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# De-Whitening Romani Women's Intersectional Experience

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## ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the whitening of Romani women's intersectional experience by white feminist movements and its implications for the perpetuation of anti-Roma racism. It argues that the dismissal of race is not a mere oversight, but rather a deliberate political strategy aimed at maintaining existing power dynamics. The centralization of race as a political lens is explored as a means to understand and address the challenges faced by Romani women in their struggle for emancipation and political agency.

## KEYWORDS

Romani women; Roma dignity; decoloniality; white feminism; white sovereignty

## Introduction

I Ain't Your Sister!  
While you claimed your "sisterhood"  
My prima was forcedly sterilised  
To which you "sisters" were color-blinded!  
While you screamed "women rights"  
My mother was running from the police raid,  
To which you "sisters" remained silenced!  
While you claimed your "universal feminism"  
There were bullets running over my head,  
To which you sisters did nothing!  
While you "sisters" called my husband "the oppressor,"  
The State took my daughter from me,  
The school segregated my son,  
The system killed my father,  
And to which you "sisters" once again remained ignorant!  
Now . . . the Roma sister asks you "sisters"  
Who the oppressor is?

Over the past few years, I have experienced one of the most challenging tasks as a Romani woman, both as an activist and academic: discussing and theorizing about the struggle of Romani women in Europe. This epistemic struggle occurs due to the political unthinking of race and racism as a structural condition in Europe that shapes the lives of racialized people. The relevance of race is structurally denied in Europe. As Lentin (2008, 487) describes, "the silence about race in Europe allows European states to declare themselves non-racist, or even anti-racist, while at the same time continuing to imply an inherent European superiority (...) with those seen as 'in but not of Europe' within its domestic spheres." This denial is an integral part of the dominant narratives and political project of a raceless Europe (Goldberg 2006), primarily sustained by the idea that racism is a thing of the past, mainly connecting it to the Holocaust, thus leading toward the personalization and individualization of racism, which reduces its structural component. Academia as an institution that shapes power-relations is one of the pillars that placed the discussion on race and racism within the unspoken subtext (Goldberg 2006). While academia has been actively producing

knowledge about racialized people, it has been dominated by paternalist approaches that have excluded the historical and current structural conditions of the struggle. Academic institutions have also discredited, excluded, and/or silenced knowledge on race, racism, and whiteness produced by racialized people with the excuse that these types of knowledge are not scientific and/or objective enough. As pointed out by various racialized scholars and activists, this is a colonial practice driven by the idea that the racialized/subalterns have no knowledge of themselves and that they can only be explained by the power/white (Fejzula and Fernández 2022; Kilomba 2016; Tuhiwai Smith 2012).

Romani women are not immune to this European political framework of depoliticized culture that has institutionally converted them into permanent objects of intervention (Fejzula and Fernández 2022). Historical narratives that expose racial antagonism as embedded in the formation of modern societies are excluded. Consequently, the dominant policy and/or academic approach toward Romani women's intersectional experience is mainly from a gender perspective and has a civilizational orientation. In this reflection essay, I argue that this approach leads to the whitening of the intersectional experience of Romani women, becoming a new fashionable instrument to keep silencing race issues in Europe, to keep ignoring the racial experiences of Romani women, which are also addressed in the above-mentioned poem "I Ain't Your Sister!". As Bilge (2014, 1) explains, "in European academic feminist circles, intersectionality is seen as the brainchild of feminism and gender studies. This narrative puts gender at the core of the intersectional project and leaves out the constitutive role of race." It is within such hesitations that I am also writing this article. Despite the current academic feminists' demand to produce knowledge based on situated experiences, when the racial struggle is placed at the center of the analysis, evidence has shown that academia is not yet ready to question its own colonial production. Hence, decolonizing academia should not be a cosmetic operation but a political will to break up with its forms of domination, assuming that the political dialogue does not have to be based on academic standards. In fact, Sirma Bilge reminds us that hierarchies are also shaped based on:

whose texts are deemed foundational and included in the translated "canon"; who gets invited to major scientific events where the new knowledge product is launched and confronted by local expertise; who gets the credit for introducing it; whose career benefits from it; who are included to be a part of local expertise, who is side-lined; who is empowered by this introduction, and who is not. Thus, debates about intersectionality also reflect power struggles, opportunity structures, and turf wars internal to specific disciplines and fields. (Bilge 2013, 410)

