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LESSONS FROM ROMA FEMINISM IN EUROPE

Digital Storytelling Projects with Roma

Women Activists from Romania, Spain and
Sweden

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Abstract

This multi-sited ethnographic research explores Roma feminism through the stories of Roma women activists participating in Digital Storytelling projects in Romania, Spain and Sweden. Drawing from relevant feminist theory and debates (intersectionality and Roma feminist theory, transnational feminism, liberal and cultural/different-centered feminist thought), these stories are understood in dialogue with different theoretical perspectives that both reproduce patterns of conflicts in feminist thought and create new ways of understanding feminism and solidarity based on a transnational context. The Digital Storytelling method was mainly supported by Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) and feminist theories on knowledge production, which helped the research participants discuss feminist theory grounded in their activist experiences, beyond and as a critique to the academia. The projects conveyed the nuances of everyday life for Roma women activists: the perceived conflict between ‘community’ and ‘feminism’, ‘picking one’s battles,’ the self in a collective, the personal and political, family and expectations, compromises, mental health and the stress of everyday life, education and employment, oppressive notions of strength and weakness within the activist community, self-expression and the struggle with sexuality. Interestingly, this project also enhanced fruitful contradictions in discussions on identity. Understanding these stories as theories, Roma feminism was explored in the connections between theory and practice.

Keywords: Community, solidarity, transnational feminism, Roma feminism, intersectionality, migration, diaspora, multi-sited ethnography, participatory action research, digital storytelling

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Chapter I: Introduction

<p><i>Yo tengo las ojos marrones, y tú los tienes verdes, pero vemos lo mismo. Lo vemos todo igual pero lo vivimos diferente. Tu gente es fuerte; la mía es vulnerable porque no tenemos ni ciencia ni memoria. Quizá mejor así. Si las gitanas tuviéramos memoria moriríamos de angustia.</i></p>	<p><i>Nu-ți uita numele copil de țigan prin ochii tăi se vede inima poporului risipit ca firul nisipului la marginea mării. ... Nu-ți uita numele copil de țigan lacrimile tale sunt ploaia cerului din Rădăcina Pământului încât Cântul Libertății va fi Drumul Numelui vostru acolo.</i></p>	<p><i>Tig inte längre Nej, tig inte längre du folk som fått ditt ansikte av solen, mitt folk med ansiktet brynt av tusen års eldar, bronsbeslöjat, skimrande som den klaraste stjärnan när skymningen faller. Vi teg i årtusonden men våra hjärtan är fyllda av outtalade ord likt havet som fylls på av flodens blåa vatten oavbrutet</i></p>
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1.1 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

These powerful Roma poems were written in and/or translated to three languages, Spanish, Swedish and Romanian, by Bronisława Wajs (known as Papusza or the mother of Roma poetry), Luminița Mihai Cioabă and Dezider Banga. I chose these poems as an introduction to the transnational approach of my research, and to evoke a more intimate understanding of stories and experiences of pain in the community. Further, these poems call for our solidarity to end the violence that has imposed silence on the Roma community for centuries, which is the main driving force in this research project, rooted in social responsibility, intersectional feminism and the value of dialogue from the margins.

Over the course of writing my thesis, I have dedicated myself to listening to and trying to capture the stories and dialogues of Roma women activists and community members in my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Romania, Spain and Sweden. These stories were recorded and produced in collective efforts using a method called Digital Storytelling, understood as and through feminist theory, and materialized, with the participants' selection of

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images to build personal narratives and transform them into digital projects. Through these stories, I have gained new lessons from Roma feminism, which serve to challenge my own feminist perspectives and praxis.

‘Giving voice’ is not my intention; I am interested in the learning experiences entailing new emergences, notions and inquiries from Roma feminist dialogues. This interest can be explained by my past activist experiences. Inspired by and volunteering alongside Roma women in Gothenburg since 2016, supporting the establishment of and taking Roma-led language classes as a response to antiziganist attitudes in Sweden, I wanted to understand more about and listen to Roma women activists’ stories and experiences, but above all, through the lessons learned from Digital Storytelling projects, explore Roma feminism in transnational dialogues within feminist activism and feminist theory. Personal relationships to Roma women and their families, developed out of these networks, gave me additional incentives to approach this examination. Consequently, as a student in Gendering Practices, I wanted to include Roma women as a feminist subject in the analysis that we engage in. First and foremost, I wanted to open up new feminist dialogues where Roma women’s voices matter and their experiences, knowledge and demands are taken seriously, in addition to exploring the ways in which Roma feminism can enrich feminist research and sustain new transnational feminist networks. Thus, the aim of the study is to examine feminist knowledge production in a Roma women’s activist context, exploring the constituents of feminist knowledge and the ways in which it emerges in this particular context, by learning from Roma women activists and Roma feminist scholars. This examination is significant given the community’s relationship to mainstream debates, knowledge production and the academia. Second, I aimed to learn more about how Roma feminism can help me challenge my own feminism and feminist praxis.

In addition, my intention is to combine research and activism to help build a participatory platform to support new forms of activism through dialogue, reflections and self-expression for Roma women in feminist networks in Europe. I found that the best way to support such networks was to visit the largest communities in Europe and speak to community activists directly. This approach stems from limited research and biased literature on Roma women in Europe, with undertheorized Roma feminist perspectives, assumptions of homogeneity and lack of diversity in policy documents and discourses from and within national and supranational political contexts that frame Roma subjects in simplified matters or directly discriminate. Roma feminist critiques concern EU-funded research on the community, as well as the scholarly community of Romani Studies, to which many activists belong, as both sources of research are essentially controlled by Western civil society, non-Roma or male community

members, ignoring Roma feminist demands (Corradi, 2017; Morell, 2016; Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015).

In my pursuit of this thesis, I also aim to challenge the anti-Romani sentiments in Sweden, where I grew up and currently live, which has witnessed an increase in racist, antiziganist political proposals, especially since Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union (EU) in 2007, which resulted in increased cross-regional mobility in the EU for the Roma minority group. One of the main events that inspired me to conduct this study is last year's proposal to criminalize begging from Vellinge Municipality (Länsstyrelsen Skåne, 2017), which would disproportionately affect lower-class Roma who, in the face of structural inequalities, rely on begging for survival, many of whom are women. The proposal concerns the collection of money in public places, defined as a place which is, by law, available for the public and exemplified as a street, road, squares, landscapes and parks, indoor and outdoor areas that are utilized by public transportation means, certain harbor areas, and areas or facilities that are supported by local laws and used for the purpose of sports, camping, hiking, swimming, playgrounds, railways, and funeral sites (LS, 2017, p.2). It further states that a public place cannot be used without permission from the police, unless the activity is temporary, with insignificant effect on the surroundings and given that this space does not cover an area which is lawfully occupied to be used for a certain activity. Vellinge Municipality asserts that to collect money for any purpose, whether it is for charity or for individual reasons, ought to require permission from the police, unless the collection is a part of a larger assembly or public event, in combination with street performances. Following such restrictions, the Municipality demands that begging should require permission (LS, 2017, p.2). Stating this, my intention is not to reproduce the stereotype of the Roma beggar, but to critique the Swedish discourse in which the Roma community is largely associated with begging, its influence on this ill-intended proposal, and importantly, to stand in solidarity with class struggles.

The ways in which I seek to make a difference in the field with my research are in terms of methodology, the understanding of knowledge beyond academia and the use of my student-activist position to support Roma feminist networks both during and after the research process. Most of the research I initially identified on Roma women in Europe focused heavily on Roma women as mothers and their reproductive health or child care. Some of the research pointed to equality measures and EU initiatives, most of which involved case studies that failed to capture the complexity of Roma women's needs and lived experiences in Europe outside of a measurement framework. This led me to explore alternative methodologies like FPAR and Digital Storytelling. The questions that guide my research are the following:

- How can the dialogues of Roma women activists and feminists enrich feminist inquiry and debates? What lessons can we gain from Roma feminists based on this Digital Storytelling research?

These questions are relevant because they recognize the legitimacy of and agency embedded in Roma feminist demands. In response, I argue that Roma feminism problematizes the notion of education as well as the focus on identity in intersectionality while it simultaneously strengthens intersectionality as a tool by adding new categories to the intersectional model and integrating elements of transnational feminism and solidarity across borders.

1.2 Methods, Limitations and Positionality

My project employs two main research methods: 1) multi-sited ethnography in Romania, Spain and Sweden, including interviews with Roma civil society and activist networks as well as one representative from the EU (Soraya Post), and 2) Digital Storytelling (DS). The interviews facilitated the Digital Storytelling projects and supplied information to the Background section, but the Digital Storytelling method and its material are the most significant for this research. The interviews with civil society were semi-structured and mainly carried out to investigate the different national contexts, histories of migration, discrimination and activism. The open-ended method of Digital Storytelling as a medium for Roma women activists' stories and expression constitute the focus of this research. Six interviews were conducted with Roma activists from the following NGOs: the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (PCRM) and the Roma feminist network E-romnja in Bucharest, Romania; Federación Nacional de Asociaciones de Mujeres Gitanas Kamira (the National Federation of Roma Associations in Spain) in Córdoba, La Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas Romi (The Roma Women Association) in Granada; and finally, Trajosko Drom [the Journey of Life] in Gothenburg, Sweden. These six interviews paved the way for nine individuals' involvement to produce the total of five Digital Storytelling projects (two in Romania, two in Spain and one in Sweden). Pre-Digital Storytelling, the first contact and introduction was initially facilitated by Roma civil society, except for one case, where I independently followed up on a suggestion from my own activist networks; however, civil society was no longer involved after the first meeting. The research participants shared different positions in their networks, ranging from directors to activists and community workers. Establishing a common ground and engaging in dialogue, from the beginning until the end, from production to editing, each participant and I worked collaboratively to produce these projects.

I chose the open-ended approach of the Digital Storytelling method to prevent my own voice from framing the projects. Another limiting factor concerns the criteria of participants.

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The research participants in the Digital Storytelling projects include Roma women who have connections to feminist and activist networks and NGOs. Despite the fact that they hold various positions, they have previously been exposed to political mobilization, which can imply aspects of privilege and the equipment of certain analytical tools to participate in feminist research. Further, it was a conscious choice not to focus on policy and supranational (EU) initiatives, as I found that there was already extensive research on Roma women that focused specifically on policy and how to implement policy for Roma inclusion and similar EU-projects. Neither did I aim to enhance policy as a holistic approach to social change, that such measurement framework is enough to describe European Roma women's experiences, needs, interests and demands, nor that the EU holds a solution to what has been framed as 'the Roma issue'. Finally, this thesis does not aim to speak for Roma women who have not been present or participated in these projects, or to generalize about the community as a whole. Fundamentally, as these stories can be particular to the individual, to a certain collective and the networks that are accessible in the regions I have visited, or influenced by inequality and factors of time, energy, money or mobility that enable reflections upon these matters, these digital projects present local views and do not necessarily address themselves to multiple sites within each context. My positionality and personal biases, too, are interrogated to understand the limitations of the study.

Coming from a mixed background and constantly navigating the borders of Swedishness and otherhood, sometimes forced to adopt lifestyles and attitudes that my surrounding environment deems appropriate, being the 'good' immigrant girl in the eyes of the Swedish society, thus becoming the assimilated 'fake' in the eyes of immigrants, I have not had the power to negotiate my own identity. On top of that, as a mixed-race Swedish-Iranian woman, objectification and exotification is largely a part of encounters with white men, understood as either seductive or 'wifey material', despite my lack of consent to any of these categorizations. I share some of these experiences with my research participants. For example, I was told about the shame of having a "non-white" last name. Some of them had changed their last names completely, or just a letter, 'a' to 'o,' to avoid the stigma. I, too, know this shame, as I changed my last name when I was nine years old, nearly forcing my mother to sign the required documents. Sharing this part of myself, I do not intend to justify my privileged position and my use of it; however, I would like to be a part of the changing of such attitudes based on learning experiences from the margins.

To some extent, this is my personal campaign for an inclusive feminism, the right to survive, to lead a life of dignity and that Roma lives matter. Connected to activist networks in

Sweden, Spain and Romania, my research is part of my activism, and consequently, I position myself as a student activist. Further, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, I position myself as a mixed-race Swedish-Iranian woman, who has an understanding of the shared, collective experiences of women through an intersectional analysis, where my personal experiences and those of Roma women both belong to and transform the category ‘woman’. Therefore, I want to explore the complexity embedded in the ‘dialogue’ between us, and to take responsibility to create an open, safe space where Roma women’s voices are listened to.

1.3 Thesis Outline

My thesis will be structured according to the following order, starting with chapter two. First, I will provide a literature review on Roma history and the development of Roma women’s transnational activism. Second, I will provide my theoretical framework where I discuss theoretical debates in different strands of feminist thought, contextualize and situate Roma feminism and Roma feminist theory. Third, I will go over my methods and methodology to support my use of Digital Storytelling. Fourth, I will read the (digital) stories as feminist theory, how they reproduce the debates as established in the theoretical frameworks and give rise to new emergences. Finally, I will provide a conclusion of my research, discuss the ongoing projects and activism that this research supports, and include further remarks.

Chapter II: The Path toward Roma Feminism

Engrossing myself in Romani Studies and Roma feminist theory, I have identified three main themes that help develop and guide the reader through my thesis: Identity in Europe, Roma History in Europe, and finally, Roma Women’s Activism in Europe. In the first two sections, I discuss Roma women’s contributions and experiences as part of the community, while in the third, I mainly draw from Roma women’s contributions to community struggles.

2.1 Identity in Europe

While the Roma community in Europe identifies itself differently based on national context and other factors, they generally call themselves Roma, Rom, Romi, Romani, Gitano and sometimes, Gypsy; in other cases, however, they do not identify themselves at all in majority societies. In my research, all participants identify as Roma primarily, but have used aforementioned categories as well. From the 1950s until today, debates in Romani Studies have focused on the community’s identity as a national minority or non-territorial nation (Rövid, 2011, p.12). Imaginations of a Roma nation, however, are not meaningful or relatable to all members of the community today, as some groups “would like to integrate politically and

socially in their respective nation-state and do not wish for the recognition of a nonterritorial nation” (Rövid, 2011, p.17). In the 1990s, much of the focus was on the differences between settled and diasporic communities, and toward the Millennium, on transnational migration; “the process of searching for a place for the Gypsies in European integration saw the emergence of the concept of the Roma as a trans[border]- national minority” (Rövid, 2011, p.12). In addition, the Roma minority group is heterogeneous, and many Roma groups do not identify themselves with the Roma category alone; some prefer to prioritize the identity of Travellers given their early marks on Roma history (Köljning et al., 2013, p.22); some their religious identity (p.25) and others identify primarily as Manoush, Musicians, Gitano and Sinti, for example (Rövid, 2011, p. 9). Identity is also a factor of visibility which brings fear to the community due to their history of persecution. This is seen in a cross-national study covering six Eastern European countries, conducted by Hungarian Szelényi and Ladányi (2002), where only 36.8 % of the Roma participants identified themselves as Roma in Hungary (as cited in Rövid, 2011, p.8).

