Transgressing Borders:: Challenging Racist and Sexist Epistemology

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CHAPTER 5

Transgressing Borders

Challenging Racist and Sexist Epistemology

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What does it mean to have to create oneself from scratch,
in environments where one is not supposed to exist?
—Alexander G. Weheliye

Feminist critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) offers an intersectional framework for women of color to explain their multiple oppressions. She demonstrates how injustice and social inequality interplay in a multidimensional system. Intersectionality explains that various oppressions within society, such as racism, sexism, classism, and many other forms of oppression, intersect and interrelate, creating a system of multidimensional domination. It is never just about racism, classism, or sexism; it is always the combination of several oppressions that create the intersectional obstacles for Romani women in academia. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate how Romani feminists are shaping and maintaining the content of critical Romani studies by transgressing the constructed binary between activism and scholarship. Through candid confessions, Romani women scholars are exposing the intersecting dynamics between racism and sexism. Their claims challenge the academic epistemology to accommodate a new kind of knowledge production, where different knowledge sources and locations are connected and recognized.

The presence of Romani women in knowledge production evokes the question that was formulated by Alexander G. Weheliye (2016) in his public lecture, "Black Life": "What does it mean to have to create oneself from

scratch in environments where one is not supposed to exist?"[1] What does it mean to be a Romani woman in academia, where we are not supposed to exist as scholars? Undoubtedly, we have to create ourselves from scratch in environments that usually construe Roma/Romani women as subjects of research and never imagine them as scholars who inhabit a space where knowledge is produced or published in academic journals, and certainly not as theorizers of the forces that condition Romani lives. To be a Romani woman scholar is beyond the imagination of many scholars, who imagine Roma exclusively as activists and/or research subjects.

Critical Scholarship

Craig Calhoun (2008: xxiv) persuasively argues that activist social science is a very productive research paradigm: it "may inform both activism and social science by pursuing critical knowledge." He underscores that critique is a crucial part of social science; it is therefore important to understand how research could be different, and why existing theoretical frameworks do not explain the actual possibilities of lived experience. He explains this in the following way:

> Critical theory is not just criticism of other theories, it is an orientation to the world that combines the effort to understand why it is as it is (the more conventional domain of science) and how it could be otherwise (the more conventional domain of action). Precisely because of attention to possibilities of change, critical social science is often focused on the ways in which power, privilege, and self-interest as well as ideology and limited vision reinforce actually existing patterns in social life and limits on potentially positive change.[2] (Calhoun 2008: xxv).

Michael Burawoy's (2005) ideas resonate with Calhoun's stance on activist scholarship; he passionately writes about the growing gap between the sociological ethos and the world we research. He challenges sociology to engage with the public in multiple ways (see also Beck and Maida 2013; 2015). Civil society and NGO activism, besides their ambivalences (Kóczé and Trehan 2009) and internal hierarchy, are still important terrains to understand and engage with contradictions, as well as to reflect on their ambiguous politics; as Burawoy (2005: 25) argues, it is "the best possible terrain for the defence of humanity—defence that would be aided by the cultivation of a critically disposed public sociology." For many Romani feminists, civil society and NGO activism, despite their systemic contradictions pointed out in earlier work (Kóczé 2009; 2011; Kóczé and Trehan 2009), are still more accessible environments than academia. Most Romani feminists are still located in (or come from) NGO activism, from where they seek to create

a politics of possibility by connecting political/social activism and academic scholarship.