This article argues that the depoliticizing of Romani women's intersectional experience is not a white mistake but a matter of power-relations. Taking the white feminist agendas as my object of study, I will point out that their mainstream approaches toward our intersectional experience reproduce anti-Roma racism by ignoring/silencing/diminishing our racial antagonism while notably arguing for the need for Romani women's salvation. The whitening of Romani women's intersectional experience by white feminist agendas is part of the broader anti-Roma framework in Europe which is that of integration/civilization. Therefore, I draw on the definition of white feminism by the decolonial thinker Vergès (2021, 4–5) as "civilizational" "because, in the name of an ideology of women's rights, it has undertaken the mission of imposing a unique perspective that contributes to the perpetuation of domination based on class, gender, and race." In this regard, dismissing race is not a naïve mistake but a political condition aiming to maintain power relations. My main argument lies on the foundation that Romani women's intersectional experience can only be understood if race is placed at the center of the analysis "as an essential axis of domination and oppression, shaped by political and institutional elements that operate in a relational way" (Fejzula and Fernández 2022, 392). This article aims to contribute to the theoretical and political discussions on (de)whitening the intersectional experiences of Romani women from a decolonial (feminist) perspective, as politics that "(...) assert[s] its right to existence" (Vergès 2021, 10) as racialized women. More concretely, the decolonial perspective allows the reading of white feminist agendas within the racial logics of Modernity, and it enables knowledge

production from the standpoint of “otherness,” “[...] providing a space for the voices and experiences of silenced ‘othered’ women [...]” (Manning 2021, 1204).

In the following section, I discuss the political framework prevailing in Europe in regard to anti-Roma racism. Next, I discuss the whitening of the Romani women experience by the white feminist agendas as part of that same anti-Roma framework. Finally, I conclude on the necessity to reclaim the centralization of race to challenge the erasure and silencing of Romani women’s experiences, demanding a more comprehensive understanding of their intersecting identities and the specific forms of oppression they face.

## Anti-Roma racism in Europe

As a Romani woman, I have found it challenging to place myself within notions of women’s liberation, women’s rights, feminism, democracy, and human rights. These labels have been emphasized in the exercise of white domination over Romani people for the sake of integration. This creates a dichotomy between Modernity and being a Romani woman because European modernity is built on the dehumanization of Roma, which stems from anti-Roma racism, defined in this article as a:

race-based system of domination that has historical roots in modernity and that obeys the construction of the European white man as the model of humanity, thus dehumanizing all others. As Roma, we are considered as not human enough, therefore, we are denied this political capacity of self-determination and, at the same time, to close the circle, this serves as a justification for the implementation of an “ideology of integration” that seeks to “civilise” us within what they consider to be civilisation. That is why, the battle against anti-Gypsyism cannot be limited to trying to change prejudices or certain misconceptions in the minds of the gadje, but to understand that this system of domination is rooted in the State itself and its institutions. (Fernández 2020)

To comprehend this dichotomy, it is necessary to pay attention to the historical construction of white narratives about Roma people depicted through white fictional representations. The Romani thinker Cayetano Fernández argues that the conception of “Roma history” is a white creation about us and our ancestors, a Gadji<sup>1</sup> view of us that amounts to nothing more than an ontological search for white identity and legitimation” (Fernández 2021, 205). Similarly, Matache (2017, 3) points out that “scholarly research has advanced the image of the uncivilized and uneducated Gypsies.” These historical colonial and civilizing approaches date back to the nineteenth century when George Borrow, one of the fathers of “gypsyology” (Fernández 2016), claimed “[t]he Romas have no history” (Borrow 1841, 159). He, among many other white scholars, policymakers, reporters, etc., have institutionally converted the Roma body into the permanent object of intervention: “as the intervened, the ones who are in constant need of interventions. This is because of the dominant understanding that we, as Roma people, are incapable of organizing ourselves politically, hence unable to govern ourselves” (Fejzula and Fernández 2022, 389). This racial exclusion has placed us to be in a permanent need of white salvation, and has also robbed our self-agency and autonomy. The historical racial construction of Roma people as non-European and non-human became one of the foundations of the imaginary European project of civilization. Narratives of dishonest and criminal Gypsies surrounded Roma in chronicles, and even humanists such as Jacobus Thomasius concluded that “these black-looking heathen foreigners, speaking a strange tongue, were not fully human” (cited in Lewy 2000, 2). Since then, the principal aim of states has been to control Roma lives, with various measures ranging from forced sterilizations of Romani women (see European Roma Rights Center, ERRC 2016), to cases of police brutality and placement in ghettos. The “Roma ghettos” in Europe serve as twentieth-century prisons without walls in which Roma lives are controlled by different state institutions such as police, social services, and education centers, all serving the same purpose: to control the uncivilized Roma people. This systematic control is driven by racial fear and historical criminalization of Roma bodies.