2.2 Roma History in a Transnational Context: Romania, Spain and Sweden

Achim (1998) explores the history of Roma populations in Romania through official records and linguistics. First mentioned in an official record in Wallachia in 1385, Roma populations from the Balkans emerged in Romania in the late 14th century, mainly as slaves, possessions of the monasteries and land property. Between the 14th and 19th century, the community suffered cycles of slavery and human trafficking through ‘transfers’ and exchanges of Roma families between monasteries, individuals and the state. Royal figures such as Prince Wladislav I, Mircea the Old and Alexander the Good took pride in this possession; by the end of the 15th century, “all the most important monasteries and boyars owned [Roma] as slaves” (Achim, 1998, p. 24). In the 19th century, the state and wealthy property owners were increasingly involved in the slave trade; the owners had the power to do anything they wished with the Roma slaves, even killing them, but for the sake of profit, they were continuously ‘bought, sold or given away’ (Hancock, 1987, p.50). Most of the time, the Roma slaves were forced into agricultural labor, to support households or work as craftsmen. After 500 years, not until 1860 were Roma slaves ‘freed’ in Romania, but this, however, was followed by the normalized, everyday discrimination that exists today.

Research on the history of Roma migration to and settlement in Spain is difficult to navigate due to inconsistent or lack of data, despite the fact that Roma people have lived in Spain since the 15th century. NGO estimations of the Roma population vary between 725,000-1,000,000 across Europe (Giménez & Sáez, 2012, ch.1, para. 2), but similar reports point to

the same number as a representative of the Spanish Roma populations alone and far from the total of the Roma populations in Europe (p.4; European Roma and Travellers Forum, 2016, p.3). Historically, the population has been mainly concentrated in Andalusia (40 %) as well as in Catalonia, Valencia and Madrid, not only in segregated rural areas but increasingly in urban settings given the rise in urban settlements between the 1950s and 1970s (Giménez & Sáez, 2012, ch.1, para. 2). Corrigio (2007) describes the group that constitutes the majority of Roma settlements in Spain, known as *kale-romano*, with century-long history and generations of sedentary living in Spain (p.14). Nomadic groups did not arrive to Spain until the late 1800s and are often othered and “lumped together in the category of ‘Hungaros’ by the other Gitanos” (Corrigio, 2007, p.14). However, Roma migration to Spain occurred long before that, as Corrigio (2007) traces the Roma migration back to North Africa and asserts that Gitanos are a very mixed group of ‘European’ and ‘African’ Roma, who crossed paths in Spain, some possibly travelling through North Africa and Egypt to reach Spain, and others from distinct parts of Europe (p.15). At the current time, the majority of (new) Roma migrants come from Eastern Europe (OSCE, 2010, p.36-39), becoming part of the very mixed Gitano community.

Sweden has had Roma settlements and generations of Roma families residing within the Swedish borders since the 16th century, but the Roma was not recognized as a Swedish minority until the year of 2000 (Westin et al., 2014, p.18). It is unclear, however, if this recognition appeals to, for example, the largest Roma group with the longest presence (dating back to the 15th or 16th century) in Sweden, Travellers, or the Kalderash, ancestors to the Roma that came to Sweden from Russia and France in the 19th century, which are generally assigned the group ‘Swedish Roma’ (Westin et al., 2014, p.18). Historically, the degree of strictness of the Swedish border control has been a determining factor in terms of Roma migration to Sweden. Along with periods of temporarily open borders, through increased family migration, conflicts and the Nordic Passport Union, the most recent groups, Finnish Roma (Kaale), Eastern European and Balkan Kalderash or Lovara minorities came to Sweden between the 1970s and 1990, as well as current flows mainly from Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary after their entries to the European Union (Westin et al., 2014, p.18-19). Currently, the Roma constitute a relatively large (50,000 citizens, not including non-citizens), very mixed and diverse group in Sweden, due to the ‘old’ and ‘new’ waves of migration (Westin et al., 2014, p.10).

The history of Roma migration, however, was far from peaceful, as introduced in the Romanian example. Extending the history of Roma slavery in Romania, Lukacs (2016) means that it divided the Roma community internally, and colonized Roma women’s bodies. Lukacs

(2016) describes the sexual division of labor and Roma women's roles as domestic slave workers in Romania, where Gadge [non-Roma/white] men displaced “negative stereotypes of womanhood...onto Roma women, a symbolic devaluation of non-Gadge femininity that continued until today” (p. 80). In the trafficking of Roma women in Romania, Roma men were encouraged to “internalize Gadge ideas about Roma women, for an illusory acceptance and inclusion into the Gadge world” (p.80). Thus, Roma women were exploited by both Gadge and Roma men. Many racist stereotypes, including the hypersexualization of Roma women's bodies, have origins in the Roma slave trade. Such portrayals are found in the influential piece *History of a Gulden* by Vasile Alecsandri, where “the Roma woman is presented as the quintessential slave who is completely available to the non-Roma noble” (p.80). Similar manifestations and exoticification can be seen in Swedish literature, such as Viktor Rydberg's famous work *Singoalla*, depicting a mysterious, free-spirited dark, beautiful and seductive Roma woman, as well as in the portrayals of Spain's flamenco-dancing Gitanas in Federico García Lorca's poems and ballads.

Like Roma women in Romania and Sweden, Gitanas in Spain were considered less than second-class citizens. They were seen as “impure” based on the concept of “limpieza de sangre” (purity of blood), a notion strongly connected to religion and race, which evolved in the late 15th and early 16th century (Martinez, 2008). Spanish inquisitors believed that non-Spanish women and those who had converted to Christianity, including their daughters, could contaminate society and that they discontinued the teachings of Christianity when they returned home from church (Martinez, 2008, p.50). Thus, women were increasingly policed by “kitchen servants, slaves, or neighbors” and faced harsh allegations that could lead to execution (Martinez, 2008, p.55). The first ‘Gitano law’ was implemented by the Catholic church in 1492, as part of this broader religiopolitical movement to remove all non-Christian groups in Spain, in which persecution and deportation through direct and indirect impositions were the main aims for over 300 years. These codes were used to justify large scale violence, such as the royal verdict implemented in 1749, which led to La Gran Redada de los Gitanos [the great roundup of the Gitanos], involving the imprisonment of more than 10,000 Gitano men and women, and more than 500,000 deaths, comparable to the Roma genocide and incarceration during the Holocaust (Corrigo, 2017, p.18). Apart from explicit violence, many of the laws, especially the ‘Gitanitude’ reform in 1783, were implemented in coercive assimilation measures to deny the community its cultural rights and to make their identity completely invisible. During this time, simply talking to or about Gitanos was prohibited, “in efforts to convince everyone that Gitano was just a fabricated ethnic identity” (Corrigo, 2017, p.18-19).

Sweden as a state is responsible for many violations against the Roma, with ‘legal’ discrimination as part of national strategies. Among those are, for example, forced deportation, forced labor, lynching, sterilization measures, the forceful custody of Roma children and legislation that materialized housing and educational inequality as well as lack of access to political mobilization and/or voting rights. Socialstyrelsen, or The National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW), has been actively involved in such implementations. Significantly, this Board was produced in the context of racist science and racial biology, with key institutes in Uppsala, and described the Roma and Travellers as an inferior, dysfunctional race incapable of adjusting to society’s standards, which influenced the NBHW’s notions of the Roma as ‘asocial, lazy nomads’ that by nature do not want stable settlement, which were used to justify their legal orders (Westin et al., 2014, p.23). For example, in the 1940s, the Board started taking Roma children into custody against the will or knowledge of their parents due to ‘asocial’ behavior, and between 1934 and 1975, in the belief that sterilization was an indication of a progressive human and scientific development and a solution to poverty, the Board lawfully authorized 20,000-30,000 female sterilizations, many of which involved Roma women (Westin et al., 2014, p.22-24). Another way that the authorities kept track of the Roma was through ‘Roma registers’ (zigenarinventeringen), which was used to justify police razzias (Westin et al., 2014, p.23). Illegal Roma registers, however, have personally affected the research participants in this project and existed in police records as recently as five years ago, prompting major outburst of public dissent in media and protests nationwide (SVT Nyheter, 2013). The first half of the 21st century saw violent deportations, involving civilians and the police, as well as the deepening of inequality of access to housing and education, both linked, as if a family did not have a stable home, with a registered address, they or their children could not access education (Westin et al., 2014, p.25). Such politics prevailed for decades. Currently, Sweden’s national image and role in the perpetuation of Roma discrimination is still largely unproblematized. In 2010, Maria Leissner, one of the leaders of the Delegation for Roma Issues, stated that it would take approximately 20 years to recover from and break patterns of discrimination that have affected the Roma minority group in Sweden, referring to structures that have operated for hundreds of years (Westin et al., 2014, p.10). Altogether, these elements of Roma history in Europe, struggles of migration and persecution, are crucial in examining the resistance that emerged as a response.

2.3 Roma Women’s Activism in the Roma Civil Rights Movement, the EU and Beyond

Roma women’s activism and feminism has historically struggled but persistently articulated its own agenda in the Roma Civil Rights Movement (RCRM), alongside or

separately from national feminist movements and in the EU. First, the situation in Europe, relationships to the EU and the conditions under which Roma community activism emerged is important to examine. Most Roma NGOs evolved in the 1920s and 1930s, which, tragically, due to the Holocaust and persecution in Europe, reached a halt in the outbreak of war. While some NGOs were active in the interwar-period, many of them did not operate again until the 1980s, but it was not until the 1990s and the Millennium that the Roma agenda gained significant attention worldwide, with reports on violations of Roma rights from NGOs such as the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (Aiello, 2016, p.58; Rövid, 2011, p.5). European NGOs, often acting as ‘a second arm’ to the EU, intervened to financially support ‘Roma projects’, gaining the authority to influence the agenda of RCRM, and shifting their focus to goal and results-oriented project-driven agendas, which had implications on agency and created distance from the grassroots level (Morell, 2016, p.15).

Due to this donor-dependency, many Roma projects in Europe, of which few are Roma-led, have undermined Roma women activists as agents of change and active producers of knowledge (Kóczé, 2011, p.46). Problematically, Roma women’s organizations have also been used as instruments of Member States and the EU to implement projects and achieve state objectives (Kóczé, 2011, p. 45). The compensations, however, often end up in the pockets of elites rather than the Roma women activists who were key agents in the projects (Aiello, 2016, p. 105). Rudko Kawczynski (2015) sheds light upon this profitable organizational design, where projects, conferences, training workshops, official platforms and policy continue to grow in numbers without results; “this Roma policy is Part of the problem, and in no way part of a solution” (as cited in Aiello, 2016, p.105). In a similar analysis, Márton Rövid, Iulius Rostas and Marek Szilvási (2015) call this large-scale phenomenon ‘the Gypsy industry’, which consists of institutions and NGOs that develop expertise in writing reports that attract funds based on “principles they do not follow” (2015, p.9-10). As a result, this industry flourishes from its ‘inclusion’ approach, widely adopted across the European Union, since the Decade of Roma Inclusion between 2000 and 2010.

This ‘inclusionary’ Decade excluded Roma women. Schultz (2009) writes that Roma women’s issues were reduced to gender mainstreaming concerns instead of a major thematic pillar, placing Roma women activists in the position of fighting “for resources and visibility within every other thematic area” despite their limitations (p.42). However, during this time, Roma women activists also gained leadership positions in the EU. Corradi (2017) discusses the potential of Roma women working at European level for the integration of Roma feminist demands, recognizing the leadership of European Deputies Viktoria Mohacsi, Livia Jaroka and

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EU-Parliamentarian and Swedish feminist politician (Feminist Initiative) Soraya Post (p.68-69). Such impact is addressed in my interview with Soraya Post, in which she discussed her resilient work to place the community at the center of evaluation processes and her fight to adopt a resolution that calls for the EU to host a Memorial Day for the loss of Roma lives during the Holocaust (Personal communication, April 01, 2018). Thus, while Roma women activists have had to rely extensively on international organizations for support and suffered from the effects of the ‘Gypsy industry’, in the same platforms, they have also managed to promote their own agenda. Stancu (2011) means that although Roma women activists “financially depend on Western organizations, they have found ways to navigate these networks to draw attention to the problems of Roma women from Romania” (p.45). In addition, Oprea (2005) warns that international intervention should not be used to discredit Roma women for their transformations of social change within the community and in their Roma feminist networks (p.138).

Second, it is important to address that male community leaders and historians discredit Roma women activists’ contributions to the community. While Roma women activists have fought alongside their male community members since the beginning of the RCRM, historical records ignore Roma women activists’ presence and demands. The origins of RCRM can be traced back to the mid-18th century, with the armed Roma collective protest in Germany for liberation from the feudal states’ control in 1722, or possibly to the 15th century, given unofficial records of “a huge meeting in Switzerland of Romanies from all over the Europe” during this period (Aiello, 2016, p.57). One of the most important RCRM developments was the First World Romani Congress in London in 1971, which witnessed the creation of a national flag, a national anthem and the renaming of the group (Roma) as part of forming the transnational collective and unity that would characterize Roma as a nation and community the following decades. In such accounts, Romani Studies scholars write about the history of the Movement from a male-perspective. Rövid (2011), for example, explains that historically, different geographic locations allowed for different degrees of development of Roma consciousness and political spaces (p.5) but disregards the extent to which women, and Roma women, could politically organize in those locations. In addition to their absent acknowledgement, they have historically lacked access to leadership within the community. An example of this is when Roma women activists attended a Roma conference in Hamburg in 2001 and were denied political participation; “they were only allowed in the kitchen to prepare food for the male participants” (Stancu, 2011, p.33-34).

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Third, Roma women activists have been excluded in the perspectives and political organizing of national feminist movements. Roma women activists in Romania criticize “the Romanian model of emancipated women” (Neaga, 2016, p.28) and Romanian feminists who do not have “a common agenda, a common language based on shared experiences to which Roma women and women from ethnic minority groups can identify with” (Gheorghe, 2010, p.254). Similarly, according to my interview with the Director of the feminist NGO Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas Romi, Gitana feminism did not find its place in the Spanish feminist platform when the first women’s organizations emerged, and feminism was consolidated into socialist/democratic politics in the 1960s (Personal communication, February 28, 2018). Instead, from the beginning of the 1990s, they created their own, separate platform and network of feminist associations across the nation (Personal communication, February 28, 2018). Aiello (2016) highlights the work of one of the Associations, Drom Kotar Mestipen (DKM) in Barcelona, which initially hosted workshops for Gitana students (Romani Women Students’ Meeting) or different training and job workshops, fighting tirelessly to attract Gitana participants, through offering relief from stress in the form of, for example, babysitting services during events, meetings and workshops (p.149). By 2015, they had hosted more than 17 workshops and more importantly, slowly developed and set the tone for community activism:

Many Romani women that had not been previously engaged in any type of associational activity, once they engage in organizing, for instance, in the Romani Students’ Meeting, or once they start volunteering with DKM, have passed from being a shadow to becoming authentic community leaders (Aiello, 2016, p.193).

