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Romani women and the paradoxes of neoliberalism: Race, gender and class in the era of late capitalism in East-Central Europe¹

Introduction

This chapter examines the paradoxes of neoliberalism through Romani women's experiences² and social struggles in the era of late capitalism in East-Central European (ECE) countries. I will locate Romani women's experiences in the junction of neoliberalism that is intertwined political, economic, social, and cultural reconfiguration of gendered and racialized relationships between the states and individuals that unfold within a set of paradoxes. Sealing Cheng and Eunjung Kim (2014) enlist several paradoxes of neoliberalism particularly in relation to women (Cheng and Kim 2014: 372). However, I will focus on one specific neoliberal paradox that mostly relates to vulnerable racialized populations such as Romani women in East-Central Europe that have been disproportionately impacted by enormous social and economic marginalization and disparities in economic resources and wealth. Neoliberalism supports a range of cheap, exploitative employment opportunities and encourages philanthropic, private and NGO sector to empower marginalized women (Sharma 2008). However, at the same time, neoliberalism contributes to the dismantling of the social and economic safety as well as reduces and eliminates certain welfare benefits and social services, which disproportionately increases the burden on poor and marginalized women such as Romani women in ECE.

This paper introduces the theoretical discussion on how Roma have become connected to the theme of variegated neoliberalism in Europe, and it will analyse the gendered and racialized relationship between neoliberalism and the situation of Romani women. Finally,

¹ In this article I use East-Central Europe (ECE) defined as eastern part of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that is limited to member states of the Visegrád Group - Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary as well as the Baltic states. However, where the content makes it necessary, I will also use CEE that usually refers to the former communist states in Europe.

² While keeping in mind that "Romani women" is a heterogeneous category divided into various subcategories including class, sexuality, age, and many others.

it will make some suggestions for a collaborative contemplation for Romani and non-Romani feminists on how to create possibilities and opportunities to decrease intersectional gender, racial, class and other hierarchies and divides at this neoliberal era.

Local and regional manifestation and translation of neoliberalism

The focus of this volume is how feminisms and women's experiences are related to the post-socialist liberalization and the neo-liberalized economic, social, and political structure in East-Central Europe. We could stick our heads in the sand and collectively ignore the gendered- racialized effect of the spatial-temporal manifestation of neoliberalism that has had a disturbing and restructuring effect on our societies after 1989 if we were not to talk about the particular gendered and racialized situation of Romani women.

Neoliberalism seems to have spread all over the world and reconfigured it into its gendered, sexualized, racialized, and classed "local manifestations". Aihwa Ong approaches neoliberalism as a "reconfiguring relationship between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality" (Ong 2006:3). Ong draws attention to the issue of translation, articulation, and discursive practices of neoliberalism. She is arguing for ethnographic attention to capture the local translation of neoliberalism into a historical spatio-temporal context. Ong's approach to neoliberalism opens up conceptual and political possibilities and also poses an intellectual challenge. Instead of using the monolithic and monofocal concept of neoliberalism, we are encouraged to use a more innovative conceptualization of the variegated versions of neoliberalism. By using a regional/local conceptualization of neoliberalism as well as multifocal and intersectional lenses we cannot overlook the gendered and racialized manifestations of neoliberalism that affect Romani women in East-Central Europe.

Remarkably, even though that our social, economic and political system is saturated with "neoliberalized" ideas, mechanisms and governance, however our progressive-left politics still has been in general blindness to the web of connections and interrelations of the shifting and transformative neoliberal politics (Clarke 2008). Lisa Duggan (2003) describes this phenomenon as the elusiveness of neoliberal politics in the USA, which reminds me of the East-Central European politics: where the right wing thinkers are more vocal to criticize neoliberalism by using the same logic and mechanism that create their own neoliberal nationalist oligarchy at the same time. However, the left in CEE still fails to address "the chameleon that eludes" them. The East-Central European version of neoliberalism is described as "*an embedded neoliberal*" regime by Bohle and Greskovits (2007:444). They argued that the Visegrad states were less market-radical than the Baltic states at the beginning of the '90s, therefore they achieved better results in building new competitive market industries as well as being socially more inclusive. However, as they also pointed out, institutions that are supposed to safeguard macroeconomic stability have either not been established or do not function independently from government in most