This racial context is particularly relevant to understanding how anti-Roma racism in Europe is dealt with, given that the political approach of “Roma integration” has become the ultimate goal of the Roma’s emancipation. In her analysis on the racist beliefs in the formulation and the implementation of the former EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, the Romani scholar

Margareta Matache (2017, 3) argues, for instance, that “gadjo stakeholders have designed legislation and policies for Romani children relying on a popular idea that Romani cultural patterns reject education, an assumption that neglects and simplifies the multiplicity of Romani identity.” According to Matache (2017), Roma integration policymakers have failed to tackle the continual racism, white privileges and power and their influence on Roma children. Although Matache’s analysis focuses on the policies for Romani children in education, her well established critique could be expanded to the entire former EU policy framework on Roma integration. The structural racism component of the Roma struggle and the role of whiteness in the oppression of Roma people have not been fully addressed in European policies. The exclusion of a clear and overt debate about anti-Roma racism has prevented the conditions for Roma’s self-agency, political definition, and participation. These civilizatory-oriented projects and initiatives have served the purpose of avoiding any political discussion of whiteness, its privileges, consequences, and possible reparatory measures, while “granting more symbolic and material value and powers to gadjo-ness” (Matache 2017, 10).

More recently, European Roma policies have shifted from a prevailing logic of integration toward a new approach based on political participation and the fight against anti-Roma racism, also known as antigypsyism. The current EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation for 2020–2030 has indeed received institutional acclaim due to its explicit inclusion of and reference to antigypsyism. However, altering the language and formulation of certain policies does not necessarily diminish their underlying civilizational and neocolonial nature, as exemplified below:

Europe has a duty to protect its minorities from racism and discrimination. We must replace antigypsyism with openness and acceptance, hate speech and hate crime with tolerance and respect for human dignity, and bullying with education about the Holocaust. Above all, we must promote diversity as a wonderful gift that makes Europe strong and resilient. This is why the Commission calls on all Member States to join the pledge to end racism and discrimination, which blatantly affects our large ethnic Roma minorities. We urge Member States to commit to a new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation to bring social fairness and more equality in all senses of the word. (European Commission 2020)

What we observe is a superficial and diluted incorporation of antigypsyism: vague formulation and moralizing narratives contribute to fostering a depoliticizing approach that fails to address the fundamental structural dimensions of anti-Roma racism. Consequently, this framework risks hampering the development of meaningful anti-racist initiatives that could foster Roma self-agency, political definition, and inclusive participation in emancipatory projects aimed at improving Roma lives. It is not my specific intention to analyze the EU Roma Framework itself, but rather to discuss the whitening of Romani women’s intersectional experience by white feminist agendas as part of the broader anti-Roma framework in Europe, as expounded in the following section.