As demonstrated by this example, Roma women’s activism was and is a transformative power in the community. Across national contexts, their activism is a direct critique to the exclusion of female leadership positions in community activism and national feminist movements that fail “to pay attention to problems resulting from the interplay of race, gender, and class (Stancu, 2011, p.27).

Due to the struggles and limitations of their national feminist movements, Roma women activists began to envision a transnational activist community and feminism across borders. The Millennium witnessed the emergence of Roma women’s transnational activist platforms. Particularly important to this development were two networks: the International Roma Women’s Network (IRWN) and the Joint Roma Women Initiative (JRWI). While JRWI was seen as a more ‘progressive’ movement, open to transnational feminism, IRWN represented the more conservative side, “more traditionally oriented, reluctant to deal with topics such as sexual harassment, prostitution, and gender-based violence” (Aiello, 2016, p.68). Both of these

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networks evolved as part of a wave of growing Roma women's organizations and 6 International Roma Women's Conferences across Europe between 2000 and 2017 (Aiello, 2016, p.86-92). Kóczé (2011) discusses the importance of these conferences, the visibility given to Roma women's issues at EU-level and "the first publicly printed material [the Manifesto of Roma Women in 1994] that specifically referred to the situation of Romani women in Europe" (p.52)

Like Roma women activists across Europe, Roma feminists in Romania, Spain and Sweden have, through the support of NGOs and allies to their cause, historically mobilized within their communities, and led the developments which gradually transformed and merged into local and transnational Roma feminist movements. Digital Storytelling participants and interviewees attribute various factors to the analysis of how Roma feminist activist networks have emerged in each site. Spanish Roma women's activism was developed in response to exclusion, and the confidence of this movement was a requirement for its survival, which can help explain its current state or status (Personal communication, February 28, 2018). Many Roma participants from the Romanian and Swedish contexts have families across Eastern Europe and express that such confidence was "deadly" and extremely dangerous in their countries of origin, where demanding any rights was inconceivable. For example, one of the participants explained an incident of being denied service at a restaurant in Slovakia. She had to leave in silence, as she knew that if she raised her voice, she would be in immediate danger, and the police would come to arrest her instead of addressing the issue at stake (Personal communication, March 16, 2018). This fear certainly affects the level of confidence required to build a feminist movement. An additional contributing factor is the community's disbelief in the relevance of Roma issues to the majority society. Swedish participants explain that the main difference between, for example, Romania and Sweden is the level of attention to Roma discrimination in the news and social media:

When I explain to my fellow Roma activists and scholars in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Romania that cases of blatant racism are often highly publicized, ending up on the cover of newspapers here in Sweden, they cannot believe that anyone cares (Personal communication, March 16, 2018).

Such experiences certainly exist in Spain as well, but the migratory/sedentary debates can be significant to understand the level of respect granted (or denied) to Roma activism, as Roma migrants are less visible in Spain in comparison to the Romanian and Swedish contexts. This hypothesis, however, is undertheorized and needs more support. While the Roma community in Romania and Spain have had a closer relationship to civil society than the Swedish Roma,

which, in comparison, have worked relatively isolated, Gitana feminists in Spain have possibly achieved the strongest, most solid local foundation. Interestingly, according to Swedish NGOs (Göteborgs Räddningsmission and Föreningen Hem), and demonstrated in the stories of Georgeta and Adela in Simonovic et al. (2016), activism is also seen among the most marginalized, homeless Roma women in Sweden, who have actively argued against the Vellinge proposal to criminalize begging, challenging the frame of begging as related to organized criminal networks; “we are organized, but not criminally,” they say to a local newspaper in Gothenburg, asserting that they, their friends and family are organizing and mobilizing politically to survive (Expressen, 2017). Interested in examining Roma women’s activism deeper to understand Roma feminism and its encompassing dialogues, this literature review helps me understand the historic vulnerabilities of Roma women and the Roma community in Europe, but more importantly, the hardships Roma women activists have had and continue to endure just to have a say as feminists. Moving forward, the theoretical framework supports the themes that Roma feminist participants advance in their Digital Storytelling projects.

Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

As I read and interpret Roma women’s stories as feminist theory and knowledge production, I first need to establish theoretically what stories and knowledge constitute, examining feminist debates on education and knowledge production, as well as related critique on assimilation, integration and inclusion. Second, I will discuss the complexity of identity in relation to intersectionality, as well as the theory itself and the location of Roma women in intersectionality. Third, I will explore patterns and new emergences in the dialogues enhanced by the Roma feminist theoretical debates and perspectives from the Digital Storytelling projects. Through the theoretical basis of intersectionality, transnational feminism, and liberal, cultural and/or difference-centered feminist thought, these dialogues centralize notions of solidarity, community, motherhood, family and religion, which are all relevant to Roma feminist theory and its struggles to gain legitimacy in mainstream feminist debates. Put together as a whole, these pieces help situate Roma feminism. Crucially, I will argue for the compatibility of these diverse elements with (Roma) feminism. In essence, these choices are motivated by my findings and interpretations of the DS projects, and such theoretical applications will be demonstrated in integration with my empirical material in the next section, “Lessons from Roma Feminism”.

3.1 Knowledge Production and the Subaltern Voice in Research

Whose stories and feminism count is important to investigate in order to understand the unprivileged position of Roma feminism in the mainstream feminist discourse. Foucault's (1998) theorizations on the relationship between knowledge and power are relevant here, as this 'deprioritization' in feminist narratives cannot be explained as a coincidence or lack of interest; rather, they are "historically contingent and dependent on power relations that have already rendered a particular topic a legitimate object of investigation" (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p. 2157). In this sense, dominant forms of knowledge, at the top of the 'knowledge hierarchy,' exclude other forms of knowledge, including personal narratives and embodied 'ways of knowing,' which constitute integral components of the Digital Storytelling projects.

This knowledge hierarchy is evident in civil society. Narayanaswamy (2016) discusses the discursive exclusion in the continuous disconnect between grassroots activists and elite feminists in the development sector. This is relevant to Roma women activists as they, along with other civil society actors have had to familiarize themselves with the dominant 'way of knowing' and 'expertise'. This discourse formation draws from professionalization processes that rely on the production of this expertise and consequently, experts, which "underpin the expansion of narrowly focused, neoliberal economic development paradigms" (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p.2158). Thus, experts "with a knowledge of the new vocabularies and master buzzwords" have the power to silence those who do not reproduce the same discourse and knowledge (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p.2158).

Such expertise often requires formal education, to which Roma women activists offer meaningful critique, in terms of situated knowledge, neutrality and objectivity, as well as functions of assimilation, integration and inclusion. Corradi (2017) means that "formal education should be problematized in a de-colonial way, because we are talking about the same cultural institutions that have been perpetrating the inferiorization of Gypsies for centuries" (p.92). Also, Roma anthropologist and activist Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2015) critiques the academia as a historically oppressive institution which uncritically defines notions of objectivity and legitimate knowledge, granting disproportionate authority to academic research than other sources of knowledge in universities and beyond (p.41). In response to this injustice, however, Roma feminists articulate alternative notions based on their own experiences; Roma women's knowledge, along with other "local, indigenous or Southern knowledge, act as a counterpoint to the international scope of dominant Western knowledge systems" (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p.2158).

In the incorporation of locally situated knowledge, however, there is a tendency to refrain from problematization and critique among practitioners. Many scholars, despite their self-proclaimed community-oriented approach, interpret this knowledge as “a static entity to be captured... seen as a ‘given’, almost a benign and consensual knowledge simply waiting to be tapped into” (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p. 2158). Consequently, they reproduce “geographies of knowledge production...draw a sharp distinction between (local) indigenous knowledge and the construction of an international knowledge system” which further serves to romanticize ‘the local’ (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p.2159). This requires an understanding of the always-present power relations embedded in notions of knowledge; that knowledge in itself cannot be fixed and is, instead, partial (Haraway, 1988, p. 587), “iterative, contested, dynamic and continually evolving” (Narayanaswamy, 2016, p. 2158).

Apart from his famous critique on academia and education, Freire’s (2000) critical analysis of the teacher-student (oppressor/oppressed) relationship can be extended to navigating the mechanisms of assimilation, integration and inclusion (in this case: of minorities), where ‘students’ are spoken or thought *about* rather than with/to, and seen as empty containers to be filled with knowledge, assuming that the student has no knowledge before the encounter with the ‘teacher’; “the teacher teaches, and the students are taught” (Freire, 2000, p.59). This ‘teaching’ process includes the students assimilating and integrating into, having learnt to strive for or simply been forced into ‘inclusion’ in the teacher’s discourse, which in turn gives birth to students with the ‘teacher’s knowledge’, reproducing thoughts ‘about themselves’ that lead to distance and dissociation. This analysis is applicable outside of the frames of education, and to the experiences of Roma women activists who critique Roma inclusion and the discourse ‘about them’ created by international and European NGOs and institutions. Further, Roma activists claim that inclusion (referring to the ‘Decade of Roma inclusion’ as discussed in the Literature Review) in terms of access to services and institutions might not necessarily address *exclusion*; “the opposite of exclusion, in contexts structured by coloniality is not inclusion, but decolonization. Inclusion, in these contexts, is just another form of coloniality” (Corradi, 2017, p.145).

Consequently, accounts ‘about’ involves a dangerous process of othering, which I have reflected upon in my own research. Willemse (2014) addresses the incorporation of non-western women’s biographical accounts in research, the biased notion that women of color are “essentially different...in the way that they can relate about their lives,” how they are reduced to either individuals or a collectivity, and that these narratives are often constructed in a Western ‘from the cradle to the grave’ format that disregards the complexity of subjectivity,

space and temporality (p.40). Similarly, Mohanty (1991) critiques the idea that the mere existence and record of the 'Third World woman' in research offers critical engagement; "it is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally that is of paramount importance (p.34). Like Mohanty (1991), Spivak (1988) is concerned with the construction of 'voices from the margins' and problematize attempts to uncritically and loosely 'capture' and understand them as representations, with 'essentializing glasses'.

3.2 Roma Feminism and Intersectionality

Given the community's relationship to education, feminist theory is both significant and insignificant to Roma women's activism. In addition, this link is important to this discussion, as the feminist subject in intersectional analysis is often presented in liberal light, as educated (or striving for education) and free from community or family responsibilities, which is not the case for many women of color in activism. Intersectionality, however, is significant to Roma feminism as Roma women activists see themselves as living on the intersections, with their bodies and experiences as "theory". Before discussing Roma feminist theory on intersectionality, it is valuable to address Roma women's experiences of identity and their personal relationship to intersectionality. Roma feminist scholars such as Carmen Gheorghe (2016), Ethel Brooks (2005) and Angela Kóczé (2009) describe the location of Roma women and Roma feminism 'at the intersections', 'in two worlds' or "moving between Romani and gadje worlds through processes of migration, education and parentage [as 'halfies']," which challenges the dichotomy of authenticity and purity in terms of cultural representation (Brooks, 2015, p. 57). Bitu (2012) addresses the dilemma of the latter: "as a Roma feminist, I am having my identity as a woman, as well as that of a 'true' Roma questioned" (p.137). Problematically, identity is policed from multiple directions, both inside and outside of the community, due to essentializing, racist and sexist notions that define Roma women limitedly by poverty or education levels (McCormick, 2018, p.3). Similarly, Gelbart (2012) addresses how the influential notion of a 'true Romni' ignores diversity and personal resistance (p.28). Despite resistance, Roma women, just like the Third World Woman, become "a singular monolithic subject" in white feminism (Gelbart, 2012, p.27). To move away from narrow, limited representations and to challenge identity policing, McCormick (2018) cites Indian feminist and Roma ally Narayan (1997), who encourages distance from the interpretation of national and cultural realms "as sealed rooms, impervious to change, with a homogenous space 'inside' them, inhabited by 'authentic insiders' who all share a uniform and consistent account of their institutions and values" (p.1-2).

Moving forward, discussions on identity are both transformative and counter-

productive, as they involve a complex process of ‘locating identity’ which stretches the concept in considerations of the denial of identity as a consequence of a history of persecution, alongside new feminist articulations. McCormick (2018) describes the Roma community as scattered internationally due to forced migration (see chapter 2), as well as “cosmopolitan and heterogenous, immersed within multiple cultural formations and sites of belonging” (McCormick, 2018, p.2). On the other hand, national or transnational contexts are not sufficient in addressing identity, as many cases point to the hiding of identity; “we have to understand why certain Roma hide their identities and we shall not be judgmental over their choices because at the end of the day Romanipe is about survival” (McCormick, 2018, p.2). Consequently, McCormick (2018) discusses the difficulties of developing an inclusive Roma rights discourse, as it currently has “little to no sustainable effect or impact if people (particularly women) on the ground still fear to identify” (p.2). Thus, without further Roma feminist engagement, intersectionality can be difficult to approach, as it raises concerns on who is included in the category of ‘Roma woman’ in an intersectional analysis.

Fundamentally, coined by Crenshaw (1989) and black feminists in the US, intersectional feminist theory captures the complexity of occupying in-between spaces in society and analyzes oppression from the interconnected, multiple axis of power through and in which it expresses itself. Before intersectionality was accepted among researchers and activists, black women’s position in the US was often misrepresented and misunderstood. McCall (2005) writes: “it was not possible, for example, to understand a black woman’s experience from previous studies of gender combined with previous studies of race because the former focused on white women and the latter on black men” (p.1780). Intersectionality, thus, helped women of color understand, heal from and build alliances based on their experiences of multi-directional oppression, including intra-community discrimination. This knowledge, however, has been present in communities long before the naming of the term. Chicana feminist Paredes (2015) discusses the evolvement of “indigenist machismo” (and its critique) within the community, as a result of European colonialism. While colonialism is not necessarily a term used to describe the situation of the Roma in Europe, Oprea (2012) means that intra-community oppression worsens ‘at peaks of racial oppression’ during which Roma women “are encouraged to defend harmful practices when these practices are used to legitimize racist attitudes about Roma. Alongside this reactionary patriarchy lies a reactionary homogenization of experiences” (p.14-15).