So, in short, activist scholarship is engaged with the public. It is a legitimate form of academic scholarship that sometimes lacks recognition from hierarchical academia, which privileges intellectual work to the detriment of active engagement. Andrew Ryder's chapter in this volume explores the debates around community-led research, engaging with the current debate in Romani studies, and comes to the conclusion that academics should appreciate the value of disagreement, as well as the use of different theory and methodology as instruments to create new knowledge and understandings. This message resonates with the seminal work of Sam Beck and Carl A. Maida (2013: 1–13), who suggest a more responsible role for anthropologists working with people, communities, and movements—that is, to engage with them in a way that they might benefit from the study. This "engaged anthropology" encourages collaboration with the people who are the objects of their studies, to create social change (Beck and Maida 2013: 13). This approach requires a change in methodology, and use of a different theoretical approach, even of developing an attitude that moves away from traditional anthropological observation, already largely contested since the seventies (Asad 1973; Huizer and Mannheim 1979; Harrison 1991a; 1991b; Scheper-Hughes 1995; Bennett 1996). In this chapter, taking stock of previous critical writings on knowledge production, I intend to bring to the fore the racialized and gendered lived experiences of Romani women in the academia, in order to highlight mechanisms of oppressive hierarchization, and argue for an epistemic change within Romani studies.

Romani scholars' gendered and racialized lived experience, as well as their social and political activism, provides a unique basis for theorizing the intersection of gender, race, and class. Instead of being discouraged, Romani activist-scholars should be supported by scholars who pursue critical knowledge and seek nonhierarchical and reflexive partnership. The way forward in Romani studies is to critically reflect on the hierarchical nature of academic knowledge production. This entails critical dialogue among Roma and non-Roma scholars, activist-scholars, activists, policy makers and those who implement policies, as well as those who have opportunities to create new knowledge-making avenues and horizons that were hitherto structurally and epistemologically denied to Roma. These changes will help us liberate our imagination and see Roma as equal partners in knowledge production, instead of Roma being objectified as the other and used as informants solely to enhance knowledge produced by non-Roma in hierarchical, nonegalitarian ways, and to advance their careers. Too often, Roma still feature as an ethnographic spectacle, instead of Roma activist-scholarship being recognized as an important contribution in its own right, by which academics may work

with Roma communities in determining their own futures. Although the move toward Roma activist-scholarship will be contested, I believe that it will gradually decolonize Romani studies, as well as challenge the structural conditions of intersectional racism and sexism, which constantly (re)produce and perpetuate existing racial and gender hierarchies and inequalities.

Challenging Racist and Sexist Epistemology

When the women's movement in the 1960s and '70s fundamentally challenged positivist epistemology and methods of social science, Romani studies was still dominated by non-Romani scholars and experts, and their hegemonic voices (in a Gramscian sense) were coined "Gypsylorists" or "Gypsyologists" by Roma and non-Roma scholars (Okely 1983; Mayall 2004). The most comprehensive definition of "Gypsylorists" is provided by David Mayall (2004) in his seminal work. He defines nineteenth-century "Gypsylorists" as those "who were particularly keen to show that their work and publications were an objective and scientific enterprise, and so would stand alongside any serious investigation, and were not just the indulgent pastime of amateurs. These miscellaneous writers, past and present, are frequently seen, by others and by themselves, as well, as Gypsy 'experts'" (Mayall 2004: 24).

One of the central critiques raised by Romani feminist scholars is about the non-Romani male domination of the genealogy of knowledge production (Brooks 2012; Kóczé 2011; Matache 2016a). One primary feminist assumption is that "truth" is perceived and explained depending on the specific subject position of the teller (Haraway 1988). Feminism also takes the stance from the 1960's slogan that the "personal is political," therefore any knowledge is political, regardless where it was produced (Harding 1986). There is no knowledge that can be purely objective outside the social context in which it was produced, or that can be detached from the positionality of the scholar who produced it (Naples and Gurr 2014). Feminist scholars—mainly women of color—expose, deconstruct, and critique sexism and gender bias in academic discourse.