### **Whitening the intersectional experience of Romani women**

The issue of Romani women in Europe has gained increasing attention in recent years, with a growing focus on intersectionality. Romani women activists and feminists have emphasized that their struggle is multilayered, with ethnicity,<sup>2</sup> gender, and class intersecting continually in their lives (see Kóczé and Maria Popa 2009). However, these intersections are often not recognized by white feminist agendas, leading to a need for new knowledge and practices that consider the experiences of Romani women:

Intersectional discrimination on Romani women within activist circles seem to affect some Romani women to move “back” to understanding of identity dimensions (such as “being Roma” and “being woman”) and inequalities based on “ethnicity” and “gender” as competing and not as intersecting. Intersectional discrimination Romani women activists face may also be the reason why recently some young Romani feminists expressed resistance to “gadze feminism” and a need to produce knowledge as “Romnja feminists.” (Jovanovic, Kóczé, and Balogh 2015, 12)

Despite their urgent call for systematic integration of this intersectional dimension into studies and policies aiming to improve the position of Romani women, anti-Roma racism and its effect on Romani

women are hardly addressed. This leaves historical and current issues such as Roma women's racialization, criminalization, and persecution to be an ongoing normalized practice. As mentioned previously, the notion of "Gypsy criminality" has been systematically employed as a means to target Roma individuals, reflecting the state's desire for control and order in contemporary Europe (Fejzula 2021). The association of crime with the Roma community has led to heightened control and policing of Roma "ghettos," often associated with drug-related issues (Fejzula 2021). An investigation conducted by the Barañ research project in 1999 revealed a stark overrepresentation of Romani women in Spanish prisons, with their numbers being 20 times higher compared to non-Romani women (Palomo 2002). The project aimed to analyze the history of criminalization and imprisonment of Romani women to avoid repeating past mistakes and identify areas for improvement or change within the Spanish context. While the Roma population in Spain represents approximately 1.4% of the total population, Romani women account for 25% of all female prisoners (Palomo 2002, 149). This overrepresentation far exceeds that of other traditionally marginalized ethnic groups. The author draws a comparison between the high percentage of Romani women in prisons and the Black population in the United States of America or indigenous peoples in Australia, highlighting the historical exclusion of the Roma from "normalized" sociocultural and economic relationships in Spanish society (Palomo 2002, 152). Despite the alarming overrepresentation of Roma individuals in Spanish prisons, the discussion of anti-Roma racism and its connection to security policies remains marginalized within Spanish society. Moreover, the structural component of this issue is often overlooked, leading to the reduction of police brutality incidents as mere "misbehaved individual actions" (Fejzula 2021, 296). According to a survey conducted by the University of Valencia (García Añón 2013), only six percent of white individuals reported experiencing a police checkpoint in the previous two years, compared to 22% of Latin Americans, 39% of Black people, 45% of Arabs, and 65% of Roma individuals.

Similar findings were observed in a 2008 study conducted by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). In 2016, the Pro Human Rights Association of Andalusia (APDHA) conducted a direct observation study of police checks at the main bus station in Granada, revealing a ratio of 12:1 for Roma individuals (Povic and Jiménez Bautista 2016). In their discussion and analyses of relevant research and policy efforts in regard to the situation of Romani women, Angela Kóczé and Raluca Maria Popa concluded that:

While policy studies and recommendations that include a focus on Romani women suggest certain advances on the anti-discrimination, gender equality, and human development agendas, they still fail to achieve an integrated and coordinated policy response to the exclusion, inequality, and discrimination experienced by Romani women. (Kóczé and Popa 2009, 22)

Based on the latest report published in 2022 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights,<sup>3</sup> there has been little change in the lives of Romani women over the past few decades. This report corroborates the findings of Kóczé and Maria Popa (2009). The report reveals that exclusion, deprivation, discrimination, and racism continue to be prevalent in the daily lives of many Roma individuals. In particular, Roma women face significant challenges. The data collected in 2021 indicates that Roma women have a life expectancy that is, on average, 11 years shorter than that of women in the majority population. Additionally, only 28% of Roma women aged 20 to 64 are employed (FRA 2022; 17–18). The data highlighting the ongoing racial antagonism experienced by Roma individuals in Europe is deeply concerning. However, it remains largely unnoticed in academic and policy discussions concerning the Roma community.