Inspired by the black feminist movement in the US, Roma feminist scholars discuss the starting point of Roma feminism in intersectionality and how it evolved in the reflections on

black women's struggles (Bitu, 2012; Gheorghe, 2016). They point to “the parallel between African American women and Roma women...valid in the case of ignoring the female identity and recognizing the belongingness to the Roma community as the paramount identity or the absolute one” (Bitu, 2012, p. 136). Drawing similar parallels, McCormick (2018) references the black nationalist, pan-African leader and key Civil Rights activist DuBois' (1903) understanding of a ‘double consciousness’ and believes that the Roma community can relate to such deep pain from discrimination: “this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (as cited in McCormick, 2018, p.2). Thus, intersectionality and in particular, its origins have greatly influenced Roma feminist thought.

As part of Roma feminist demands, Roma feminist literature aims to extend the notion of ‘multiple discrimination’ raised in relation to Roma women's issues (often limitedly focusing on gender and ethnicity, which in turn are frequently analyzed separately), to an intersectional analysis (Bitu, 2012; Bitu & Morteau, 2010; Kóczé, 2012; Corradi, 2017; Schultz, 2012; Morell, 2016; Aiello, 2016; Sordé et al., 2014). Impressively, Roma women were at the forefront of asserting the demand for intersectionality in feminist networks and for framing intersectionality based on their own lived experiences. Bitu (2012), for example, discusses Roma women's advancement of intersectionality in Romania, where women such as Isabela Bănică Mihalache, Crina Morteau, Mihaela Gheorghe, Carmen Gheorghe and Nicoleta Bitu herself introduced the term to legislation: Law 202, the Law of Opportunity Equality (p.140). These women did not only bring intersectionality to the Romanian feminist movement, but to their own community struggles, articulating Roma feminism, which does not separate community and women's rights: “[t]he meeting of feminism and Romani politics has already transformed internal discourses within the Roma movements” (as cited in Jovanovic & Daróczi, 2015, p. 79). The compatibility of the Roma struggle and the feminist movement, however, is and has not always been accepted. Bitu (2012) shared her experiences with colleagues, both men and women, who were fighting in the Roma equality movement and who constantly asked her why she wanted to “separate the world into two” (p.133). They asked her why she was fighting for Roma women's rights when the Roma communities faced so many issues with discrimination and racism and responded with anger as ‘they didn't need anyone to divide them by focusing on the status of Roma women’ (Bitu, 2012, p. 134). Outside of the community, there is a comparable dilemma; “feminist and antiracist politics in Europe are still by and large two separate struggles, and Romani feminists wind up in a separate, isolated sphere fighting on their own” (Oprea, 2012, p.18).

Further, the transformative potential of intersectionality as a tool is recognized among Roma feminists, who articulate that the purpose of such use is to challenge the limited ‘multiple discrimination’ approach and to build alliances. Jovanović et al. (2015) claims that “by using intersectionality approach, Romani women respond to the limitations of ‘ethnicity’ but also to the limitations of ‘gender’ as the exclusive categories of interest to them” (p.3). Also, it creates a politicized space where Roma women can develop critique to the mainstream feminist movement as well as the Roma community struggle, wherein Roma women’s issues are considered secondary matters (p.3). Further, according to Roma feminists, intersectionality offers a methodological approach to build alliances and solidarity networks across borders (Jovanovic and Daroczi, 2015, p.79), especially significant to the marginalized and LGBTQIA within Roma communities, in the navigation of the “the parallels and divergences within and between the experiences of different sexual minorities and the development of support systems and campaigns” (Baker, 2015, p.76). Approaching intersectionality, Roma feminists value a bottom-up approach; Popa (2009), for example, claims that Roma feminists bring “a vision of equality that start from the most marginalized positions” to intersectional feminism and societal transformations (as cited in Gheorghe, 2016, p.15-16). Other arguments by Roma feminists suggest that the application of intersectionality is relevant to all members of the Roma community. Jovanovic et al. (2015) mean that intersectionality needs to address itself to context and hence, to include not only Roma women but Roma men in context-specific analysis. For example, referring to the case of homeless young Roma boys living in the streets of Belgrade, Jovanovic et. al (2015) discuss the material effects of ignoring the fact that Roma boys are more targeted in specific forms of human trafficking, which “results in a lack of prevention, assistance and protection measures” for this group (p.80).

While intersectionality is a valuable tool for analysis and activist alliance-building, scholars such as McCall (2005), Salem (2016), Yuval-Davis (2006), and Butler (1990) critique its methodological problem, trajectory and liberal feminist hijacking, reliance on identity politics and the limits of categorization as well as the additive ‘etc-approach’. Yuval-Davis (2006), for example, argues that “differences between categories of positionality and social identities are not visible in an intersectional model, which render[s] invisible the crucially important political struggles being carried out in many parts of the world that problematize and contest the boundaries of social collectivities” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.205). Also concerned with the depoliticization of categories, Salem (2016) discusses intersectionality as a ‘traveling theory’, from which she traces the transformation - mutation or loss of meaning - of concepts traveling: “what has happened to intersectionality as it has crossed time and space, and first

moved from Black and Third World feminism to feminism as a whole, and then from feminism in the Global South to feminism in the Global North?” (p.2).

Roma feminists are concerned with how intersectionality is applied. While intersectionality is often the 'go-to theory' in Roma research, Kóczé (2012) evaluates the actual application of intersectionality as insufficient, as the axes of difference and research variables are not comprehensively examined together but separately (p.13). Additionally, in terms of the location of Roma women, Roma scholars mean that intersectionality is missing certain categories of analysis such as family, marital status, culture, religion, and social-cognitive development. Kozce (2009) attempts to locate an intersectional model that is more relevant to Roma women's lives by exploring new social divisions (p.21). Jovanović (2015) exemplifies relevant additions to the intersectional model and points to the significance in marital status and heterosexuality, including having children, as well as the importance of speaking Romani, for Roma women activists' authority within the community. Also, “a position of a woman within the Romani movement is said to be also depending on her husband's position within the movement (if he is a Romani activist or not)” (p.43-44). Additionally, Aiello (2016) and Gelbart (2012) discuss the significance of family, especially the position of the family, and following 'Roma norms' or meeting the expectations of one's role in the Roma community, for the status of Roma women (p.51). Further, Jovanović et al. (2015) address social-cognitive development, the time and energy required to discuss identity and “the lack of 'privilege' to grow up in a family where they at least talked about 'being Roma'” (p.7). All of these factors deserve consideration in the intersectional analysis.

Lutz (2002) offers a more inclusionary approach for Roma women activists who use intersectionality as a tool. Despite the critique of the additive model of intersectionality, Lutz (2002) believes that filling the gaps and adding categories and social divisions to the intersectional analysis can enhance context-specific experiences and needs. Beyond the traditional intersectional model, she lists sedentariness/origin, recognizing diasporic and transnational migration, North-South relations, as well as income and level of social development (as cited in Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202). This additive model is flexible and recognizes not only additional categories and social divisions, but more fluidity as well. Without flexibility and fluidity, however, the 'differences' of family, culture and religion can be interpreted as 'naturalized', “even more so, in relation to gender and sexuality, ability and age” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199) which is harmful given the framing that chiefly reproduces the 'traditional' Roma woman, excluding other 'ways of being' or ignoring compatibility between different categories of identity.

3.3 (White) Feminist Anxieties on ‘Traditions’ and ‘Modernity’

Roma feminism is evidence for the compatibility between culture, community interests, religion and feminism, which challenges the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, and more specifically, the notion of modernity as an indication of progress in liberal feminist thought. This dichotomy imposes an impossible process of ‘choosing’ between (and separating) different part of one’s life, struggles and identities, as seen in sameness-difference debates between liberal and cultural feminist thought, which are significant in understanding individualism and collectivity, and the either-or approach which ignores that Roma feminism is neither a singularly individual or communitarian project. At the center of this debate, liberal feminism relies on the assumptions that people are “autonomous individuals making decisions in their own self-interest in light of their individual preferences” (Becker, 1999, p.32). This perspective fails to acknowledge that the Roma community historically has been forced to rely on its members and internal structures for survival and, consequently, values interdependency. Articulated based on sameness, the underlying assumption is that we can fulfill our roles in society if given the same choices and opportunity, which disregards factors of difference such as gender and race, and mistakenly assumes that everyone responds to ‘sameness’ equally (Becker, 1999, p. 32-33). In addition to aforementioned critiques, sameness-based arguments exclude communities who are not necessarily part of formal society or who cannot access or benefit from individual ‘choices’ for personal development. An example of the former is that of Peterson and Sanders (1998) who discuss the dilemma posed to Aboriginal communities, to “choose whether they want to live in the mainstream community and give up their rights of ancestry, or live on designated reservations and give up the right to live within the wider community” (as cited in Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p.378). Roma feminists share this experience and offer substantial critique to the ‘choices’ imposed on them in order to ‘rightfully’ claim their feminism.

The idea of motherhood and family is an example that breaks the dichotomy of tradition versus modernity. Roma feminists share many of the elements of black feminism on this topic. While motherhood is often articulated from the viewpoint of white middle-class feminists in the US and seen as incompatible with the feminist struggle, black feminists and a number of scholars argue that this experience is not universal, which replicates liberal versus difference-centered feminist debates. For white feminists, motherhood has often been framed as a significant impediment to women’s movements for equality, the main source of women’s oppression or “a trap confining women to the home, keeping them tied to cleaning, cooking, and child care (bell hooks, 1984, p.133). Along these lines, they locate empowerment outside

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of the home, mainly in employment. To black women, however, working outside of the home was not equally empowering; the emotional labor at home was humanizing in contrast to their work “in the fields, in the factories, in the laundries, in the homes of others,” and motherhood did not necessarily hinder such employment, as they had always worked, by coercion and/or for survival, “from slavery to the present day” (bell hooks, 1984, p, 134). In contrast to white women’s liberationists, black women have historically expressed that they “want to have more time to share with family... to leave the world of alienated work” (bell hooks, 1984, p.134). Home holds significant meanings in this context. Collins (1990) discusses the home as a site of resistance and protection of black families from white power structures (as cited in Rodriguez, 2010, p.63-65). Similarly, Roma women activists express that they find relief from racism at home, with their families and in their roles as mothers.

According to Roma feminist scholars, there is nothing ‘unfeminist’ by motherhood. On the contrary, the institution of family is at the center of Roma feminism (Serradell et al., 2014, p. 91). Thus, the idea that “motherhood is an imposed and oppressive role, and that its celebration limits women, often misses the point” (Gelbart, 2012, p.28). Aiello (2016) demonstrates that community and family responsibilities are compatible with the fight for Roma women’s rights; family in this sense is more of a relief than a burden, and “a key element for success in their transformations: family goes hand in hand with them in the struggle for the Romani women’s emancipation” (as cited in Aiello, 2016, p.51).

Albeit not all Roma women activists practice religion, many participants expressed the importance of their faith, and how neither culture nor religion prevent them from being activists. To locate a comparable position, Islamic feminism is an interesting point of departure, which demonstrates that religion and feminism is compatible. Mahmood (2006) discusses the women’s mosque movement in Egypt and Egyptian women’s collective attempts to pursue formal training in and advanced studies of Islamic scriptures - a practice often restricted to male intellectuals, which constitutes a rather complex phenomenon and notion of agency that ‘false consciousness’ (often used by Western feminists to describe activist women in ‘traditional’ settings) cannot explain, ignoring the analysis that “the women’s mosque movement has significantly reconfigured the gendered practice of Islamic pedagogy and the social institution of mosques” (p.44).

Significant to this context is the discussion on feminist agency, “not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create” (Mahmood, 2006, p.33-34). Drawing from this notion of agency and Islamic feminists’ “articulations of relative freedom that enable [them]

both to formulate and enact self-determined goals and interests,” Mahmood (2006) believes that Islam and feminism is compatible (p.40). While the women in the mosque movement are operating within relations of subordination and aim to develop practices and values that are generally attributed to “feminine passivity and submissiveness (e.g., shyness, modesty, perseverance, and humility...), they create something new, as they “resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their own interests and agendas [which are] sites of women’s agency” (Mahmood, 2006, p.36). Similarly, Gelbart (2012) discusses the agency of her Roma grandmother despite the orthodox restrictions imposed on her, as a woman who was “certainly not devoid of rights or decision-making responsibilities...as one of the family’s matriarchs,” claiming that Roma women have historically negotiated power within patriarchal contexts (p.23). Mahmood (2006) means that explicit feminist agency is difficult to locate if notions of resistance do not address themselves to historical and cultural specificity, which explains why Islamic feminists who do not employ liberal feminist discourse are not believed or taken seriously when discussing feminist issues.

Ghodsee and Borovoy (2012) reflectively respond to liberal feminist and cultural relativist arguments, including that of Mahmood (2006); however; they believe that neither side fully takes into consideration women’s need for social protection or recognizes a feminism “that sees women's interests as aligned with broader, shared social goods” (p.163). They write, “what is downplayed in this debate, and what we hope to contribute, is the importance that many women and feminist movements have accorded to advancing women's position through advancing social welfare more broadly” (p.162). Applying such analysis to the dialogues in this research, Roma women activists speak of motherhood and families as part of their politics, feminist politics that supports women’s welfare, and Roma feminists transfer the values of family and motherhood into their local and transnational activism.

3.4 Transnational Feminism: Solidarity across Borders

As previous discussions demonstrate, I discuss Roma feminism in the context of transnational solidarity. This requires further examinations of solidarity as a concept. Dean (1996) offers insights into its different forms and appeals: conventional solidarity, affective solidarity and reflective solidarity. While conventional solidarity often relies on identity politics and depends on commonality of struggles, interest and concerns, affective solidarity is based on shared expressions and emotions of care and concern such as pain, rage and sadness (Dean, 1996, p.39). Reflective solidarity involves the construction of a mutual ‘we’, values interdependence and dialogue and recognizes the transformative potential of each other’s differences as well as specificity “as a ground for commonality” rather than sameness (Dean,

1996, p.39). At the center of this section, the latter is seen in Roma women activists' dialogues on transnational feminism, which conceptualize solidarity beyond identity. According to Mohanty (2003), feminism without borders, however, should not be confused with border-less feminism and is not based on loosely defined universal values (p.2). Instead, it acknowledges the effects of borders and 'border-thinking': "the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment" (Mohanty, 2003, p.2). Consequently, the definition of borders is expanded to include different experiences, different lines for different people, and articulates solidarity across those demarcations (Mohanty, 2003, p.2). To build a transnational feminism upon such experiences, Mohanty (2003) argues that we have to locate colonial moves in the points of reference or basis of argument in our shared questions, such as the women category and 'women as an oppressed group' (which can appropriate assumed collective experiences of women of color) and consequently, *decolonize* feminism by deconstructing and re-building the 'woman category' for feminism to 'cross borders' (p.39).