Visegrad states so far (Bohle and Greskovits 2007:463 cited by Kóczé 2015). Later on Bohle and Greskovits stated in an interview that Hungary in fact stepped out of the category of “*embedded neoliberalism*” and created a new variation of neoliberal regime, keeping the same neoliberal strategies such as increasing employment (mainly state financed public work) while reducing social welfare expenditures, creating new identity politics, and promoting indigenous capitalists while suppressing socially and economically large populations who are not viewed as compatible with their social and economic politics.³ As I argued on the basis of my research, this type of “*experimental identity based political regime*” that this Orban’s regime in Hungary, in fact, is a nationalistic and racialized version of neoliberalism that ultimately leads to exclusionary democracy (Kóczé 2015).

Neoliberalism and Roma related studies

Currently, there are few studies that make an explicit connection between the situation of Roma and the neoliberal context. Some studies even go further to incorporate the gendered and racialized impact of neoliberal governance, ideology and policies (Temple 2006; van Baar 2011a; Trehan and Sigona 2009; Themelis 2015; Kóczé 2016 forthcoming). The Eastward European integration process has been characterized as an extension of the neoliberal project (Palley 2013). As several scholars have pointed out, the promise of social and economic prosperity has failed, and it rather conveyed a disillusionment with the impact of the variegated neoliberal structural changes on the vast majority of Roma in Europe (Temple 2006; Trehan and Sigona 2009; Kóczé 2012 etc). Sigona and Trehan talk about neoliberalism as imported and externally imposed structural and policy changes that increased the marginalization and precarization of large segments of the European population including millions of marginalized Roma. Moreover, they argue that neoliberalism as an ideology triggered the emergence and spread of extreme right movements with explicit anti-immigrant and anti-Gypsy political agendas (Sigona and Trehan 2009:2). The link between neoliberalism and anti-immigrant and anti-Gypsy political mobilization is intrinsically connected via the politics of securitization (van Baar 2011b).

Elizabeth Bernstein and Janet R. Jakobsen (2013) created three categories on how neoliberalism is conceptualized. *The first school* identified by them is the neo-Marxist that emphasizes upward economic redistribution in our societies. They are referring to those “structural adjustment policies” that have been encouraged by the international monetary organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. *The second school* is conceptualized as the Foucauldians who imagine neoliberalism as a cultural project based on a specific form of governmentality that produces ideal “self-responsible” and

³ Kísérleti terepen bolyong Magyarország, Kasnyik Márton and Stubnya Bence 2013. november 2., szombat, Index http://index.hu/gazdasag/2013/11/02/kiserleti_terepen_bolyong_magyarorszag/ (November 2, 2013)

self-regulating neoliberal subjects. *The third school* is focusing on the shifting structure and ideology of state from welfare to a punitive state that focuses on imprisonment and national security.⁴ The securitization of social problems is one of the main characteristics of this type of neoliberal state (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2013).

In CEE, there is a political legacy of the third school, namely to treat Roma as a social problem that is inevitably securitized regardless whether they are Roma migrants or citizens of the European Union. This approach is intimately connected with the third school of critique of neoliberalism that focuses on the changing mode and priorities of state structure, whereas the welfare state gradually became a punitive state. The securitization of Roma has been widely discussed by Huub van Baar (2011b) and by Nicholas De Genova in the context of the Europeanization of the Roma. Nicholas De Genova argues that it has reconstructed their subordination with a form of racial stigmatization, criminalization, securitization, and “neo-nomadization” (De Genova 2016). Securitization is a logic and characteristic of the neoliberal state that creates a suspicion and invokes security measures. “Racial profiling” of Roma became justified by the logic of suspicion based on centuries old stereotypes that Roma are inherently criminals (Kóczé and Trehan 2009). The claim that extreme right groups make about Roma criminality (Vidra- Fox 2014) has been a tacit element of the securitization of Roma in the East-Central European neoliberal context.