### ***White feminism and its (re)production of anti-Roma racism***

The exclusion of race in discussions and actions perpetuates the whitening of Romani women's struggles and overlooks the historical and ongoing effects of racism. It is imperative to dismantle the structures of power that perpetuate racial inequalities and recognize the intersecting forms of oppression they face. Even within white feminist agendas, which have traditionally focused on gender-



related inequalities, this issue goes unrecognized. White feminist agendas are complicit in upholding existing power structures (Espinosa-Miñoso 2014). According to the decolonial feminist Yuderlys Espinosa-Miñoso (2014), by focusing solely on gender equality within the current system, white feminism fails to challenge the broader structures of white supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism that perpetuate inequality and marginalization. This critique emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive and intersectional analysis of power dynamics. It is within such context of silencing race relations that I argue that processes of whitening Romani women's intersectional experiences form part of the contemporary approach to racism in politics.

The political slogan “we are all equal,” has indeed created a “silent protocol on race” aimed to contain the “reaction” to racism, rather than combat this historical and political phenomenon (Araújo and Maeso 2021, 187). Within the same racial silencing context, the claim that “we are all women” stems from the same ideology that aims to dismiss processes of racialization that allow white women to exist. Spillers (as cited in Broeck 2018, 26) argues that there exists no relation of differentiation between white women (“the empowered”) and Black women, but an antagonistic opposition (“nemesis”) between being and “nonbeing.” In contrast to white women historically marked as being inferior, a Black woman is marked by the “paradox of nonbeing” which aligns Black male and female existence as absolutely equal. Based on this antagonist opposition, the omission of racial considerations in European policymaking regarding the Roma community is not a mere oversight. Rather, it is a product of the broader political framework that perpetuates anti-Roma racism and seeks to integrate Roma individuals into society based on a civilizational paradigm. These approaches effectively silence the racial antagonism faced by the Roma community by solely focusing on ethnicity and culture.

In this regard, I suggest a decolonial feminist reading of the Romani women's struggle because it permits us to establish a basis for gender-focused approaches within a larger political context that often disregards the issues of race and racism, despite the ongoing oppression deeply rooted in racial relations. In fact, decolonial feminism, emerging as a response to the colonial governance of racialized populations, provides the analytical tools to critically analyze the racial logics of Western civilization and progress. It also enables us to develop strategies for liberation based on our situated knowledge and experiences with whiteness. As Vergès (2021, 12) asserts, “a feminism that advocates solely for gender equality while ignoring how integration exposes racialized women to brutality, violence, rape, and murder, ultimately becomes complicit in it.” Sara Ahmed (2021, 157) emphasizes that “whiteness remains invisible to those who inhabit it or become accustomed to its presence, even when they are not themselves white.”

Throughout history and in the present political landscape, white feminist agendas have actively participated in constructing and upholding a white order that equates civilization and progress with whiteness. Rather than being naive, these agendas have silenced racial antagonism and generated feminist knowledge solely based on the experiences of middle-class white women. This approach has led to the normalization of white feminism as the only acceptable form of feminism (Zakaria 2021). Through their whitening approaches, white feminist agendas depoliticize the experiences and knowledge of Romani women in academia and social movements, effectively serving the interests of whiteness and contributing to the (re)production of anti-Roma racism. Françoise Vergès (2021) further characterizes white feminists and their role in perpetuating the white order as follows:

As active accomplices of the racial capitalist order, civilizational feminists do not hesitate to support imperialist intervention policies, as well as policies rooted in Islamophobia and even “Negrophobia.” (Vergès 2021, 12)

Many racialized women, mostly decolonial scholars and activists, have criticized white feminism for its colonial, and thus racist, ideology (cf. Bouteldja and Contreras Castro 2017; Vergès 2021, among others), precisely because of its role in normalizing dehumanized relations between white and racialized women. As a Romani woman from North-Macedonia, I have witnessed the extreme exploitation faced by Romani women, including my mother, who work in precarious conditions cleaning the houses of white women. These Romani women receive low wages, lack employment contracts, and have no access to social insurance. This racial exploitation directly contributes to the significantly shorter average lifespan of Romani women compared to women in the majority population.

