From clients to agents. Roma feminist activism in the special issue of *Analize*


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T he special issue of the Romanian journal *Analize – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, devoted to the topic of Roma Feminism, is an important landmark in the advancement of Roma empowerment, and particularly Romanoni women’s activism, with a focus on “reframing Roma women from a social issue to a political subject” (13), to move them away from being“instrumentalized” by researchers, NGOs, Romanoni organizations, and Western feminist agendas. The issue aims to present a more complex and comprehensive understanding of Roma women’s activism, which has been largely overlooked in previous studies. The special issue takes a Roma perspective to address the topical importance of its feminist bent is also hard to overestimate as an attempt at verification of their ideas with the possible role of emancipated Roma women as champions of reconciliation of mainstream society with that of the Roma communities. Admitting that the latter still suffer from exclusion, discrimination, particularly if it refers to trans-border discrimination, critical political and economic inequality, and a lack of recognition, the special issue aims to present a more complex and comprehensive understanding of Roma women’s activism, which has been largely overlooked in previous studies.

A summer school teaches Roma women and men from Moldova about gender equality and rights. PHOTO: YASMIN PROUDMORE/’WOMEN FORWARD: TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE’

which these figures and standard approaches to the Roma situation are silent. ‘The author demonstrates how exactly intersectionality functions in this particular case: what is sacrificed by Roma women in order to gain rights in a society – their Roma (ethnic-cultural) or their women’s identifications; how the women’s movements promoting traditional gender roles differ and intersect with those that challenge the power relations between genders; and why it is sometimes necessary to take a tactical position, refusing to see the feminist agenda as the main goal for the sake of coalition with other movements and reaching the common aim of empowerment. The latter interacts with many postcolonial women’s movements, including Muslim feminism, Chinese feminism, etc. At times the author seems to simplify the situation a bit when she limits herself to only three basic original approaches of intersectionality: class, race and gender – which erases some important nuances. Neaga raises a crucial point for most minoritarian communities – that of the preservation and revival of Roma identity without sliding into essentialism, and steadily preventing any efforts at assimilation.’

**MARION COLARD’S ARTICLE** “L’émancipation de la femme dans la société contemporaine de Roumanie” is mostly informative and draws heavily on intersectional theory, focusing on the possible role of emancipated Roma women as champions of reconciliation of mainstream society with that of the Roma communities. Admitting that the latter still suffer from exclusion, discrimination, particularly if it refers to trans-border discrimination, critical political and economic inequality, and a lack of recognition, the special issue aims to present a more complex and comprehensive understanding of Roma women’s activism, which has been largely overlooked in previous studies.

As the article concludes, the author emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding the complexities of Roma women’s experiences, and highlights the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of their activism. The article argues for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Roma women’s activism, which has been largely overlooked in previous studies.

**THE GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL approaches of this article emerge from participatory sociol- ogy and working with the Roma women rather than merely for them. Yet it still needs more theoretical independence from Western in- perpretations, instead of merely serving as an attempt at verification of their ideas with the help of the local examples. It would perhaps be more useful to forget the Western analytic- isms and non-Western NGOs and start immediately from the Roma cosmology, ethics, epistemology, and gender models as they are rethinked in the agency of the Roma feminist activism. A bet- ter acquaintance with other global South and semi-periphery feminist initiatives would also be beneficial as a further step in the decoloniza- tion of knowledge and thinking.’

This article is marked by an economic re- ductionism whereas the next, written by Diana Elena Neaga – “Empowering Roma women in Romania – gender or/and ethnicity”, is an example of a more culturalist interpretation. Neaga further develops and problematizes the intersectional approaches to the analyzes of Roma women. The indispensable value of this work is that the author is extremely fluent in the dynamics of figures and facts demon- strating the complex discrimination of Roma women in Romania, and at the same time ac- curately analyses the lacunae and voids about
science, theories of nations without states and other contemporary discourses. Particularly interesting is the author’s reflection on the nature of intellectual racism using the example of Roma discrimination in the EU. The article dwells on the shift from the orientalist annihilation to a progressive vision and the deficiency of the human and cultural rights discourses in the analysis of the Roma situation and their instrumentalization in today’s conditions of neoliberal capitalism or, as the author puts it, making the Roma into a “useful labor force for a market economy” (162). A consequence of this policy is addressed as a specific reality of poverty-stricken groups in relation to their racial and cultural stigmatization. When it appears to be impossible to integrate the Roma into a neoliberal society, they are dehumanized and their lives become dispensable. One could agree with the author that the political and repatriated intersectionalism of the Roma women, in alliance with other ethnic and social groups and genders, can be an important factor in the revival of the Roma struggle for their dignity and rights of production, reproduction and representation.

The special issue also contains historical works, important for the understanding of the genealogies of today’s processes. Thus, Mihai Lucas’s article “The Critical ones: another tale of slavery” is an essay, which, through analysis of the phenomenon of slavery in Roman history and an effort to compare it with the African case. The parallels that are traced adequately explain the racialization of poverty-stricken groups and their resistance in all historical and contemporary versions of modernity. The main mechanisms of dehumanizing African slaves and the Roma are similar, up to today’s boutique multiculturalism and excluding the neo-noble savages from modernity.

The author analyses the emergence and development of stereotypes of the stereotype of Roma femininity (as an animal/biological rather than cultural condition) in the social control and reproduction of inequality. He introduces into the more accessible context the issues of specific abdication in relation to Roma slavery in Moldavia andaab and the Roma are similar, up to today’s boutique multiculturalism and excluding the neo-noble savages from modernity.

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