Cockburn (2014) discusses the potential and weakness of transnational feminism, through the example of Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab women's activist movement (called "Bat Shalom of the North"). Grounded in the shared critique to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and as well as their experiences of sexism and discrimination in both communities, they mobilized on issues of gender equality against Israeli imperialism (p.434). The visions they formulated together created strong bonds in the network, which required that they "give away a bit of [themselves] in order for others to live" (Cockburn, 2014, p.442). However, with deepening conflicts, this 'dialogue died' (as the title of the article reads) rather quickly, in their negotiation of differences, as some of the Jewish women did not want to give up their privilege: "the Jewish women varied in the degree of their Zionism and anti-Zionism, and therefore in the kind of solution to the conflict they felt able to imagine as tolerable" (p.436). This discussion is significant in the context of Roma feminism. While a large majority of Roma feminists advocate for transnational feminism in their own feminist struggles, scholars such as Kocze (2011) offer critique. They mean that Roma women are invited to transnational networks on the basis of solidarity by international actors that offer 'human rights language' as a tool to advance their feminist agenda; however, this 'tool' more likely imposes "the universalizing idea of gender equality, underscoring the language and ignoring the structurally unequal power relations specific to Romani women in [for example] post-communist countries" (Kocze, 2011, p.57).

Roma women activists explain that feminist dialogue suffer when white feminists do not acknowledge their contributions. Brooks (2012) for example, personally experienced the

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accusation of her feminism as ‘false’ by a white attendee, who, ironically during an international conference on Roma feminism, expressed: “if you want to claim feminism, then you must give up your claim to a Romani identity...to be a feminist means renouncing being a Romani woman” (p.2). Given such experiences, it is even more important that feminists like myself take responsibility and reflect on the solidarities we build, and the exclusions we reproduce.

As seen in my previous analysis, Roma feminism differs from mainstream liberal feminist agenda but finds a lot of support in black and postcolonial feminism. However, it should be understood in the context of transnational struggles, not on the basis of universality but acknowledging ‘commonalities in our differences’ (Mohanty, 2003). There are many examples of solidarity between Roma and non-Roma women, such as Bitu’s (2012) encounters with activists such as Anastasia Posadaskaya-Vanderberg and Debra Schultz, Eva Foldvari and Azbija Mernedova; “a friendship between Roma women and non-Roma women was formed which led to one of the most active networks of Roma women in Europe” (p.141). Such “gadji-Romni solidarity, as well as connections among Romani women, generate friendships and activist networks that sustain political action” (Brooks, 2012, p.6). Brooks (2012) describes networks “across national boundaries and ethnic identifications [as] key to the possibilities of Romani feminism” and locates solidarity in such friendship and personal connections (p.6). Similarly, Bitu and Vincze (2012) suggest that Roma feminism by nature seeks transnational networks as a vehicle for social change in the community and beyond, to solve “immediate, practical problems, but also broadly conceptualize societal issues like difference, intersectional inequality, the social life of rights, and the relationship between rights and culture” (p.45). Apart from Roma and non-Roma European feminist alliances, McCormick (2018) discusses solidarity between Roma, Native and Dalit women. While not all Roma feminist scholars agree on her point of departure, McCormick (2018) locates the Roma feminist movement as an indigenous movement and claims that a Roma, Native and Dalit coalition emerged out of inspiration from various intersectional and feminist networks, queer movements and “discussions on diasporic transnationalism with Native American and Dalit women” (p.2). Within this movement, Roma feminists articulated shared questions with indigenous and Dalit feminists, “looking into the mirror of each other’s lived experiences to co-creating shared visions of a collaborative journey” (McCormick, 2018, p.3).

More importantly, these coalitions constitute ‘dialogical feminism,’ which offers space to feminism(s) which have previously been excluded in Western ‘academic’ articulations of feminism. Kocze (2011) means that “Romani women who resist the universality of feminist

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theory and politics sometimes develop alternative dialogues with other women of color who have already challenged Western feminism” (p.55). Furthermore, “the dialogic feminism of the ‘other women’, those who have low educational levels and have traditionally been excluded from the spaces of debate and decision-making, has opened up the possibility for Romani feminism to be recognized” (Sordé et al., 2014, p.91). Like Dalit and Native feminism, Roma feminism has a complicated relationship to education due to the history of institutionalization, racism and classism. Dr. Rauna Kuokkanen (2008), for example, discusses indigenous peoples’ perspectives on research and the history of being “researched to death”, categorized and classified “alongside the local flora and fauna” (p.48). Davis and Craven (2016) bring such sentiments to light: the silence, painful memories and “a smile that is knowing and distrustful” (p.55). Sharing the experience of communities who have been “oppressed by theory,” (Smith, 2012, p.39) Roma women activists pose a challenge to academic feminism.

In addition to their shared critique on education, the three aforementioned movements struggle to articulate feminism due to internal fears and racism from the majority society. Black and Muslim women community activists also embody this phenomenon. Jovanovic (2015) writes that not all Roma women activists are informed by feminist theory, partly due to the fear of the stigma revolving feminism but also as they lack one, single ideological affiliation (p.8). Similarly, Dalit women activists refrain from calling their struggles feminist, but their critiques are not only significant but intersectional, calling out mainstream feminists for their disregard for caste as well as the Ambedkarite movement’s absent gender perspectives and male community members’ transfer of domination from the class system onto Dalit women (Sen, 2012, p.2). As community members, women are often blamed for external oppression and for interrupting local resistance, which suppresses an explicit feminist agenda but also gives rise to a ‘nameless’ feminism.

As noted from the struggles of Native, Dalit and Roma feminism, new feminist dialogues are necessary to challenge ‘hegemonic feminisms’ which exclude women on the margins from feminist spaces and place judgment on their activist affiliations. In this theoretical framework, the dichotomy of tradition and modernity is broken down through an analysis of Roma feminism’s compatibility with multiple experiences and feminist critiques, addressing the importance of the extension of an intersectional model that does not solely rely on academic knowledge production and which is attentive to ‘border thinking’ and debates on identity, critically examined in this transnational context and articulations of solidarity.

Chapter IV: Methods and Methodology

4.1 Methods

Among my main methods of research are multi-sited ethnography and interviews with Roma civil society and EU-representatives as well as Digital Storytelling with Roma activist and feminist participants. These include a combination approach of observations and memory work from interviews, the Digital Storytelling projects as well as informal, unrecorded conversations (upon consent). Due to the transnational focus of this research and its different national contexts, I have positioned my study as multi-sited ethnography, as I believe that it is the most relevant for studying dispersed communities like the Roma and transnational solidarities within and beyond the community. Digital Storytelling is used to produce digital narratives, which in my research, are used to understand Roma women activists' stories as feminist theory and knowledge production. Fundamentally, the Digital Storytelling method I used involved the selection of a participant through a mediator, the arrangement for a place and time for meetings to produce the project, pre-production meetings, and finally, the participation in the production itself, including both the dictaphone recording as well as editing of the files and image selection (taking new photos or choosing among existing photos). All tasks were performed together, in each site and online. I define Digital Storytelling as a method which is open to negotiation (with my research participants), participatory in essence, highlights personal narratives and which can contribute to digital archives to support community activism. I claim this method, despite my untraditional approach (which will be discussed later in this section) because it is based on and developed out of negotiations with my research participants and our acknowledgement of time constraints as well as physical location. Further, I motivate the choice of field work in Romania, Spain and Sweden with the community's large presence in these sites, my activist networks and language skills, as I work with Roma women (from Romania) in Sweden and speak the languages of two of the ethnographic sites, Spanish and Swedish, as well as English, which increases my access to communication, activist opportunities and facilitates invitations to the building of research relations.

In total, I conducted six interviews (involving nine individuals) with Roma activist from the following NGOs: Federación Nacional de Asociaciones de Mujeres Gitanas Kamira (the National Federation of Roma Associations in Spain) in Córdoba, La Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas Romi (The Roma Women Association) in Granada, Spain; the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (PCRM), the Roma feminist network E-romnja in Bucharest, Romania; and finally, Trajosko Drom [the Journey of Life] in Gothenburg, Sweden. Among these, all were

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community and grassroots-oriented, and all, except one, had explicit feminist objectives (see Appendix 2). Fundamentally, the role of Roma NGOs and feminist networks was mediation of contact and sharing of information in the first phase of the research encounters. They aided the selection process as they spread information and the details of my project, confirmed interest within the community and finally, chose my participants or directed me to individuals to whom I spoke and came to an agreement with. However, given my positionality, it is possible that this process involved aspects of gatekeeping in “decisions about what information to let through and what to keep out (as cited in Deluliis, 2015, p.4).

Among the six interviews, one interview was conducted through e-mail correspondence with Swedish Roma FI (Feminist Initiative Party) and EU representative, Soraya Post. Interviewees and participants included Directors, staff, community members and activists. In terms of Digital Storytelling projects, two were conducted in Spain, three in Romania, and one in Sweden, with the total of six participants, excluding two Romanian translators with activist connections to the Roma community (one for the purpose of producing a project and one for adding subtitles, both chosen through NGO connections). Furthermore, I had two different methods of conducting interviews and Digital Storytelling material: semi-structured interview questions for the NGOs to open up further dialogue and free, open-ended conversation for my research participants. The main communication in Romania was in English and Romanian (with the help of a community ally translator), Spanish in Spain, and Swedish and English in Sweden. Thus, one of the factors which may have impacted the data is aspects of translation. In one of the projects, two translators were involved at different stages of research in Romania: first, a local community ally translator assisted me in terms of communication during the recordings in Romania, and second, my Romanian friend, who had been informed about my project, assisted me in the process of translating and adding subtitles to the project upon my arrival back to Sweden. As I have recorded all interactions, I have been able to compare both the translator and my friend’s understandings and translations and deem them compatible. Translation however, can influence the way the story is told, what is told, or *heard*, and how the community’s identity is understood. To try to address these issues, all Digital Storytelling projects have been provided to the research participants for their final approval.

The Digital Storytelling (DS) projects, rooted in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, were developed in collaboration between my research participants and myself. Not only did I wish for this platform to be accessible during the course of writing my thesis, but to extend beyond my graduation, which is why I have continuously engaged in collaboration with NGOs in Romania, Spain and Sweden and maintained contact with my

research participants, with whom I have developed meaningful contact. To contribute to this possibility, I financially compensated the participants who struggled to participate due to economic reasons, provided access to laptops and dictaphones that I brought with me during my trips as well as installed related editing software (Wondershare Filmora) for the purpose of Digital Storytelling production. While I have replaced the participants' real names with new ones for anonymity and to protect their identity, brief descriptions of the Digital Storytelling participants is provided in Appendix 1.

4.2 Dialogue

The principles that have guided my research practices, my attempts to carry out research in ethical ways, constantly searching for platforms for meaningful and deliberate co-production of knowledge and critique, and more broadly, choosing a method that combines research and activism, stem from my feminist understanding of knowledge and dialogue. My understanding of feminist dialogue is drawn from Freire (2000) and Lugones (1983). Freire (2000) claims that dialogue cannot be reduced to a dichotomy of exchanges of two or opposite viewpoints; rather, it is an act of creation and necessity for human existence, which involves reflection and action through humility, courage, love, hope and critical thinking (p.87-88). More importantly, it can only be performed by those who wish to transform society: "Dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming - between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them" (p.88). Just like Freire (2000), Lugones (1983) emphasizes love, empathy but also responsibility in her concept of dialogue: "in order to engage in dialogue, it is necessary not to erase differences; rather, these should be preserved as a precondition for dialogue...Dialogue requires two voices, not one, because one would mean somebody's oppression and silence" (as cited in Hernández, 1997, p.16). My positionality certainly played a role in the production of the Digital Storytelling projects, but I experienced that the dialogues amongst us as feminists helped us overcome certain barriers, as the discussions evolved naturally, both with humor, concern and empathy. Thus, Freire's (2000) and Lugones' (1983) notion of dialogue based on mutual respect help us work and transform society by informing action and building social capital together.

Following their understandings of dialogue, I have implemented Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) in my project. This methodology has been explored in the Roma community before by Kazubowski-Houston (2010) and Melgar et al. (2011). From Kazubowski-Houston's (2010) collaborative ethnographic research and theatre project with Roma women in Poland, I learned that an external (non-community) research facilitator's

involvement in FPAR nearly always entails risks for conflict and for undermining participation, and I share her complex experience of trying to build bridges and sustain feminist dialogues to ‘learn together’ (p.140) despite the insider-outsider dilemma. Like Melgar et al. (2011), who carried out a similar project with Roma women in an education setting in Spain, I refrained from evaluating arguments based on academic qualifications and highlighted narratives based on the validity and legitimacy in the Roma feminist networks (p.218). Through this existing FPAR research on Roma women, I was able to better understand my role as a researcher in these Digital Storytelling projects, possibilities of conflict and my responsibility toward equal knowledge production.

4.3 Positionality and Ethical Dilemmas

Feminist standpoint theory, extended by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, suggests that, while there are multiple standpoints, all knowledge is socially located, which means that the factors that constitute one’s social location, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and functionality, not only shape “what we know and limit what we are able to know [but] they can affect what we are capable of knowing and what we are permitted to know” (Roychoudhury et al., 1995, p.898). Despite implications on epistemic privilege, such privilege is not automatically assigned due to social location and does not change the fact that women from the margins are systematically denied access to structures and locations that give them “tools to understand the systemic processes in which they are entangled” (Naidu, 2010, p.31). Like Spivak, Naidu (2010) warns about epistemic violence:

[The assumption] that the marginalised and oppressed woman has privileged access and insight by virtue of her being the victim of various kinds of systemic violence/s. Black women or Black African women then, according to the contours of this reasoning, would be tapped into privileged access just by being Black and African women, who are (collectively) marginalised and oppressed (Naidu, 2010, p.30).

With this critique in mind, I constantly have to ask myself: am I producing epistemic violence in my assumptions of knowledge and resistance? How can I understand my own social location in this research project? My reasons for doing this research can certainly be questioned. As I am pursuing a multi-sited ethnographic study in three different countries within the EU, one can interrogate my privileged position. To be able to travel and carry out this project, I have had the privilege to put shares of my income into a savings account overtime, for later use; thus, I want to address myself to the many other realities and struggles that make this research difficult to conduct. Further, I acknowledge that I am conducting research with communities

to which I do not belong and in languages which I do not speak. Based on such considerations, I particularly chose my research design, including method and methodology.

I want to shed light upon instances where I struggled with my position in this research, to acknowledge problematic aspects of my research and learn from them. Inspired by FPAR, my entry point in this research has relied on the assumption that all individuals hold immense knowledge about themselves and their surroundings, capable of critical thought and inquiry. Also, while I view education as a significant tool and part of my own personal and feminist development, I do not necessarily believe that education is the only mechanism to access analyses of power, inequality and injustice, or that it translates to empowerment or ‘humanization’ (as theorized by Freire), especially if its transformative potential to instill political action is not tapped. Given these understandings and my positionality, I have struggled with various critiques, which I have reflected upon in this research process.