For instance, Black feminist scholars Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Angela Y. Davis, Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, and many others provided inspiration and intellectual guidelines for Romani women scholars to think about gender, race, class, sexual identity, and other forms of oppressions as intersecting categories. Collins (1990) underscores that Black feminists need to challenge the very definition, as well as the content, of intellectual discourse constructed about Blacks, which is embedded in racial and sexist bias. This resonates with the scholarly endeavors of Romani women scholars, who, influenced by Black feminist theory, interrogate sexist

and racist academic discourse. The well-established knowledge by feminist scholars,[3] claiming that theories, epistemologies, and even scientific facts are produced from specific standpoints and interests, is still being contested in academia. Romani feminists, working from this understanding, critique some of the Romani studies scholars for continuing to believe in objectivity, as well for being reluctant to reflect on their own power position in the knowledge-making process (Kóczé 2018). For instance, Margareta Matache (2016a), the first Romani instructor at Harvard University, critically reflects on "Gypsy and Romani Studies" in the first part of her blog series, originally published in the *Huffington Post*:

> The work of early scholars served to reproduce the widespread racism and negative imagery circulating in the public that demonized Romani people and nurtured their exclusion. Gypsy scholarship not only contributed to racializing and dehumanizing Romani identities[4], it also reinforced the hierarchy, established through the means of policy and law, between white Europeans and Roma, and further solidified the social and political construction of whiteness/gadjeness, its hidden powers and value.

Ethel C. Brooks, the first tenured Romani woman scholar, critically points out that the "Gypsylorists," instead of exposing the racialization of Roma and the mechanism of structural racism, attribute the oppression of Roma to their culture. She poignantly explains: "In their [Gypsylorists] judgement, tautologically, our 'culture' explains our oppression, and our 'salvation' would preserve their superiority over our historically and socially determined practices and situations" (Brooks 2012: 4). Both of these Romani women scholars are bravely challenging the epistemology of Romani studies and the discourse of "Gypsylorists," which has had a long-lasting, hegemonic effect on contemporary structures of thought—crucially, even among some Roma, who internalized these representations (Acton 2016).

Gypsyologists/Gypsylorists' logic can be explained by using Max Horkheimer's delineation of the difference between traditional, positivist, and critical theories. Horkheimer (1972), in his essay *Traditional and Critical Theory,* argues that traditional theory is typically encountered in natural sciences, and pervaded other academic fields. Positivism claims "independent, 'supra-social,' detached knowledge" (Horkheimer 1972: 196). He argues that despite its assumed "neutrality," knowledge is derived from its very specific social context. He claims that the positivist scholar's knowledge is "incorporated into the apparatus of society; his [*sic*] achievements are a factor in the conversation and continuous renewal of the existing state of affairs, no matter what fine names he gives to what he [*sic*] does" (Horkheimer 1972: 196). The positivist approach brings a wide variety of facts into conceptual frameworks, in "a way as they fit into theory as currently accepted," (ibid.)

but keeps the status quo and the foundation of the existing state of affairs, no matter which and how many facts are introduced. In some ways, this reflects a pragmatic version of the institutionalization of biases (gender, racial, and others), combined with the sense of "objectivity" and neutrality that pervades Gypsyologists' writings (Acton 2016; Mayall 2004). Thomas A. Acton's (2016) seminal work on *Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society* analyzes the legacy of institutional racism based on the corporeal distinction between white superior men and inferior Romani others, something that I will discuss in the next section.