The second school of critique of neoliberalism, identified by Bernstein and Jakobsen (2013), is close to Huub van Baar’s articulation on neoliberalism. In his seminal book *The European Roma: Minority Representation, Memory and the Limits of Transnational Governmentality*, he explains the emergence of a new European governance, as he names it, the neoliberal states that are restructuring their economies, civil societies, and are reshaping their nationalism in relation to Romaphobia (van Baar 2011a: 6). He defines neoliberalism based on the Foucauldian approach, as a constructivist form of governmentality that has been cross-fertilized, variegated, modified, shifted and assembled with other cultural formations and social and political discourses to create an uneven, ‘indigenous’ spatio-temporal translation and articulation of neoliberalism (Ibid). Huub van Baar, similarly to Aihwa Ong, underlines the use of neoliberalism that requires to investigate the “local manifestations” (van Baar 2011a: 165). Nevertheless, in the mainstream critique of neoliberalism, and also in the tiny segment of Romani related studies that critique neoliberalism, there is a very limited knowledge on the gendered, classed and racialized “local manifestations” of neoliberalism (Kóczé 2016 forthcoming). This forthcoming book will illustrate, from the point of view of the first school, the neoliberal policy agenda and the implementation of

⁴ This categorization is developed based on Simon Springer, “Neoliberalism as Discourse: Between Foucauldian Political Economy and Marxian Post-structuralism”, *Critical Discourse Studies* 9.2 (2012): 133-147 and Loic Wacquant “Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism,” *Social Anthropology* 20.1(2012): 66-79.

upward economic redistribution in the post-socialist region that excessively restructure social and economic wealth by disadvantaging and dispossessing the Roma population. In particular, it will underline the gendered and racialized manifestations of such upward resource allocation. This approach is connected with the first school of critique of neoliberalism that focuses on upward economic redistribution and unequal resource allocation that create a deeper gendered, racialized and classed division. In this forthcoming book, I as a feminist scholar will use an intersectional approach and analytical frame to expose the structural, discursive, and biographical formations of neoliberalism.

Sypros Themelis (2015) argues that the current socio-economic crisis in a neoliberalised Europe further intensified the existing racial and social inequalities between Roma and non-Roma. He also propounds that the “capitalist reintegration of Eastern Europe has had devastating effects for the Roma, who, even before the transition, used to belong to the most vulnerable section of the working class in economic, cultural and political terms” (Themelis 2015:7). Themelis uses the parallel/semi-comparative analysis between the Holocaust of the Jews in the late 30s and early 40s, and the anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia in late capitalism to illustrate racialization as an act of concealment of rampant structural and systemic inequalities in Europe. He argues that the Nazi leadership constructed the Jews as the “evil within Germany society” to create a collective scapegoat. However, currently Roma have become a new collective scapegoat to mask structural inequality and injustice. This rhetoric of strategy helps to understand the logic of racialization and the mechanism of scapegoating, however it occludes the specificities (specific manifestations) of the given time period.

In addition, he suggests that there is a class restoration by using similar arguments as used by the neo-Marxist first school of critique of neoliberalism. He argues that, “shifting power from the poor to the rich and the further worsening of the position of working class, which is divided along false lines, is thusly prevented from taking action against those truly responsible for its emiseration” (Themelis 2015:16). In other words, he means the creation of the biopolitical border between white and racialized working/underclass to prevent class solidarity among the subordinated precarious populations in Europe. Instead of solidarity and defending the public institutions and demos, the system covertly promotes the racialization and collective scapegoating of Roma to polarize revolt against neoliberal structural oppression.

Local manifestations of neoliberalism based on race, gender, and class

I agree with Aihwa Ong’s approach to neoliberalism, who encourages scholars to look at the local manifestations of neoliberalism. In order to illuminate the East-Central European version of gendered and racialized neoliberalism, I will use some quantitative data to show the difference between Romani and non-Romani women and Romani men in the context of education and employment in Hungary.

There are only a few transnational survey datasets that expose the statistical discrepancy between the situation of Romani and non-Romani women and Romani men in Central and Eastern Europe. The most current comparative survey was carried out in various European countries in 2011 and was analysed from a gender point of view by Ewa Cukrowska and Angéla Kóczé (2013)⁵ commissioned by the UNDP. The same survey was also analysed by the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2013.⁶