First, as mentioned earlier, Naidu (2010) problematizes the idea that all women who have experienced different forms of oppression can insightfully reflect on their victimization, due to the structural inequality of access to tools to understand the complexity of their social location (Naidu, 2010, p.30-31). Similarly, Haraway (1988) writes that “vision is always a question of the power to see... We are not immediately present to ourselves” (p.585). In this sense, it is important to reflect on what it means to study a community to which one does not belong and how to pursue this ethically, bringing forth questions of my own ‘vision’ and the insider-outsider dilemma, especially relevant in my use of a translator. Translation is an indication of outsidership, as well as privileged access to information and research relations. For example, had the research positions been reverse, it is not certain that Roma researchers would have been met with as much support in Sweden, as I was in Romania and Spain, including the opportunity to use a translator. Apart from questions of access, conducting research with a community whose language I do not speak is an additional ethical matter to consider. While I speak two of the participants’ ‘majority-languages’ (Swedish and Spanish), I do neither speak Romanian nor Romanes/řomani čhib, which creates distance, to some extent compromising FPAR and feminist dialogue in Romania. However, I have tried to make myself visible throughout this research process, starting from explaining who I am and the aims of this research, to respecting the research participants’ boundaries and interests, and finally, to engage in feminist dialogues with my participants. My previous experience with the community may have influenced my credibility and the trust granted to me to support Roma women’s activism; this did not make me an insider, but a person from whom solidarity can be expected. Through the articulation of shared questions and contributions to broader social justice goals, as well as

the potential of our differences, we have explored the meanings and purposes of feminist research, together, which I believe strengthens the ethicality of this thesis.

Second, Narayanaswamy (2016) critiques the professionalization of local and/or indigenous knowledge to understand it comprehensively, based on “the idea that local indigenous knowledge must first be professionalised (ordered and systematised) so that it can be circulated and shared” (p.2159). As Roma feminist theory is undertheorized and I have struggled to find scholarship to support my empirical material, aspects of this critique can be applied to my research as well, considering that I have tried to contextualize Roma feminist theory in mainstream debates. On the other hand, Digital Storytelling participants expressed an interest in the increased circulation and sharing of Roma feminist theory.

Additionally, the framing of the story in the Digital Storytelling process is an important ethical consideration. This involves questions of identity, subjectivity and agency: Can the subaltern speak in my research (Spivak, 1998)? Are the Digital Storytelling research participants free to define their identities beyond the individual-versus-collective narrative? These points highlight the importance of recognizing the possibility of my research position’s influence on the framing of the stories. Given these concerns, the significance of ethical responsibility and the understanding of agential power in knowledge production have guided this research. Vives (2012) means that feminist research needs to address itself to the fact that research participants occupy agential power and can be as strategic as the researcher (p.64). They are not only ‘telling the truth’ in revealing their experiences; rather, they are constructing their ‘self’ according to their own interest or the researcher’s positionality (Vives, 2012, p.64).

Regarding my participation and role in the Digital Storytelling projects, I have considered new concerns in retrospect. My ‘open and broad’ framework might have counterproductively allowed for the framing of ‘success stories’ as will be discussed, and for unclear negotiation of research objectives. Not only may I have come across as slightly stupid, but also generalizing and essentializing, as I, in the first NGO meetings, expressed interest in working with ‘Roma women activists’, without specifically requesting further information about them. To this, one NGO responded, “so there are no criteria...do you want to talk to just any Roma?”. Furthermore, the assumption placed upon me as a researcher to conduct and process data on my own affected the levels of participation and the ways in which the digital projects were ‘participatory’ by nature. While I was careful not to ever call these projects mine, I was met with such indications: “How would you like to be described in her [my] project?”. Following the recordings, I was inviting the participants to engage in image selection and editing of the recordings together with me, to produce the Digital Storytelling projects

collectively. However, some had limited time or energy and requested to continue working with me online, sending me pictures and describing how and where to add them in the storyline. In those moments, without their physical presence, I felt that I was taking control over their stories and that the participatory platform was undermined, but I also reminded myself that these acts were decisions that they had personally made and consented to.

4.4 Methodological Limitations and Reflections

Studying transnational contexts, the method of multi-sited ethnographic research approach helped me understand Roma migrant participants, as women “with experiences prior to and beyond migration, with desires, aspirations, choices, and fears” (Vives, 2012, p. 75). One of the limitations of this method is, however, the “un-situatedness” that can follow from “the multiplicity of research spaces, [which may] become an obstacle in building relationships of trust with participants, since the researcher is never fully ‘here’ but ‘There ... and there ... and there!’ (Vives, 2012, p.66). While this scattered presence may have had implications on trust, the Digital Storytelling method and regular contact with participants helped sustain research relations.

At first, I conceived the Digital Storytelling process in very broad terms, ambiguously thinking of them as ‘giving voice’, to later critically reflect on this approach and realize that I did not agree with this notion and that it was not my intention at all. The activists I encountered already had a voice, they knew their stories and maybe they did or did not learn anything new from retelling them (Gottfried, 1996, p.26). I came to understand that I had learned and adopted this notion quite unreflectively, throughout my years of studies within the Social Sciences. This imposing and somewhat entitled consciousness-raising approach is, despite its underlying bias, a product of feminist theory developments that aimed to pinpoint the ways in which traditional social science could perpetuate or be used as a tool of oppression. Other discussions from feminist theory and critical psychology have highlighted the concept of voice as a “socially and politically contested site of meaning” and a site of power in which transfers take place (Thompson, 2018, p.99). Examining further limitations and a critique of paramount importance, Spivak (1998) is concerned with the silencing of voices when ‘giving voice’ fails, demonstrating how it can lead to the neglect or misrepresentation of the same voice the scholar wishes to ‘capture’. To move away from such rhetoric, the concept of dialogue is crucial.

The ways in which my application of Digital Storytelling has been different from that of other scholars is that the digital projects in this research are less planned and not limited by time. Unlike the work of other scholars, in my case, the Digital Storytelling participants preferred not to plan their stories ahead of time, write outlines or storyboards. Also, their digital

projects greatly varied in time, with some being 17 minutes long, and other nearly two hours; some with more limited time on their hands and some that wanted to speak longer. While my research shares many elements (close relationships and friendships, social justice goals, legitimizing different forms of knowledge production, demystification of theory, bridging the gaps between theory and practice, the creation of a digital archive, etc) with existing literature on Digital Storytelling (Hurst, 2014; Beckett, 2016), most scholarship point to the role of workshops to develop the method, which was absent in my case. While my Digital Storytelling approach did not include workshops, I shared Beckett's (2016) long-term goals for the project, as I also envisioned the projects as an always-accessible community-based digital archive (p.21). These two elements are linked to community activism, as I wanted to create a digitally available platform together with my research participants, with the potential to be extended beyond this research and in activism. Therefore, the projects are be distributed to all participants and NGOs involved, upon consent from the participants. Instead of workshops and due to factors of time and different physical locations, I maintained personal communication through informal means (text-messages and WhatsApp, Facebook, phone and Skype calls as well as e-mails) with my participants throughout this research process. Considering that the research participants live in different countries and that my fieldwork in each site was limited by time, continuous on-site workshops were not possible.

After reading existing literature on the method of Digital Storytelling, one of my main concerns is the construction of 'success stories', seen in Beckett's (2016) research: "I never wanted to be like the successful example. Whatever that means. This immigrant from Guatemala... look at him now, he graduated and he is doing a PhD program" (p.211). A success story is the neoliberal narrative echoing ideals such as the American dream: you can become anything you want in life if you just work hard. White guilt feeds off this narrative and projects itself onto marginalized subjects, replacing discussions on the colonial legacy in unequal societal relations with 'post-colonialism, post-slavery and post-racism' imaginations, through an equality discourse based on sameness. While Beckett's (2016) example and unintended concept of success was produced in the fight to allocate funds to under-resourced schools in California, my Digital Storytelling research did not have or aim to respond to economic incentives, institutions and sponsors. I have witnessed tendencies to frame 'success stories' among some of my participants, possibly due to my positionality and their /un/conscious fear that I would portray the Roma community in a bad light. Those stories mainly emphasized education as a 'solution to a problem' and consequently, the overcoming of a 'situation of inequality'. While I addressed these perspectives in my research by acknowledging complexity

and contradictory statements on education, many participants directly challenged success stories:

Look you will have education. You will be a smart person. The Gadjo will look at you and say, “Oh! You are a Roma who knows English or you are a Roma went to a PhD. Wow!” But we have to prepare you and tell you that at the end of the day, people may continue to be racist.

This methodology offered something different because it brought life to theory - an approach that I had been searching for, highlighting real faces, voices and tangible experiences shared by women around the world. Moreover, this format is accessible to many and challenges elitism in academia and the class issues that pose as obstacles for education, for people who are in positions of unequal access, through its support to digital community archives of knowledge production which do not solely rely on academic standards. I believe that this method evokes a sense of familiarity in encounters with research and theory; instead of creating distance between “the educated” and “the uneducated,” it can increase awareness among a larger number of people who are excluded from or stigmatized by formal education systems, enabling new learning experiences through relatable and accessible means. While four out of six Digital Storytelling participants had formal education, all criticized education; they were aware of their social location but used their critiques to include all Roma women activists in feminist dialogue. This aspect can certainly be questioned and constitutes a concern in Romani Studies and feminist critique. For example, Rövid (2013) and Stancu (2011) mean that many Roma transnational activists, including some Roma feminists, constitute an educated, professional elite. This, however, reflects a classist society, and so were possibly the selection of my participants, given my positionality and possible NGO gatekeeping. On the other hand, this does not render the discussion on education insignificant.

Chapter V: Lessons from Roma Feminism

This material highlights Roma women activists’ relationships to the community and other feminists, the complex negotiations in between, as well as the elements that constitute Roma feminism and Roma women’s activism. The participants in this study differ in terms of background, social location and age, but are all active in different networks, local (Roma) and transnational feminist movements, as activists, NGO staff, volunteers and community workers. Some of them are activist scholars, which is why I stress this dualism in my theoretical and empirical framework. The Spanish Roma participants are younger in comparison, given their

roles as students and young professionals. The Romanian and Swedish Roma participants possibly differ the most in terms of social location, due to migration and citizenship status. Among the three groups, the Swedish Roma participants perhaps have the most limited activist support, whereas Romanian and Spanish Roma participants are relatively connected to activist spaces, platforms, resources and transnational solidarity.¹ Essentially, the Digital Storytelling method brought reflections on the experiences of pain and suppressed identity in the community, but also on resistance, solidarity and visions for the future. Furthermore, the stories were deeply personal and complex, at times contradictory and indicating the occupation of multiple spaces and subjectivities. In the participants' narratives, I have identified the following themes: 1) the shared understanding of collective discrimination and Roma feminist critique on intra-community oppression, 2) the role of education and the notion of knowledge, 3) the struggle of uniting the identities as a Roma, woman, and activist, as well as the compatibility between Roma feminism and its relationship to the family, motherhood, community and religion, 4) the effects of fear, internal pressure and the class struggle on activism and resistance, and finally, 5) solidarity at local and transnational levels. All of these aspects influence the participants' feminist demands and point to the complex constituents of Roma feminism.

5.1 The History of Pain and Hidden Identities

Many Roma participants have expressed the shared experience of living in parallel worlds, which is further supported by Roma feminist scholars such as Carmen Gheorghe (2016), Ethel Brooks (2005) and Angela Kóczé (2009), who not only discuss the feelings of navigating the gadjé world as a Roma, but the vulnerability of the Roma feminist position in the community as well as in other feminist networks. Accounts from Sweden and Spain highlight attempts to hide the Roma identity, and/or the experience of being 'unidentified' from time to time, while simultaneously, finding oneself as a target once the Roma identity is 'revealed'. Marcela, for example, claims that she, on an individual level, was able to live 'through' her Slovakian nationality in Sweden and consequently, hid her Roma identity, but she had always experienced and witnessed firsthand the discrimination targeting her and her family. One Spanish Roma participant claimed that she could pass as "Spanish," but that she too, was discriminated as soon as her identity was "revealed". While she expressed that she could often go unnoticed when her identity was not confirmed and meant that her family did not gain as much visibility as other community members due to traditional clothing and

¹ For more information about the Digital Storytelling participants, please see Appendix 1

language, she was still treated differently “in the university...in the hospitals...the supermarkets...Everyone watching you when you go down the street”.

In Sweden, this ‘reveal’ could depend on factors such as language (romani chib) and police surveillance, targeting families who *became* ‘noticeable’ to the authorities through their official (and non-consensual) registration as Roma. In Spain, it could be a matter of last name: “I have the surname Cortes Carmona or Carmona Cortes... and when looking for a job, they throw away the resume”. This conversation was significant as it created a personal dialogue between my participants and myself, as I too have experienced exclusion and racism based on factors of visibility such as last name, which, at the early age of nine, led me to request my mother’s help to change my last name, so that I could increase my chance of ‘passing’ (as white Swedish).

In terms of identity, all Roma participants identify as part of the community, as Roma, Romi, Romani, Gypsy or Gitana, but they identify themselves in different ways, based on nationality, locality, occupation, education, family and background, activist networks, through belongingness to groups or contexts in which they situate themselves. Few participants, however, used the ‘Gypsy’ identity, and found it deeply discriminating, while others aimed to take control over and re-shape its meaning, just like African Americans transformed the ‘black’ category, which is discussed by scholars such as Oprea (2012) and Corradi (2017). Corradi (2017), for example, named the title of her work *Gypsy Feminism*, which is both critiqued and embraced, given her Traveller (part of the Roma minority group and one of the first Roma migrations in Europe) background.

Identity is, to the surface, tied to, but not understood in isolation from the experiences of discrimination, but is also not seen as fixed. It is not necessarily a choice, but a continuous struggle or development. Spanish accounts describe a mixed identity, “You have different identities... some are more important to you. In different orders, maybe Catalan-Gitano-Spanish, Gitano-Catalan-Spanish, or first Gitano and then Andalusian, or just a mix of both” . Brooks’ (2015) understanding of halfies and hybrid identities fit in this context. Adding complexity to such perspectives, Rövid (2013) extends the discussion on ‘halfie-identity’ by discussing examples of second-generation Roma, raised by migrant Roma families who have settled in Italy: “their children are born in Italy, speak Italian and would like to integrate into Italian society, but they remain stateless... their civic equality is denied” (p.386-387).