Race is a Practical Question

Feminist and critical race theory questions and challenges the status quo that benefits from the positivist traditional forms of knowledge production, which usually disadvantages women and racialized groups, and this is a reflection that has not yet pervaded Romani studies thoroughly. As long as we do not use gender and race as analytical categories, the effects of sexism and racism remain invisible. Particularly, Romani and pro-Romani feminists, who deal with racism and sexism in a practical way in their political activism, seek to talk about race and racialization in theoretical terms too (Kóczé 2018; Vincze 2014). Although the concept of race, as a social marker of difference, pervades all forms of social relations, in contemporary Europe (particularly in central and eastern Europe) the effect of race and the process of racialization are not sufficiently acknowledged by social studies or, as Balibar (1991) points out, there is a "racism without race," which shifts the focus from "race" to "culture," and builds hierarchies in which some cultures would be superior to others. The fact that Romani studies prefer to use "ethnicity" over "race/racialized minority" thus obscures systemic institutional racism, including in the knowledge production stemming from Romani studies itself (Kóczé 2018). For instance, in her second blog post, Margareta Matache (2016b) writes about the hegemonic approach in Romani studies that still emphasizes the exoticism or marginality of Roma, instead of exposing "systemic racism and cultural domination." She also critically pins down the hegemonic approach that fixes and essentializes the marginality of Roma in Romani studies (see also Ivasiuc, this volume). I concur with Matache: focusing only on Roma marginality, without a broader process of race-making and "othering" in various spheres of society, conceals the scales and manifestations of racial discourses and practices, as well as hiding, or disguising, racialized gendered hierarchical domination in European societies. The gendered racialization of Roma is a process of "othering" that has profoundly shaped and continues to shape the history, politics, economic

structure, and culture of European societies. Consequently, the study of race, racism, and theory of gendered racialization requires a significant shift in Romani studies.

Mathias Möschel (2014) eloquently explains the sociopolitical and historical development after World War II, which did not support critical race theory in European academic discourse. According to Möschel (2007: 70), "The basic ideological concept that racism consists of one 'dominant' group, mostly the 'white' majority, targeting other groups as being (biologically) inferior and then consolidating this ideology into legal, social and political rules, is common to both Europe and the United States." For Du Bois, race and racialization is not just theoretical, but also a practical question, one that happens in everyday life; it is a lived experience. As the first Black sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois obtained his second bachelor's degree from Harvard University before traveling to Berlin. According to his biography, Germany was the first place in his life where his blackness was not the most important and relevant thing about him (Levering-Lewis 1993). The white Germans perceived him as a "young American," Harvard-educated bourgeois. It was a liberating period in his young life because race did not define him and was not an obstacle to interacting with people. His description of this experience was that he became more human (Levering-Lewis 1993). Kwame Anthony Appiah (2014) explores the impressive life of Du Bois and discusses his German experience. In that period, Germany was not free from racial prejudice, but targeted a different racialized group: the Jews. Du Bois had to learn how to interact with people in a place where his race did not matter. He came to realize that it is possible to relate to racism and racial prejudice in a different way (Appiah 2014).

Race is a practical issue to me, too. I had to come to the United States to clarify my understanding of European Roma racism and my place within the feminist paradigm where "the personal is political." One segment of my racialized experience in an academic context is similar to what W.E.B. Du Bois experienced in Germany between 1892 and 1894 as a Black scholar from the United States. I had a very similar revelation being a Romnja European Fulbright visiting scholar, and afterwards a visiting professor at Wake Forest University, North Carolina. In the United States, my Roma identity is invisible; I am not racialized; being Roma is unimportant, while my gender is more significant. As a professor in Hungary, working in an academic context assumed to be liberal and progressive, the first and most important markers about me are my Roma identity and female body. This defines people's perception about me and my interaction with white academic colleagues. In the U.S. academic context, there is no need, nor urgency, to constantly prove my intellectual capacity, because I am perceived as a European intellectual. However, in Europe, where I am noted as a Romani woman (even

in Romani studies circles), there is a need to overcome the racial prejudice that is silently imposed on my inferiorized female body. It is a challenge for anyone, even with stellar academic skills, to perform under such a debilitating gaze. As Du Bois did in Germany, in the United States I have had the time and space to reflect on my racialized European existence as I contemplate and reflect on the lived experiences of my Black students in post–Jim Crow North Carolina.

Like Du Bois, I had to travel several thousand miles to gain trust and respect, and to experience liberation from academic gender and racial profiling.[5] To put this into perspective, I am not the only Romani woman in our European academic world who has experienced lack of trust and respect. Patricia Caro, a Romani feminist from Spain, whom I interviewed for my research, explained that non-Roma teachers (*Gadjé*) never supported her in pursuing an academic degree: "When I was growing up . . . I decided that I wanted to develop my intellectual capacities, though my *Gadjé* teachers told me that studying at university is not for Calis."[6] Caro also talked about a later, positive encounter with a professor who taught at the university: "It was the first time that a professor believed in my abilities and established a human relationship with me."