The data show that the educational position of Romani women is lower in comparison with Romani men and non-Romani women. The UNDP report shows that the level of education of Romani women, particularly the total number of years spent in school is lower than for non-Romani women and Romani men.⁷ The report pointed out that, based on the research sample in the age-group of 16-64, Romani men spent on average 6.71 years in education, while Romani women 5.66 years. The respective data for the non-Roma age group are: men on average 10.95 years and women 10.7 years. The gender difference in the total years of education is higher in the Roma group. However, non-Romani women spend nearly twice as many years in education as Romani women (10.7 and 5.66 years respectively). Similarly, Romani men spend 61% of the time in education of what non-Romani men do (the same proportion for Romani women is 53%). The report concludes that Romani men are subject to an ethnic gap (significant difference between Roma and non-Roma), and Romani women are subject to ethnic as well as gender gaps when it comes to time spent in an educational system (significant difference between Romani men and women and Roma and non-Roma).⁸

The FRA report (FRA 2013) shows some interesting data concerning Romani women's employment status. The report states that the proportion of women who are involved in paid work is equal or even higher than Romani men in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. In Hungary, 32 % of Romani women aged 16 and above are in paid work compared with 26% of Romani men. In Slovakia, 24 % of Romani women in the same age group are in paid work compared with 18% of Romani men. In the Czech Republic, 36 % of Romani women compared with 33% of Romani men indicated to have paid employment⁹. The FRA report does not compare these data with non-Romani women and men. Therefore, the

⁵ The survey was commissioned by United Nation Development Program, World Bank and the European Commission. It usually is referred in various documents as a 2011 Roma Pilot Survey UNDP/WB/EC. They took a random sample of Roma and non-Roma households living in areas with higher density of Roma populations in the EU Member States of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and the non-EU Member States of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Serbia. As they refer in the data description, two parallel and the same time complementary surveys were carried out in 2011 in an effort to map the current situation of Roma in Europe. One of the surveys was focusing on the social and economic development of Roma. The UNDP and the World Bank carried this out. The other survey was focusing on the implementation of key fundamental rights carried out by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). In each country they interviewed approximately 750 Roma households and approximately 350 non-Roma households living in their proximity.

⁶ Analysis of FRA Roma survey results by gender <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/analysis-fra-roma-survey-results-gender>

⁷ <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Exposing-structural-disparities-of-Romani-women.pdf>

⁸ Ibid. 14 p.

⁹ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/analysis-fra-roma-survey-results-gender>

racial difference between Romani and non-Romani women who live in close proximity remains invisible. Also, the report did not provide any explanation for the increasing number of Romani women in the labour market, particularly in CEE countries.

Also, the report does not specify the nature of the paid work. Is it formal or informal employment, a permanent or just a temporary job? Based on my long-term fieldwork in the region as a researcher, my hypothesis is twofold. On one hand it coincides with global changes that have increased in East-Central Europe by the greater international and national economic liberalization (UNRISD 2012) as well as NGO-ization that provide more temporal, low-paid, precarious job conditions in various factories and in the NGO sector. In my interviews with Romani women from the ECE region, who are working in multinational companies as low-skilled and low-waged workers, they were complaining about their fragile and exploitative working arrangements via sub-contracting and outsourcing through a local company (Kóczé 2016 forthcoming). In the formal economy, besides low-waged factory and service jobs, there are several Roma non-governmental organizations that target Roma specifically and hire Romani women as part of a “women’s empowerment” projects that have been supported by international donors and EU funds (ibid.). Moreover, those who are working in various local NGOs also have very fragile employment statuses and depend upon the donor’s policy and financial support (Kóczé 2012).

On the other hand, Romani women’s involvement in paid work is also connected with the informal economy. In post-socialist countries the economic and social structural conditions and situational possibilities coalesce to give rise and support to economic practices that are illegal or unregulated by the state (Morris and Polese 2014). For example, in North-East Hungary, in one of the most disadvantaged micro-regions of the country, several Romani women whom I interviewed play an important role in human trafficking. In most cases women provide accommodation and catering to those persons who pay a trafficker in order to gain illegal entry to some other EU countries via Hungary. These practices are socially accepted in the local community because it is perceived as the only available and accessible economic opportunity. (Kóczé 2016 forthcoming).

