anina Ciuciu, because it represents a good piece of advice for all readers: "When you go through something like I did, you are determined to succeed. It's the only way you can give a response to life. Roma people are not just the ones who beg for money or food. They are a community who has a culture, a history and you have to get to know them. You don't have to be scared; you just have to try to understand us and to give us a chance".

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