This experience can be pertinently related to what Sylvia Wynter (2003), critical race and cultural theorist, discusses, when she analyzes the hierarchization of black, brown, and other bodies that are perceived as "less than human," deviating from the deeply gendered and sexualized, normative white heterosexual and able bodies. The racialization of Roma and the ongoing construction—through sociopolitical relations, social and cultural discourses, everyday practices, and economic exploitation and dispossession—of a visible racial identity in popular culture are the manifestations of excluding racialized bodies from the category of "human" (Wynter 2003). According to Wynter, racialization, as a sociopolitical mechanism, systematically classifies people within a hierarchical relationship that identifies social groups as human, subhuman, and nonhuman.

Mills's (1997) theoretical elaboration on the "racial contract" exposes the devastating effect of unacknowledged racial presumptions that influence social relations. Mills (1997: 3) suggests that the "racial contract," as a manifestation of white supremacy, is itself an invisible, even hidden, social contract, "a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties." He criticizes and provokes mainstream philosophy for the omission of unnamed theoretical architecture, for justifying an entire history of European atrocity and violence against nonwhites and racially identified "others" more generally, such as the Jews and the Roma, from David Hume's and Immanuel

Kant's claims that Blacks had inferior cognitive power. Mills's "racial contract" classifies people into the system of domination by which white people historically ruled over and dominated nonwhite people. Similarly to feminist theory, which revealed how orthodox political philosophy is saturated by white male bias, Mills's explication of the "racial contract" exposes the racial foundation of Western political philosophy, challenging the assumption that mainstream theory is itself raceless, and problematizing thereby the racialized social relations at the very core of the knowledge production apparatus—academia. The current colorblind approach in European academic discourse occludes the structural racial violence against Roma embedded in a hidden "racial contract."

Rethinking and Reviewing the Conceptual Language

B., a Romani Ph.D. candidate in communication studies, deplored the lack of understanding of racialization and racial hierarchy in her academic program. She explained that "our [mainly Romani female scholars'] interest in critical race theory or postcolonial theory emerges from the inability of classical Romani studies to deal adequately with the perspectives of Roma, as well as the complexities of race as a lived experience and the effect of racialization. Race, racialization and racial identity remain unmarked in most of the studies on Roma." B. also explained, "When I am using critical race or postcolonial theory to explain the racialization and subordination of Roma, then I am ridiculed by my white academic colleagues. It seems that it's illegitimate to use a different theoretical framework, other than what they are using."

Romani and non-Romani feminist scholars in central and eastern Europe (CEE) are in the process of rethinking and reviewing the conceptual language that has been used by scholars on Roma. They opted to highlight the importance of using the social-political construction of race as a conceptual and analytical category (Vincze 2014; Kóczé 2018). Similarly to critical race theorists suggesting that race is not a transcending category that stands above gender, class, and other axes of inequality, they demonstrate that these categories co-constitute and recreate the subject position of the racialized person. Romani feminists (Brooks 2012; Izsák 2009; Kóczé 2009) were among the first in CEE to introduce and adopt intersectional theory (Crenshaw 1991) to challenge the normative hierarchical, gendered, and racialized structures.

The large body of Roma-related studies conceptualizes Roma as ethnicity, hence downplaying the shifting historical and social configuration of the racialization of Roma in relation to the nonracialized "white" majority.