As Ong draws attention to the local manifestation of neoliberalism it is important to understand that how Romani women respond to the complex social and economic local circumstances in East-Central Europe that produce both beneficial and deleterious effects to the Roma community and the larger society. As the 2011 Roma survey shows, the involvement of Romani women in paid labour has increased, however, it is not necessarily connected with their level of education and years spent in school. It is rather connected with the specific version of capitalism that has evolved in East-Central Europe. Marginalized and invisible groups for the formal economy, such as racialized Roma, need to find their (often) illicit paths to creatively reinvent and recreate a means of income that is facilitated by the neoliberal regime (Morris and Polese 2014). So, the economic condition that has been created by neoliberalism sparks difficulties for those who are functioning either on

the margins or closed into illegality and invisibility by the state and the formal economy. Paradoxically, this marginal position also opens up a possibility to create an alternative income and paid positions for Romani women based on reinvigorating local and familial solidarity via the involvement in an informal economy, such as the “benevolent trafficking practice” (Kóczé 2016 forthcoming).

“To give with one hand and take away with the other”

The International Labour Office (ILO) states that female labour force participation across the world increased from 50.2 per cent in 1980 to 51.7 per cent in 2008, despite declines in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ILO 2010). The significant variations in women’s labour force participation remain: high rates of around 60 per cent in the Nordic countries, and relatively low rates of around 40 per cent in Southern Europe. As illustrated above, Romani women’s employment patterns are very different from those of educated white Europeans, it is more similar to immigrant women of colour in Europe or women’s of colour from developing countries in Latin America, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan Africa, where there have also been some relative increases in women’s labour force participation rates. Nevertheless, some regions, notably MENA, started from a very low base (UNRISD 2012). Premilla Nadasen also noted that there is a significant increase in the low-paid, temporary, seasonal, part-time contingent service sector and outsourced manufacturing that mainly relies on immigrant women of colour (Nadasen 2013). Increasing, low-waged, vulnerable women structural positions in global production such as these have made it difficult to see improvements in wages and working conditions (Nadasen 2013; UNRISD 2012).

In 2009 and 2010 I had an opportunity to conduct a feminist comparative research project with the involvement of several Romani women who later established a Romani Women NGO, called *Szirom*. The research involved quantitative and qualitative analysis that compared the social and labor status of disadvantaged Romani and non-Romani women in the selected two micro-regions of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and Pest County (Kóczé 2011). This fieldwork facilitated the observation of the impact of global economic restructuring on the local level. Particularly, how labour opportunities and the elimination of the welfare system shaped and naturalized the gender and racial boundaries on the local level.

There is a global trend in the decline of demand for labour, especially for lower-skilled men with low education. This reduction reflects the broader economic restructuring and evolution of technology, automation and globalization within the European economy. The decline of male employment had a typically negative impact on household income as well as on the prestige of manhood (Kóczé 2011). In several Romani families when the man as a breadwinner lost his job due to the neoliberal restructuring of the market, then the woman becomes the breadwinner by being a low skilled, precarious temporal worker at some multinational company or service industry.

Many of them complained about their double days and their changing double roles as breadwinners and caregivers in the family. As I already argued elsewhere, this phenomenon is also typical in white working class non-Roma communities (Kóczé 2011). The reconciliation of their double roles would require some help and protection from a state, which is rather increasing the pressure on women with the lack of health and social services instead of providing support. The shrinking welfare state “outsources” its social services to the family unit. Presumably, these kinds of services need to be implemented by women in poor families, or these services can be done by some other service providers in wealthier families. This neoliberal condition paradoxically created more jobs for Romani women but also put more pressure on them to substitute for shrinking social and health services. This is a typical situation of giving with one hand and taking away with the other. The structural adjustment policies to diminish state redistribution that encouraged the operation through privatization of social, educational, and health institutions and withdrawal of funds from local social, health and educational institutions disproportionately disadvantaged Romani families. All these expenses have been transferred from the public sector to individual households. These welfare reforms were coupled with a specific narrative that replaced the complex arguments of structural oppression with the creation of individual responsibility in the last decade (Kóczé 2016 forthcoming; Inglot, Szikra, and Rat 2012).