All Roma participants speak about the difficulties they or their family members have experienced due to discrimination. Participants from Spain and Romania mention issues such as school segregation, unemployment, the lack of access to services, and the experiences of

everyday discrimination in all its forms. They say that, growing up, non-Roma parents did not want to mix their children with Roma children, so they placed them in other schools, “emptying the schools” and leaving them to grow into ‘segregated ghettos’ for the Roma. Participants from Sweden describe the shame of being an outsider, the confusion of sitting in a classroom where their identity was never given relevance or meaning or even being kicked out of the classroom by the professors themselves, of fear from and mistrust in the authorities and institutions, and the unexpected visits from the social services that deemed them inappropriate parents and ‘legally kidnapped’ their children. Further, all participants highlighted the ways in which stereotypes have affected them. One participant, for example, discussed an incident that changed the way she looked at herself and her role in society. After volunteering with an NGO in Bucharest with her colleagues for more than two years, she casually mentioned her ethnicity when discussing a new Roma project, which led to unexpected reactions and shaming: “Do you have horses? Do you have... are you living in caravans? How do you eat? And I was like...Oh my God! You didn’t ask me two years ago”.

Many participants critique identity politics based on their experiences of exclusion. Several participants claim that a visible identity increases violent risks. Like aforementioned accounts, they discuss traditional clothing as a factor of visibility and as an additional risk to become the target of violence. One participant said: “I have witnessed strange situations like children, kids throwing rocks on [Roma] women only because they wear traditional clothes and they are very easy to identify as being Roma women”. In this context, scholars such as Oprea (2014) discuss the particular vulnerabilities of migrant women who embody this ‘visibility’. Discussed as colonial and oppressor mechanisms by Corradi (2017) and Freire (2000), these examples characterize the majority society’s coercive attitudes and measures for inclusion, integration and assimilation. Roma participants, however, say ‘an impossible no’ (Spivak, 1998) to these structures, navigating the majority societies with their bodies as living intersections.

5.2 Living at the Intersections

Intersectional theory in Roma feminism is grounded in the experiences of Roma women activists. Reflected in the volumes of Roma feminist literature on intersectionality, this analytical tool is also popular among the Digital Storytelling participants, who emphasize the understanding of intersectionality as an element and building block of Roma feminism. According to one of the participants, Roma feminism translates to intersectionality, which, to her, captures the position between ‘two cultures’, between different worlds:

I'm not looking as a Roma like blue brown eyes and brown hair and brown skin and so long...my grandmother had some issues which my mother had and I also have. But it's not the same issue that Gadjo women have. The part of racism is very sensitive and very hard to explain. But it took me some years to understand. I'm a feminist or I am a Roma feminist? I'm a Roma feminist for sure. It is Roma feminism it's not just feminism.

Like Bitu (2012), one of the participants described how Roma feminists were responsible for the advancement of intersectional feminist arguments in Romania: "Roma women were the ones who advocate in Romanian legislation to include the multiple discrimination. We are the ones who promoted, advocated and included in the law the multiple discrimination". Romanian feminists' discussions on reproductive rights excluded Roma women as they ignored inequality of access and other factors that were significant to address reproductive injustice such as forced sterilization, which Roma women activists like herself had campaigned against for a long time. When Romanian feminists discussed employment, for example, they discussed promotion, completely dismissing the struggles of Roma women to even enter the labor market in the first place. Similarly, when they discussed the right to contraception and access to condoms, Roma feminists demanded a broader conversation on reproductive injustice and forced sterilization. Thus, Roma feminist arguments were very different in comparison to the Romanian feminist agenda.

5.3 Relationships to Education and Knowledge Production

The topic of education was discussed by all participants, but in different ways. Many of them, for example, argued that education was a 'solution' to "their problem". This stems from liberal debates and notions that the "Roma has to change" and, to some extent, distance themselves from the 'traditions' and 'culture' that lead to their segregation. However, this was complicated by a transnational feminist framework born out of Roma deliberations between Spanish Gitanas and Romanian Roma, who together deconstructed ideas of knowledge and education, and challenged the idea that institutions hold sole authority on knowledge, and that the Roma need to be educated in order to be respected - the 'deserving migrant', or the *good* Roma. Fundamentally, education seems to hold a particular significance or meaning among the participants in my Digital Storytelling projects. These views are represented in Roma feminist theory (Mirga-Kruzelnicka, 2015; Corradi, 2017), in theorizations on dialogue (Freire, 1984; Sorde et al. 2014) as well as the significance of local knowledge production as a critique to Western notions of objectivity (Smith, 2012; Narayanaswamy, 2016). However, the Digital

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Storytelling participants reveal new elements: different degrees of rejection of education as an instrument of social change.

While all participants except two (who were explicitly opposed to formal education and the academia) assigned positive values to education, their perspectives have included critique on classism, elitism and the risk to ‘lose oneself and one’s identity’ in the process of educating oneself. Despite the emphasis on the value of education among most of the Roma activists I encountered, liberal feminism, with education as a point of reference, was critiqued as a measure of ‘civilization:’ “we don’t need education to be respected; we already have knowledge”. Some tied their feminism and even identity to education or explained that they understood themselves, their struggles and later their feminism, due to education. Others claimed that they did not need education to understand their positions as Roma, as women in society, and meant that education was a process of assimilation.

Altogether, this complex relationship to education can be seen in statements that simultaneously support and criticize education. One participant discussed the vital role of education in informing feminist praxis but also located the academia as a site of institutional racism:

We have to explain to the people... why Roma women rights. And we weren’t prepared. We didn’t know also. We had to understand our experiences. We had to have theoretical and academical information to be able to understand and to explain to our people and so long. The theoretical part supported my practice but it’s also important [for my] feminism [to understand] black feminists, Jewish feminists or Asiatic feminists or...India. You read a lot of Indian feminist perspective and that’s why I have learnt how it is with this forced marriages...[but at the same time], I never felt so much Gypsy as when I was at the university.

The last line is particularly significant to the tensions in the relationships to education and knowledge production, and addresses whiteness and the othering processes that universities and institutions have historically shaped. Ahmed (2007) points to similar experiences among black students in the US, who experience institutional racism and become ‘token measures’ of diversity at universities which prefer ‘doing documents’ than equality work and misusing anti-discrimination policy as a marketing strategy to attract students and sponsors (p.597-598).

Despite different critiques, all participants shared the same point of departure, including one particular question that that they had struggled with: why should I study when I can’t contribute to society, when at the end of the day, I am Roma, and nothing changes? The following account corresponds to this question:

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Look you will have education. You will be a smart person. The Gadjó will look at you and say, “Oh! You are a Roma who knows English or you are a Roma went to a PhD. Wow!” But we have to prepare you and tell you that at the end of the day, people may continue to be racist.

This concern suggests that education should not be treated as an end in itself; it should engage political action, which is a valid critique and resonates with Freire’s (2000) concept of pedagogy, or the understanding of education and dialogical learning for the purpose of informing political action. Similarly, Roma scholar Rövid (2013) claims that education holds little significance unless invested in Roma community activism: “a very thin layer of transnational Romani activist and professional elite has emerged, but an educated and well-off Roma middle class that could serve as the backbone of an autonomous Roma civil society is hardly perceptible” (p.385).

Two accounts constitute the strongest critiques on the limitations of education as a tool for social change. The first concerns inequality of access: “I’m fully rejecting the idea that education is everything. It’s a potential and it can increase, but we have seen so many examples of Roma being very well educated and still without the same opportunities as a non-Roma”. The second account concerns a dialogue between Romanian Roma and Spanish Roma feminists. While some Gitana feminists rejected the transformative potential of education, Romanian Roma feminists were rather indifferent to education but did not reject its potential:

There are so many experiences that can be valuable to women who don’t have the education. Who don’t have the knowledge. But who live this and seeing through their eyes is much more valuable than talking theoretical ideas. And they were actually doing feminism within the community level with Roma women who are not educated at all. Who don’t have the level of education in this way. Like formal education. And they didn’t care at all about that. And they were saying and I was asking, “yes but do they understand that I’m feminist.” Because we work as well with Roma women who don’t have the level of education and we don’t care about that because for us it’s not a criteria to have education to have knowledge...but then I was asking her, “do they have this knowledge?” and she was saying, “yes, they are so powerful”.

These accounts are incredibly interesting, as they challenge multiple aspects of society and raise questions that are relevant to students like myself. What knowledge is valued and produced by schools, universities and institutions in which many of us have been trained, not only for a few years but the majority of our lives? I recall the words of my undergraduate professor in African history, who said: “You have been sitting in a classroom, learning and

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taking exams since the age of 6...but were you ever taught the lesson of how to love yourself and how to take care of each other?“. Responding to such question, Roma feminists introduce the argument that knowledge does not necessarily come from education or any institution.

Departing from these critical discussions, the participants reflected on education as a site for assimilation, normalization and white-washing. One of the Swedish Roma women’s accounts concerned her dyslexia and ability to write, and how she “failed” to meet an acceptable academic standard in the eyes of non-Roma colleagues, who valued such standards. The participant, however, was proud of her ‘inability’ and refused to define herself, her skills and knowledge based on a standard she did not consent to:

They [Swedish people] have to deal with it. I write incorrectly at times...but they have to learn...that e-mails and documents are not always properly written, and if they truly care to understand, all they have to do is ask me what I mean. It doesn’t make me less worthy or less knowledgeable.

This critique echoes the argument of Freire (2000) who challenges the ‘teacher’s’ (oppressor’s) discourse and authority on knowledge production and assigns the ‘student’ (oppressed) more flexibility, space and agency to determine their own ‘ways of knowing or being’, and that the student does not have to listen to the teacher.

Apart from the understanding of education as overestimated or as an /in/effective tool for social change, in some cases, education was seen as an integral component of identity, displaying a sense of pride in terms of academic achievements and/or framed as a personal interest: “I’m a university feminist.... I am grateful to my parents because they instilled in me the importance of education, without losing my origin, knowing that I come from a Roma family. All this has made who I am, a Roma but also a college girl”. Similarly, another participant expressed her desire to study: “My dream was to study. I always wanted to study...I would love studying law. I know it’s a complicated career, but it was my dream, my dream was to study”. Considering these accounts and the class issue of access to education, it is also important to acknowledge their specific social and cultural underpinnings, which represent only a part of the community. These participants, however, meant that ‘the educated Roma’ constitutes an ‘impossible position’ with additional gendered implications, as being uneducated was frowned upon in the majority society, and being ‘too educated’ was seen as problematic in the community. Personal interest, in this sense, was often politicized. For example, while one of the participants loved doing research, her education also affected her role in the community, sometimes seen as an outsider: “when I go there, people saw me like outsider in this moment. So you are not also Roma. You are not complete Roma for them. Because you

are staying outside, you experience different stuff, you are so educated...”. This perspective is often mentioned in Roma feminist theory, addressing the impossible expectations and standards set for Roma women, which determine their ‘authenticity’ and loyalty to the community, or deem them as traitors, ‘fakes’ and/or Westernized (McCormick, 2018; Gelbart, 2012).

The framing of education as a ‘problem’ in the Roma community is influenced by Western narratives and reproduced in one participant’s account: Roma girls “leave school fast, thinking of getting engaged, get married quickly... or the parents forbid them to study, because they are Roma, and they stop going to school”. These arguments were constructed ‘under Western eyes’ (Mohanty, 1984), departing from the liberal assumption that education is the only legitimate path to personal development. To offer a different perspective to the ways in which the Roma supposedly ‘segregate’ themselves or fail to ‘stay in school’, another participant argued that these stereotypes are not coherent models of explanation for the phenomena they target. In her own research on young Roma students, she describes students who have been failed by the education system itself, or who cannot stay in school due to migration and who, upon their return, struggle to pick up where they left off. The participant concludes: young Roma girls get married “because they don’t have anything else you know”.

Besides the critique on the lack of practical options and possibilities for change offered by education, all Roma participants shared the critique on the authority of academia on knowledge production, as well as concerns for the production of political subjects enabled from masculinist, racist positions of ‘neutrality’ who perpetuate institutional sexism and racism in academia. One participant said, “I have met a lot of people who maybe have attended high institutions, who have studied. They’re supposed to have knowledge, but they didn’t change...they remain, have racist attitude. They didn’t change, education didn’t take something...”. She problematizes that these ‘educated people’, including feminists, are conditioned to reproduce the stereotypes and inequalities as established by the academia. In Roma women’s activism, they address the limits of neutrality by challenging academic feminism, whiteness and white feminist empowerment models that the academia promotes.

The notion of education and knowledge also ties to the kind of feminism that is produced in the different contexts. In Romania, for example, the feminist movement is criticized in similar terms. Some participants described the feminist movement as ‘academic’, ‘elite’, “with highly educated persons with PhDs...talking about women’s experience and mostly about political representation [in the academia] ...”. Similarly, other participants critique the Romanian feminist approach as exclusionary, ‘stuck in a feminist discourse’ that

is not compatible with community work and actively diminish the role of Roma civil society in advancing Roma women's issues. In contrast to this elitist approach, they describe that the Roma feminist movement is inherently different, working with civic initiative groups in Bucharest and all over Romania, "trying to understand the struggle of Roma women living in social exclusion and to empower them to change the situation in their communities... trying to bring women together so they could meet, they could share their [struggles and stories]". Thus, formal debates and education are understood as 'distant' and relatively irrelevant to the experiences on the field. However, the critique of education is not only about knowledge production per se, but it can also be seen as a contribution to a more general debate about feminism and its co-optation with elitism.

5.4 Negotiating and Uniting Roma and Feminist Identities

Swedish Roma feminists argue that they struggle to advance the feminist movement in their community due to strong family values and fear of such disruption. Consequently, they try to promote social change slowly, gradually transferring, to the Roma women in their community, new understandings and roles in society, in a way that does not disrupt the family institution which constitutes a major pillar upholding their local networks. Despite these struggles, interestingly, they find a way to unite their different identities and roles in their feminism and praxis, by, for example, setting a work schedule that depends on and is flexible to accommodate to the family's needs: "our work schedule should allow us to spend more time with our children and family...and if someone is expecting a visit from a relative, or something happens within the family, they are excused from work". As crucial points in their accounts, they demonstrate that motherhood, family, religion and feminism are compatible. For example, motherhood and children's upbringing in the community are of crucial importance to the participants, who believe that women should have the right to stay at home and care for their children if they choose to, and who distribute the childrearing responsibility beyond the immediate parents. Departing from family and community values, Roma feminists also offer critique to capitalism, the notion of work and its effects on society in terms of assimilation (working as a standard for being a 'good immigrant') and stealing time from sustaining significant relationships:

I want to be Roma, and I want to be able to be a mother and spend more time with my daughter....I don't want to leave my daughter at kindergarten every morning; I want to shape my daughter myself, not placing her in the hands of someone else to raise her...I don't want to work 8 hours a day; I want my family to see me, and I want to see my family.