The racialized lived experience of Roma is sustained by invisible, unmarked, and unreflexive hegemonic white supremacy, where Roma suffer the consequences of racism in most of the countries in which they live in substantial numbers and where, through their physical features, occupations, and other characteristics, they are recognized by the population as a whole as "Gypsies." As activist scholars, Romani or otherwise, we must lead the charge to theorize these phenomena and liberate scholarship and popular culture accordingly. The emerging critical Romani studies that is envisioned by a fragile minority of Romani and non-Roma scholars must critique the academic discourse that privileges the theory of ethnicity as the only or primary paradigm that frames Roma lived social experiences. Omi and Winant (2015: 21) convincingly show that theoretical trajectories of ethnicity-based theories are "an approach to race that affords primacy to cultural variables," which limit the reality experienced by Roma in public and in the academy. They also explain how ethnicity theory cannot capture racial conflict and that it becomes an ally of "colorblindness" politics that has created a new "post-racial" and "common sense" reality: "In a colorblind society, it is claimed, racial inequality, racial politics, and race consciousness itself would be greatly diminished in importance, and indeed relegated to the benighted past when discrimination and prejudiced ruled" (Omi and Winant 2015: 22). Omi and Winant (2015: 22–23) critique the construction of ethnicity as a cultural phenomenon and assert that theories of ethnicity "undermine the significance of corporeal markers of identity" that deny the historically accumulated and enduring injustices of people of color.

Silence and Invisibility

Judith Okely, one of the most reflexive feminist scholars in Romani studies, distinctly writes about her gendered lessons in academia. She asserts that feminist knowledge involves unsettling forms of power that are not equally open to all, in particular the power to produce authoritative knowledge (Okely 2007: 228). Richelle D. Schrock (2013: 52) points out that women's writing in ethnography has historically been undervalued, mainly because of the form they use and the nature of the content that includes personal reflections and narratives.

I interviewed several Romani women in academia, who complained about forms of condescending treatment and attitudes of "presumed incompetence" by their white colleagues; they recall situations similar to the experiences of Black women, Latinas, and Native Americans, who are still underrepresented in U.S. academia (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012). The expe-

riences of women of color resonate with those of a Romani female professor of linguistics:

> I think Romani women historically have been invisible, underestimated and not acknowledged for their contributions and their knowledge. The historical representation of Romani women shapes our existence in academia. . . . When I have been looked down on, I always wished I had more racially diverse colleagues, with whom I could share even these kinds of concerns. (L.SZ)

A junior scholar who started her Ph.D. in her late thirties explained,

> I have never been invited to any Roma-related research, even though there are not many Roma in academia. I participated only for one day in research about education of Roma, when I was nagging the research coordinator to involve me at least as a pollster. . . . I cannot gain research experience without participating in various Roma-related research projects. (C.)

Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, a young Romani scholar, reflects on her "impossible subject position":

> I found myself in a situation where my ethnic background began to bear relevance in the way I was treated in academia. Numerous times my objectivity was questioned: it was argued that not only am I Roma, but I am also an activist, so surely my "activist agenda" obscures my academic findings.

Her scholarly subject position was questioned in virtue of her Romani and activist background. Her "impossible subject position" provides a reason to dismiss, silence, and invisibilize her. In anthropology, decades ago, there was a similar argument: anthropologists could not be objective if they studied their own culture and society because their familiarity would render them uncritical; anthropologists were confined to researching unfamiliar cultures. This kind of limitation prevented anthropological research in Europe and in the United States, except for the study of indigenous populations. This way of thinking also created limitations on "native" versus "real" anthropologists, similar to what Roma scholars face. According to Kirin Narayan (1993: 672), this kind of polarization derives from the colonial setting "in which natives were genuine natives (whether they liked it or not) and the observer's objectivity in the scientific study of Other societies posed no problem." With changing times, this asymmetrical power relationship has somewhat changed; however, not so for Roma scholars, whose abilities to describe lived Romani racialized experience, and theorize their condition, are continuously questioned.