Women’s empowerment through undoing the welfare state

Based on a non-representative online survey, 6,2% of Roma and pro-Roma NGOs declared that they specifically targeted Romani women (Kóczé 2012: 39). Many Romani women in East-Central Europe are employed by various NGOs under the banner of “women empowerment”. Aradhana Sharma persuasively argues that in the “contemporary neoliberal era, empowerment has emerged as a keyword effectively replacing the now much-maligned term welfare” (Sharma 2008:15). The mechanism of “end of welfare” or “welfare dependency” becomes coded as “empowerment” in a development world similarly to the use of empowerment in relation to Romani women in ECE. The concept of Romani women’s empowerment reflects on the Foucauldian conceptualization of neoliberalism that imagines it as a cultural project “premised upon a shift toward governmentalities that merge market and state imperatives and which produce self-regulating “good subjects” who embody ideals of individual responsibility” (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2013). Instead of challenging the racialized and gendered structural oppression, even feminists reframe and address these structural issues as an individual self-liberating and regulating project (Kóczé 2016 forthcoming).

In ECE, Romani women’s “empowerment” projects reflect on the rationale of the neoliberal state. Some projects related to Romani women are mostly compensating for the lack of welfare or replacing some specific social services from the state. For example, in 2011 there were several Roma Mother Centres in Hungary that were supported financially

and professionally by the Open Society Foundation's (OSF), Roma Initiative Office.¹⁰ These centres' aim was to act as self-help mothers' groups to facilitate access to services (health care, child care, education etc.), and to play an important community building role through common activities. The aim was that, in the long run, it might contribute to Roma self-organisation processes, and promotes the growth of advocacy skills and social inclusion. The Mother Centres managed by Colourful Pearls Association [Színes Gyöngyök Egyesület], and *Szirom*, the aforementioned Roma women's organisation located in Pécs and Szikszó. After approximately 3 years all Roma Mother Centres closed due to the lack of funding from Open Society Foundation, Roma Initiative Office.

Based on my observation, the program's concept was built on the logic of neoliberal state that mainly privatize and philanthropize social service. Steered by good intentions, they wanted to create a self-sustaining community day-care centre based on mothers' active involvement and voluntary work to address missing social, health and educational services for Roma families. Firstly, how can we expect from a low-income (no income) mothers to do a significant voluntary work to sustain a day-care? Also, besides all good intentions of the program, it further isolated Roma from the non-Roma communities and racialized social services at the local level. The program promoted the Roma community and individual responsibility to address structurally racialized and gendered oppression. Exactly as in the above mentioned Foucauldian conceptualization of neoliberalism as a specific form of governmentality that produces ideal "self-responsible" and self-regulating neoliberal subjects. The program does not problematize the role of the government, but assumes, claims and recreates self-responsible neoliberal Romani mothers instead.

Conclusion

Consequently, we as leftist feminists who criticize the pervasive nature of neoliberalism, must challenge and analyse the centuries old gendered and racialized hierarchies that established firm boundaries between Romani and non-Romani women in East-Central and Central and Eastern Europe. Variegated neoliberalism in the guise of liberation and empowerment further strengthens and deepens the structural oppression of the vast majority of Romani women. Even though statistically there might be some improvement in the employment and education of Romani women in the last decade as the 2011 Roma Pilot Survey proved it commissioned by the United Nations' Development Program, the World Bank and the European Commission. However, compared to non-Romani, white women's education and employment situation, the intersectional structural position of Romani women is still devastating.

¹⁰ My limited objective in this paper, is not evaluate the program in terms of its effects. I firmly believe that this would require a thorough empirical examination that would go beyond the current scope of this paper. My focus is to reflect shortly on the ideology and rationale of such a "women empowerment program".

For feminist scholars and activists who are mainly white middle class persons with a different lived experiences and “politics of location” need to change the lens of analysis and explicitly add the exploration of race and class. Is feminist solidarity possible in the absence of solidarity with the most vulnerable racialized women such as the Romani? We as leftist feminists, need to think and step further in the creation of politics of possibility to create a sense and structure of solidarity by transgressing the enormous social/geographical distance that has been created by the restructuration of late capitalism in East-Central Europe. We have to find a common ground with disadvantaged Romani women whose voice is unheard and whose perspectives are erased even from Roma related programs and policies. The challenge for critical feminists is to create a discursive and material change without reproducing the exploitative nature of neoliberalism. So, for critical feminists in addressing issues of race, gender and class in the era of variegated neoliberalism in Central and Eastern Europe, probably one of the first steps is to start a reflexive and critical internal debate and reflection on how can we think and act intersectionally, not just in theory but also in practice, concerning the structural oppressions and power difference of Romani women in Central and Eastern Europe. Without these painful and tiresome discussions we will not debunk the complex and elusive nature of neoliberalism.

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