The comfortable life of bourgeois women around the world is possible because millions of exploited and racialized women maintain this comfort by making their clothes, cleaning their homes and the offices where they work, taking care of their children, and by taking care of the sexual needs of their husbands, brothers, and partners. (Vergès 2021, 2–3)

Very rarely, if ever, do we see white women, white academics, as well as white policies and strategies, challenging these hierarchical positions that are based on race. On the contrary, due to their structural ignorance, they have become normalized. On a similar note, Romani activist and scholar Alexandra Oprea asks, “[h]ow can one stand for women’s equality without examining racism within one’s own ranks and looking at disparities among white women and Romani women (e.g., in terms of earning potential, educational level, access to the justice system, treatment by law enforcement officials, etc.)?” (as cited in Kóczé and Maria Popa 2009, 22). Instead, during the last years, various international reports on gender-based violence against Romani women were published. For instance, according to a 2018 report, “poverty in Roma communities is both a consequence and a determinant of a lack of access to education” (Milenković 2018, 4).<sup>4</sup> The report highlights that gender roles come along with strict rules and expected behaviors, noting that Roma girls are brought up being told that their role is to become wives, mothers and housewives (Milenković 2018, 9), and that Roma girls who live in Roma settlements are not expected to complete their education or find jobs (Milenković 2018, 9). I argue that the production of any report on Roma communities, particularly one focused solely on gender perspectives without conducting a comprehensive analysis of the intersectional experiences of Romani women with the anti-Roma system (e.g., the educational system’s violence toward Roma women), perpetuates the idea of Roma as uncivilized people culturally unsuited to living in Europe. These imaginary ideas lead to the justified systemic persecution of Roma people and reinforce the perception that they are permanently in need of intervention. Additionally, the isolation of the discussion of an alleged “Roma patriarchy” from the construct of white patriarchy contributes to a misallocation of the origin of the problem. It deflects attention from the systemic nature of anti-Roma racism and the white perspective that underlies such approaches, instead promoting an essentialist understanding of Roma culture. Consequently, all these elements contribute to whitening Romani women’s experience and maintaining the status quo based on colonial ideology.

Therefore, it becomes crucial to situate white feminist agendas as an institutional political framework that contributes to maintaining whiteness and, consequently, Romani women’s racialization by reproducing the: (I) denial of Romani women’s self-agency; (II) invisibilization of race; and (III) whitening of their struggle. White feminists’ production about Romani women cannot be understood as isolated logics and politics. Instead, it builds upon and fuels a set of anti-Roma beliefs, practices, and politics embedded in racial formation and with a civilizing mission. In the next section, I conclude on the importance of centering race in the urgent call for decolonization within the struggle of Romani women. Centering race in the decolonization of Romani women’s struggle allows us to confront the historical and political forces that have shaped our experiences. By doing so, we can work toward dismantling the systemic barriers and biases that hinder Romani women’s empowerment and full participation in society.

## Discussion and conclusion: race as a central intersection

In Europe, intersectionality in practice is whitened in feminist studies and movements, as a result, so are the experiences of Romani women. In light of the decolonial (feminist) framework discussed above and the daily racial experiences of Romani women, I composed the poem “Ain’t Your Sister.” This poem serves as an effort to expose our realities as Romani women within what I perceive to be Anti-Roma Europe. It highlights the history of European racial silence, the interrelatedness of racially constructed institutions, and the universalism of white feminism. The poem represents the anger of a Romani woman, an anger that Sara Ahmed characterizes as a judgment that something is wrong: “we are angry about racism, about forms of violence and power that are hidden under the signs of civility and love. [...] Your anger is judgment that something is wrong” (Ahmed 2009, 49–50). This anger is



distinct from the stereotype of anger that has long been attributed to racialized women by the white imaginary vision. Instead, it is the anger that Audre Lorde describes in her discussion of racism against Black women:

My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding it, learning to use it, before it laid my visions to waste for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight. My fear of anger taught me nothing . . . Anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification . . . Anger is loaded with information and energy. (Lorde 1984, 127, quoted in Ahmed 2009, 51)