Grada Kilomba (2010), a feminist postcolonial scholar, spoke about the transformation enacted by Black women when they converted silence into

language and action. In her book, *Plantation Memories,* she talks about the unspeakable larger phenomenon described as a contestation of silence by Black scholars in a white academic world.[7] It should not be surprising that Romani scholars experience such positions of marginality that evoke pain and feelings of stigmatization in a predominantly white world. Kilomba (2008) theorizes the academic space as an oppressive institution regarding the representation of Black people:

> This is a white space where Black people have been denied the privilege to speak. Historically, this is a space where we have been voiceless and where white scholars have developed theoretical discourses which officially constructed us as the inferior "Other"—placing Africans in complete subordination to the white subject. Here, we were made inferior, our bodies described, classified, dehumanized, primitivized, brutalized and even killed. We are therefore, in a space which has a very problematic relationship to Blackness. Here, we were made the objects, but we have rarely been the subjects.

On one of her Facebook posts, one well-educated Romani woman critiqued the academic sphere as a place that silences, infantilizes, and patronizes Roma: "Non-Romani voices are still lauded as more legitimate when talking about Romani issues. We are still minimized in a way that implies some kind of parent-child relationship, that we simply cannot speak up for ourselves or recognize the injustices done to us daily because we are not mature enough as a people" (Q., Facebook post, June 2016). Aimé Césaire (2001) identified this language as a colonial technique of infantilizing and silencing the colonized.[8] In the twenty-first century, Roma increasingly have broken through the barriers to higher education and are entering academia, but Romani women have to confront additional barriers of white patriarchal privilege.

Activist Knowledge Production

Romani women, political activism, and feminist intellectual thought are deeply connected and embedded in the restructuration of economic, social, and political structures produced by market capitalism in central and eastern Europe. This ambiguous transformation in CEE, after 1989, created some space for activism and encouraged activists to transform silence into voice and action (Kóczé 2018). The knowledge that is produced by Romani and pro-Romani feminist scholars is essential to understanding the intersection of gendered and racialized oppressions under market capitalism in CEE. Most of them are deeply connected with social activism and academia. Subsequently, they are often disqualified as scholars and their work classi-

fied as "activist knowledge" by non-Roma, mainly male, scholars, who deem this kind of knowledge irrelevant and tainted by subjectivity. When I interviewed Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, she explained the condescension she felt in an academic context: "I felt put down and patronized by older non-Roma scholars who often acted as a 'know-it-all' authority, while I was 'just an activist pretending to be an academic.' I felt like I have to prove my academic merits and should work harder to prove my value as an early career scholar."

Black feminist and sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990: 202–3) succinctly explains: "What to believe and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail and shape thought and action." Regarding Roma-related academic discourses, one of the main questions is which version is the most dominant in social and political discourse. Who has greater credentials in the academic community? Who has the power to delegitimize knowledge experiences or views that are produced from a different position and epistemological perspective? I argue, in accordance with feminist theorists, that it always depends on the prevailing power and the validation of the privileged scholars in the academic community. The precarious scholars, such as the small number of rising Romani scholars, structurally depend on the validation of established, privileged scholars, who are considered the source of information about Roma (Hancock 2010).

Thomas Kuhn's (1962) classic *Structure of Scientific Revolution*'s central argument is that "truths" are formulated and validated within a specific paradigm. However, he also emphasizes that revolutionary breakthroughs in science often derive from growing recognition of contradictions and irresolvable internal conflicts within these paradigms, which are resolved by a process of change with the introduction of new ideas. Any science, including social science, is validated in a historical process that is always open-ended, incomplete, and in constant change.

Concerning academic validation, it is important to differentiate between epistemic authority and epistemic privilege: they are connected, but not the same. Marianne Janack (1997: 133) noted that "epistemic authority is conferred . . . as a result of other people's judgment of our sincerity, reliability, trustworthiness, and 'objectivity'; certain people are in a better position to 'see' the world than are other people." In contrast, epistemic privilege is socially more complex and tied to opportunities that are structured by gender, race, class, sexuality, citizenship, social network—even institutional belonging—and so on. Subsequently, this is also related to political power and control in a very specific historical moment. Those Roma scholars who can speak to the center either speak the validated language of academia, or speak via another scholar who has power in a mainstream academic context. Epistemic privilege is a flexible, temporal, and spatial position, conditioned

by those who possess material and symbolic power over knowledge production. In regard to knowledge-making about Roma, historically, the epistemic authority is claimed by non-Roma scholars and "Roma experts" or policy makers (Hancock 2010). Currently, the involvement of some Romani scholars in the establishment of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), or in the new academic program "Roma in European Societies" at the Central European University, offers a historical opportunity for Romani scholars to possess epistemic privilege.

