

Article

by Georgiana Aldessa Lincan



Embracing diversity through intersectionality

I identify as a Roma feminist and activist.

Even if I expect people to know about the Roma community I am often surprised to understand by the look of the people when I say I am a Roma feminist and activist that they do not understand what I mean by Roma. And it is because often people call the Roma community by using the negative “G” word (gypsy) which is a slur.

Why is it wrong to use the "G" word?

First, it is because "gypsy" has a pejorative meaning and it is associated with negative things in different languages. For example in the Romanian language the form is "țigăni" and the word is coming from the Greek language "atiganos" which means a person that you cannot touch, who smells bad, etc, or in other countries "gypsy" people are seen as those free-spirited people who are dancing and they are always happy. No, in reality, the Roma community is very diverse and it is not right to generalize. Secondly, we have a language, Romani language which is different from the Romanian language. It is rooted in Sanskrit, and in our language, the "g" word does not exist.

Even though there are Roma people who are using the "g" word for themselves it does not mean that gadje (non-Roma) people can do it. Many Roma people do not know about our own history. Romania enslaved Roma people for 500 years and we talk very little about this part of history. I found out about our history when I was 18 years old when I got in contact with the E-Romnja Association for Promoting Roma Women Rights.

Who are Roma people?

Roma people are the biggest minority in Europe. We have a language, which is rooted in Sanskrit because our roots are from India. One thousand years ago Roma people migrated from the North of India to different parts of the world: Europe, the Middle East, America, etc.

This year on the 8th of April, the International Roma Day we celebrated 50 years since the International World Romany Congress took place in London in 1971 when activists across Europe came together and established at an international level 8th of April as the International Roma Day, an anthem and an hymn for our Roma community symbols of our identity.

The Roma community is facing racism, discrimination, segregation, and marginalization for centuries. We still have communities in the 21 century where Roma people live and there is no access to water and asphalt streets.

What is Roma Feminism?

As Roma women, we have multiple identities and most of the time our issues are not either part of the anti-racist movement or by the feminist mainstream movement. So, the concept of Roma feminism was created in order to speak about the multiple identities and multiple struggles of Roma women.



What is intersectionality?

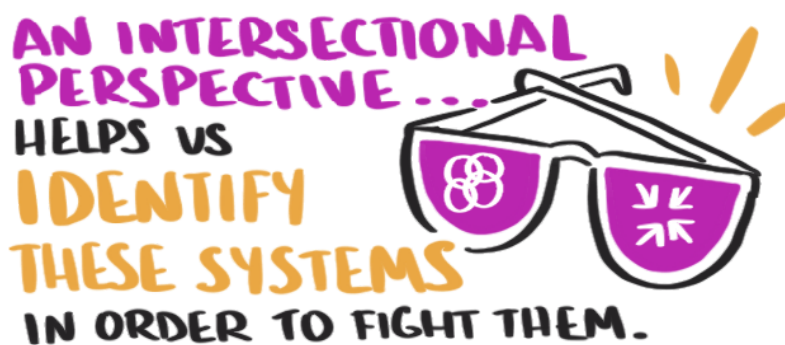
Intersectionality is the concept that focuses on the multiple identities of individuals and on the system of oppressions that are overlapped. It was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black feminist woman and a law professor at the University of California. It is very important to know that intersectionality is rooted in black feminism.

Crenshaw explained intersectionality in how black women were discriminated against in the labor market by not having access to jobs as white women and black men were having.



Through time the concept of intersectionality has received many definitions and it was completed with more identities, different perspectives and life experiences which makes the concept of intersectionality so complex. But the most important thing we should keep in mind is that intersectionality focuses on the voices of the most vulnerable groups that are part of our societies.

We may think that intersectionality it's difficult to put into practice. Yes, it is difficult. So that are the systems of oppression that affect individuals based on their multiple identities like gender, race, class, sexuality, age, religion, color, disability, etc. Systems like racism, sexism, and classism are not easy to deal with either.



Why it is essential to today's feminist movements?

It is essential because the theory of intersectionality helps us see the inequalities that exist within the societies we are part of. Intersectionality theory emphasizes the differences between women, the diversity of a person's identities, the struggle for empowerment, solidarity, and at the same time it shows very clearly the power relations within the society, community, the oppressions, and privileges.

As feminists our role should be to equalize the balance of the systems of inequalities and to make us all aware of how to use our privileges, step back and bring the most vulnerable voices in the front.

Only in this way, our feminist fight will be successful to achieve gender equality.



How can your organization develop an intersectional perspective and incorporate intersectional approaches in your practice?

- ★ First of all, acknowledge that people have multiple identities and multiple struggles which means that for some of us it is more difficult to have equal chances.
- ★ People are discriminated against based on the intersection of their identities. Do not see one identity as separated. For example, Roma women are discriminated against based on their gender, ethnicity, and class. It is impossible to choose one identity. Also, Muslim women - they are discriminated against based on their gender and religion, trans black women are discriminated against their gender, race, color, and so on. And then we need to address the problem by taking into account all the identities of a person, not by reducing the person only to one identity and create intersectional policies.
- ★ Really hear the voices and needs of those most affected by the systems of oppression.
- ★ Step back and support them to speak for themselves and for their communities.
- ★ Create partnerships and collaborate with people/NGOs who are doing grassroots work in the communities.
- ★ Develop projects and campaigns in order to give access to resources and spaces.
- ★ Change laws.

HOW TO INCORPORATE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES IN YOUR ORGANIZATION & PRACTICE?

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT PEOPLE HAVE MULTIPLE IDENTITIES & STRUGGLES	DO NOT TAKE THESE IDENTITIES SEPARATELY, BUT AS ONE	REALLY HEAR THE VOICES OF THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY THE SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION
	DEVELOP PROJECTS TO PROVIDE RESOURCES	STEP BACK & SUPPORT THEM TO SPEAK BY THEMSELVES
	CREATE PARTNERSHIPS WITH GRASSROOTS NGO'S AND INITIATIVES	ADVOCATE FOR LAWS WITH AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

- Apply the concept of intersectionality in all your projects and activities. If you work with youth, organize workshops and tackle the topic of privileges and inequalities.
- Talk about the different contexts in which people can live and how this context makes young people not to have the same equal chances and opportunities.
- Develop projects and criteria of participation in a mentorship program or a youth exchange project by taking into consideration to give priority to the most vulnerable young people.

RESOURCES:

- <https://www.womankind.org.uk/intersectionality-101-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important/>
- https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality/transcript#t-1116240
- <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>
- <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>
- <https://bridge-magazine.net/?p=619>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJYZp8aph1g>
- <http://e-romnja.ro/2021/04/05/intersectvoices-in-europe-combating-discrimination-against-roma-women/>

*Embracing diversity series***ID TALKS** *intersectional*

“MY FEMINISM WILL BE
INTERSECTIONAL, OR
IT WILL BE BULLSHIT”
— FLAVIA DZODAN



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On behalf of the SALTO Inclusion & Diversity!