This anger of a Romani woman underscores the manipulations of intersectionality as a theory and practice in relation to our experiences, due to its “silent protocol on race” - a consequence of whitening the theory of intersectionality, in order to “rearticulate it around Eurocentric epistemologies” (Bilge 2014, 16). As Romani scholar Angéla Kóczé (2011) has correctly analyzed, intersectionality offers us with instruments for further developing our knowledges about the political and social activism as interconnected practice aiming at questioning the structural reproduction of inequality. However, when intersectionality is solely focused on gender (e.g., in cultural practices), it can (re)produce and/or (re)enforce the notion of “uncivilized Roma bodies.” In this article, I conclude that this depoliticization of the Romani women’s struggle leads to “neutralizing the critical potential of intersectionality for social justice-oriented change” (Bilge 2013, 405). Moreover, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) has pointed out, “political actions that tackle only some subordinating ideas and actions while not questioning the upholding hierarchies, the consequence is in oppositionalizing race and gender discourses” (pp. 112–113). In this piece, I discussed the pressing need to centralize race in order to decolonize Romani women’s struggle; namely, the need for de-whitening Roma women’s intersectional experience. Doing so would provide the theoretical and political tools necessary for interpreting the power relations maintained over Romani women, and it would allow them to speak from a position of authority and have the right to define their own realities and identities (hooks 1989).

When addressing the Romani women’s intersectional experience from a decolonial perspective, centralizing race allows for the following interpretation. First, it places Romani women’s experiences as crucial in the process of dismantling anti-Roma racism by centering racially marked experiences as political processes of racialization.

Second, it rearticulates, reinterprets, and places the category of “woman” within the context of whiteness. Following Lugones (2007) proposal, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized should be interpreted in terms of gender, race, and sexuality. For Lugones (2007), this requires a re-reading of modern capitalist colonial modernity itself. The author argues that this is vital due to the colonial imposition of gender, which manifests in different forms, to see what is blurred in our understanding of both race and gender.

Third, it undoes categories such as “diversity,” “interculturality,” and “multiculturality,” which serve only as politics of representation rather than leading to structural changes regarding the experiences of Romani women. These categories are once again used to dismiss any discussions on racism, thereby excluding any reparatory measures and anti-racism projects of liberation. Hence, it is necessary to recognize the limitations of not understanding the historical perspective of anti-Roma racism as a matter of structuring order.

Fourth, it creates an anti-racist Romani women’s struggle with a political agenda. The anti-racist struggle entails the opportunity to critically interpret the universal order in which we live, allocate key counter-hegemonic narratives that prove the continuum of anti-Roma racism, while simultaneously rejecting the project of modernity. As a result, this would also mean an epistemic potentiality to disturb any type of integratory approaches to anti-Roma racism that Romani women face. Understanding the anti-racist struggle as a project of liberation requires challenging the idea of universal feminism and the neoliberal thinking of liberation to move beyond notions of inclusion or integration. In short, it requires the ability to trace the connections between feminism as a progressive movement and the racial logics inherited by European White Modernity. Centering

race allows for the possibility of breaking with the idea of humanism established after the Second World War under the umbrella of “we are all equal,” which pretends there is no race and racism in the formulation of the human.

In summary, these four elements/interpretations enable us to formulate theoretical and political strategies aimed at de-whitening Romani women’s intersectional experiences and facilitating the accomplishment of liberation initiatives.

## Notes

1. “*Gadje*” in the plural, and “*gadjo*” and “*gadji*” as the masculine and feminine forms, are Romani words which refer to non-Roma or white people (Fernández 2021).
2. Please note that the inclusion of the term “ethnicity” in the mentioned sentence is solely due to its usage by certain Romani feminists and activists. This usage is the product of wider historical and political categorization of Roma as an ethnic group, emphasizing their cultural identity. Analyzing Roma related issues from an ethnic point of view limits our ability to recognize and address the underlying structural condition of anti-Roma racism, specifically rooted in whiteness. By recentring the concept of race, I aim to also move away from the very problematic “ethnicization” of the Roma, which has dominated Romani studies.
3. “This report presents findings from FRA’s 2021 survey on Roma in Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain, as well as in North Macedonia and Serbia. The survey includes interviews with more than 8,400 Roma, collecting information on more than 20,000 individuals living in their households. By focusing on Roma, the survey provides unique data and information that are not available from European general population surveys, which do not disaggregate on grounds of ethnic origin. The findings present a bleak but familiar picture of exclusion, deprivation, discrimination and racism.” (FRA 2022).
4. This report was produced by the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub. For more detailed analyses visit: <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/nowhere-turn-gender-based-violence-against-roma-women>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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