Postcolonial feminist theorists also refer to the geopolitical structures of dominance and control, which provide more epistemic privilege for those who are located in a dominant (central) geography (Mohanty 2003). In the Roma-related knowledge-making process, it is native-English-speaking, Western-trained Roma and non-Roma scholars who maintain language and knowledge hierarchies and asymmetrical power relations. A significant number of Roma intellectuals from central and southeastern Europe have limited access to English resources and their work and efforts remain marginal or invisible.

The politics of location, standpoint, and positionality play an important role in knowledge-making. Sandra Harding (1986) argues that subordinated groups may offer stronger objectivity due to increased motivation for the subordinated to understand the perspective of those who are in power positions. This stronger objectivity and motivation to understand leads to the shift that occurs when subordinated groups, in this case Romani intellectuals within the new cultural institute and academic department, gain some epistemic privilege to influence cultural representation and academic discourse on Roma. It does not mean than this will be a perfect representation of Roma in the European academic canon; however, it will ensure that Roma lived and racialized bodily experiences will be gradually recognized and integrated. It might give an opportunity for social political activism to offer scholars political consciousness that can be transformed and theorized into academic knowledge. Activist scholarship provides us with a unique opportunity to learn from errors and to recognize the highly contextual, political, and conditional nature of knowledge production within social science.

Much of the important work done by the first generation of Romani feminists in mainstream academia remains invisible to the public because, instead of writing journal articles, they are more engaged in supporting the forthcoming young generation of Romani scholars. "We are taking all the emotional burdens which are attached to the token academic position that prevent our academic productivity," explained B., one of the rising Romani feminist scholars. There is an emerging young generation of Romani scholars who would simply not exist without the pioneering work of Romani feminist mentorship and their invisible labor in creating new structures and lineages

in higher education.[9] These types of work remain the unacknowledged labor of intellectual and professional mentoring in academia. Nevertheless, it is crucial to work with the emerging generation, as well as to offer a theorization for social and political activism, especially in underrepresented fields of academic inquiry, which can be shaped and developed by critical scholarship and activism (that, in itself, is also a form of knowledge), such as critical Romani studies.

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Notes

1. ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, "Alexander G. Weheliye: Black Life," YouTube, posted 17 May 2016, accessed 10 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0I6xGqMHns.
2. Craig Calhoun (1995) elaborated his vision about critical theory in detail in *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History and the Challenge of Difference.*
3. In the mid-1970s and early 1980s, several feminist theorists began developing alternatives to the traditional methods of scientific research. The result was a new theory, now recognized as standpoint theory, developed by Sandra Harding and many others, such as Dorothy Smith, Donna Haraway, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, and Hilary Rose. Standpoint theory caused heated debate and radically altered the way research is conducted.
4. Matache refers to Ken Lee's (2000) article "Orientalism and Gypsylorism."
5. There is a body of social science research that indicates racism and sexism in academia mainly targets women of color (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012).
6. Romani group in Spain, generally known as Gitanos.
7. See Kilomba 2008 for an excerpt, "Africans in Academia: Diversity in Adversity."
8. Originally published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* by Editions Présence Africaine, 1955.

9. For example, in 1996, I founded the Romaversitas Foundation in Hungary, which still provides mentorship and scholarship for Romani university students. In 2001, as International Policy Fellow, supported by Open Society Institute, Budapest, I introduced this higher education mentoring program in several central and southeastern European countries.

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