This account is shared by black feminist scholars such as bell hooks (1984) and Rodriguez (2016), who challenge liberal feminists' arguments for women's economic empowerment and desire to participate in the labor market, by emphasizing that black women have not had the luxury of seeing their children grow up in peace and free from violence, and that caring for the family has historically been more empowering than at the workplace. Gheorghe (2016) offered similar critique as she discussed the ineffectiveness of focusing on employment as a measure to enhance Roma women's rights considering the lack of quality, not only due to inequality of access but racism at the workplace.

Roma women activist perspectives on motherhood resemble black feminist discussions. Not only is motherhood and feminism compatible by principle, but in practice and activism. Motherhood, from black women's perspective, involves the extension of childcare to the community, along with the sharing of such responsibility to other 'childrearsers', which compensates for the services the community cannot afford (hooks, 1984, p.144). Similarly, Collins (1990) addresses black motherhood "as a dynamic and dialectical institution that consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships between Black women, their children, the larger Black community and each other" (as cited in Rodriguez, 2010, p.63). This community work is considered 'activist mothering', highlighted as part of the interconnectedness of community work (labor), political activism, and mothering" (as cited in Rodriguez, 2016, p.66). Such maternal activism is seen among black and Hispanic mothers in the US, such as the mothers of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, whose "sorrow and grief serve as critical weapons in struggles for justice" (p.66).

5.5 The Relationship between Social Location and Feminist Resistance

One of the most significant lessons from Roma women activists' discussions on identity and resistance is the acknowledgement of the value of 'slow change' and the reconceptualization of resistance within a community which has historically suffered from persecution. Responding to radical feminist critique on the insufficiency of 'slow change', Mahmood (2006) believes that we should not discredit women who develop practices of resistance from within the system, and that feminist agency can emerge in the very same structures that oppress. Many Roma feminists along with research participants in this Digital Storytelling project share Mahmood's (2006) understanding.

Roma women's feminist demands are often based on the specificity of their location, but due to complexity of identity, various forms of pressure, and possibly my positionality in these projects, many participants jump from Roma-specific positions to drawing from the universal category of 'woman' and women's oppression to rejecting the experience altogether.

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For example, one participant described sexism first, from the standpoint of a Roma woman, and then, jumped to the universal standpoint entailing the collective shared experience of women. While she started off by saying that being a Roma woman was like “being the devil” and that sexism is a part of their suffering in the societies and communities they live in, a moment later, she commented that sexism did not influence her experiences as a Roma: “in my family, sexism doesn't exist, maybe a little, like for all other women, but no more for being Roma”. Another participant takes pride in her identity as a Roma woman and demonstrates traditional community/family values (following ‘her laws’ and being happy to have an uncle who “kills” her if he sees her partying at five in the morning), while she, at the same time, critiques them as an activist: “I want you to know what a Roma woman is worth; we are not just to be at home, scrubbing and sweeping, being housewives and taking care of children”. Gelbart (2012) highlights ‘contradictions’ in her examination of elderly Roma women’s and her relatives’ stories of their positions as Roma women in the household as both empowering and constraining, and of practices of negotiation of power ‘within the realm of the problematic’. She, for example, means that acts of jealousy, critiqued widely by feminists as ownership, are, according to many Roma women and men alike, based on mutual security, belonging and reciprocity, and a site where both partners can negotiate their relationship and set boundaries:

The untranslatable cultural, local, and family-level values embroiled in this potentially problematic and abuse-perpetuating dance of ownership are touched upon in some Romani studies scholarship...As with beauty pageants or sexualized and self-sexualizing female musicians, there is more to this cultural matrix than any single theory or form of activism can readily sort out (p.24).

On the one hand, such accounts demonstrate the tensions that are very tangible and present in Roma women’s everyday life, their identities, feminist values and praxis. On the other hand, they point to the significance of context-specific analysis to the examination of (Roma) women’s location and experiences (Mahmood, 2016; Jovanovic et al., 2015). Considering that the institution of family is often seen as a site of oppression in liberal feminist theory, the additional factor of a supporting family challenges the way experiences of oppression are understood and point to fruitful contradictions and inconsistencies for analysis, referring to certain spaces and sites in which women occupy more (or less) power and agency to develop resistance and critique. Therefore, social location is key in addressing Roma women’s feminist demands:

It’s very complex and it’s very... I mean, diverse and it depends a lot on the position that you are in because you can talk about Roma women in traditional communities,

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Roma women in poor communities, Roma women who have achieved different positions, different level of education, different acknowledgement in different spaces. Despite their significance to a wide range of community members, the articulation of Roma feminist demands is mainly concentrated in and assigned to activist networks, critiqued by Roma scholars such as Rövid (2013). As with any community organizing, it takes time and often money to actively dedicate oneself to social justice goals, especially if one cannot afford losing a day of salaried work, and if one's mind is occupied with survival. Several participants point to the loss of political energy as a direct result of poverty.

To some participants, identity awareness is a privilege, referring to Maslow's (1943) theory in psychology on the hierarchy of needs, saying that leading a life of poverty and impoverished conditions in Romania, without a roof over your head, starving and fighting and migrating, then identity is not the issue that consumes you the most:

You know you're Roma, but your identity means little in comparison to survival in a situation like that. This does not mean that identity is not important; it is, but it is more about self-awareness, understanding the implications of your surroundings and what the Roma identity means and what experiences it brings. Questions like, how much do I understand? How much do I understand myself and my interactions with the majority society? Many questions are not reflected upon because of fear.

This account touches upon the effects of oppression on identity and the access to consciousness, the level of consciousness required to engage in or lend support to activism and community work. Similar questions arise: what is feminism for a person who is struggling to survive in her everyday life? This participant recognizes the many women in the community whose basic human rights and needs are not met, with lack of access to infrastructure, proper roads, water, no heating systems or bathrooms at home:

Because of being so occupied to meet those basic needs... when you struggle for surviving. Then it doesn't matter if you are in an oppressive relation, if you are in an abusive relation, if you suffer from power relation because of your mother in law, family, community. These issues become invisible and ignored.

The participant's question, however, does not affect her concern for these women as a feminist. Instead, she asks: "how can we transform that?" and means that the framing of Roma women's understanding of their roles and lives as women as 'not a priority' should be a feminist concern; all women should be able to feel at home in the feminist movement. She has previously been asked why Roma women are 'not aware' of or struggling against their situation as women, which makes her deeply uncomfortable, as she does not want to give accounts that, in another

context, highlight their struggles as less a priority. On the other hand, she stresses that Roma women, indeed, have many complex experiences of intersectional discrimination but that their everyday struggles remove the focus from their positions as women:

Because everything is on you. Because you are burdened with all the responsibilities. And they are struggling with a lot of issues...we noticed that a lot of women don't have actually the power to decide over their reproductive rights. Over the fact that they want to use contraception for example. And it's not their choice even if it's their bodies. It's a family choice, it's a man choice, it's the church choice, it's not theirs most of the time.

In this context, Roma women, often in secret, ask critical questions and reach out for help in Roma feminist networks, especially for access to contraception: "You know I would like to hide this. Can you help me do this?". Tesār's (2012) provides similar examples of female relatives helping each other 'cheat' norms behind closed doors, such as mixing the laundry with underwear, despite the 'pollution belief', which constitute moments of inconsistency and interruption of patriarchal norms which are fruitful in feminist analysis and examination of agency:

The oldest woman in the family reminded me not to put my lingerie in the machine. However her daughter-in-law, who helped me carry the device to my place, secretly encouraged me not to follow the old woman's advice. 'When she's not at home, I wash all my underclothes in the machine', Catalina, the young woman tried to convince me (Tesār, 2012, p.140).

Interestingly, this 'cheating' practice can be read as a new emergence 'within the problematic' and a potential feminist site of agency (Mahmood, 2006). Thus, it highlights the existence of 'secret feminist praxis' and acts of 'doing feminism' without naming it. Such phenomenon is connected to the value of 'slow change' and can be seen in examples given by the Swedish Roma Feminist NGO Trajosko Drom, which, in consideration of female community members' interests, hosted a fashion show and project (Rättigheter med stil) in order to advance the topic of women's rights through a 'fun' medium:

The fashion show was supposed to get them [the women] here, to design and start discussing. We started having women's meetings and displaying traditional outfits. Elderly and young women came; the elderly shared stories of the past and the young were amazed: 'have we looked like this? We were so beautiful'.

As a result, new shared questions and concerns arose, particularly about the female body and self-expression (the 'can-we' questions), which would be considered feminist inquiries in other contexts. This nameless feminism is seen in family relations and among non-activist and

activist community members alike, at very local levels such as supporting mothers who reject the patriarchal violence and sexism targeting their daughters in the community, which should not be underestimated.

5.6 Transnational Feminism and Solidarity

Given the ambiguity of solidarity and the ways its meaning constantly changes in these dialogues, we can understand that solidarity is not fixed. In the following two sections and accounts of solidarity, three main forms are evident: conventional, affective and reflective solidarity. As in the theoretical framework, these discussions draw from Dean (1996, 1998). Many Roma feminist participants have expressed an interest in transnational feminism and wanted to have a say about and to contribute to women's rights around the world, too. One of the Spanish Roma feminist participants asserted that that strength lies in unity and that women from all over the world should support each other and fight together:

I don't like [the separation of] Roma, feminist, woman; because you are a woman! What does it matter that you are Roma or not, that you are Syrian, that you are- I don't know from Norway. No matter where you are from, you are a woman and as a woman, society still rejects us. Then let's fight for that! And the rest will come, I do not know. In the end we are fighting for the same. Then why are we separated? Let's join our struggles, together we are stronger than separated.

While this account constitutes an argument for transnational feminism, it is based on liberal feminist thought and sameness. Other accounts of solidarity demonstrate difference as a site of transformative power. An example of such reflective solidarity is seen in the case of Swedish Roma feminists, who work alongside sign language users to increase the status of Romani chib and sign language simultaneously. Dean (1998) describes this phenomenon:

Once we recognize that the more differentiated we are, the more we depend on each other for recognition and connection, we create the possibility for seeing our relationships themselves as key components in the process of working together on shared political concerns (p.5-6)

However, as seen in Roma feminist theory, Jovanovic (2015) addressed the scattered ideological loyalties embedded in Roma feminist activism, and that the meaning of transnational feminism and solidarity are slightly ambiguous and depends on context.

Despite these notions of conventional solidarity (unity as strength) and reflective solidarity (differences as transformative), another participant described how transnational activism and deliberations with other Roma activist women gave her a sense of relief that she

could not find 'at home' - an experience that other Roma women activists in the transnational network shared:

We were a group of Roma women in activism, young women from Albania, Macedonia Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and other women.. [At first] we didn't realize how close we are. How common we have experienced...it was very hard to accept that we are Roma women acting for women rights. It was very hard to be part of women rights in our countries Our struggles link us to be very close and to keep each other.

From these experiences, she imagined the meaning of solidarity as something more intimate and personal, based on relationships, as opposed to what she had previously learned in her local networks as tactical and strategic. On the latter point, Dean (1996) explains that such solidarity "is reduced to a means, subject to the calculations of success of those seeking to benefit from it" which offers little space for critique and values relationships as 'opportunities' to be consumed (p.27).

One of the major problems in transnational solidarity is how to go beyond global dichotomies and inequalities. Roma women activists envision a critical transnational concept and reflective solidarity, but also stress affective solidarity as an integral component of such approach. Despite the many rich experiences involved in these interactions, transnational feminist networks also reproduce internal hierarchies and inequality. One example responds to the biased request to 'speak from a Roma woman's perspective': "Fuck off! I can talk about women issue too... Ooh! There is a Roma here... let's talk about Roma. Early marriages, Oh my God! Everybody has an opinion, everybody has a data, and everybody is talking about that and that". She pointed out that she was not interested in dialogue until white feminists acknowledge racism as the key factor behind controversial issues such as forced marriage: "Fuck off! Talk about your rape, talk about your issue and don't talk about my violence of my Roma men". These accounts' anger is transformative, constituting a site of power which moves the participant toward social transformation, (Dean, 1996, p.39; Hemmings, 2012, p.148) and call on other activists like myself to stand in solidarity with their struggles.

According to Roma feminists, racism and reductionist views prevent transnational feminism from realizing a dialogical character, claiming that until racism is addressed, they are not interested: "until then, I am a Roma feminist". Consequently, they discuss change as coming from 'inside' since no one hears or listens to their critique; "it is the Roma that will make their own change; no one else can do it for us". These participants are critical of the framing of Roma issues from a Western perspective as well as the non-Roma driven 'Gypsy industry' that profit from their oppression: "[we] avoid being the client of anyone. We want to

function differently; we will not wait for funds or requests from anyone before acting” (Bitu & Vincze 2012, p.46). This continuous disappointment certainly adds exhaustion to the Roma feminist movement which often struggles independently, despite its transnational activism (Oprea, 2012). The vision of a *different* solidarity, however, is meaningful in these accounts.

5.7 Solidarity at Home

Discussions on transnational feminism evolved into reflections on solidarity in the community and its fundamental constitution of friendship, love, respect, trust and loyalty. While solidarity in their own local networks had been seen by many participants as ‘more political’ than personal, still struggling with this divide, they were able to understand the meaning of ‘the personal as political’ anew, and consequently, re-articulate it in a transnational context. When such views were carried back ‘home’, however, they were not always welcomed. The Digital Storytelling research participants recognize the importance of social location, mental health, awareness and level of consciousness as well as the mental strength required to ‘give energy’ to the movement. Such vulnerabilities shape the notion of solidarity among the participants, and as a result, impact feminist political strategy, with elements such as respect and the value of ‘slow change’ (including ‘strategic organizing’) and ‘going easier’ on other women in terms of critique, judgement, and identity questions. Solidarity, thus, entails many meanings, but fundamentally, in the Digital Storytelling projects, it is expressed as something learned through feminism or experience, as part of human relations, primarily within the family and community, but also to non-Roma activist friends. Several participants displayed strong family values, which translated to their feminist networks, to sisterhood, “feeling at home” in their activist platforms, and/or “growing up in the movement”. In these very locally articulated terms, solidarity was seen as part of cultural and family values and relationships as well as a major force to overcome intra-community oppression and to lend strength to other ‘sisters’. Such understandings resonate with black and Islamic feminist thought as previously discussed. However, family, community and motherhood as sites of solidarity create a wider concept of ‘family’ across all borders.

One of the new emergences in this project was the account of a participant who identified feminist solidarity in her own mother, “a classic widow” from whom she expected disappointment, due to her conservative upbringing:

When I went to her and I told her, ‘Look, I cannot do it anymore. I will divorce. And I need your support and trust’. I just said like this shortly. She looked at me...She told me just, ‘I believe you. We have to support a child’. And I was... [pause]. That moment. It was not just my mother, it was a moment [of] solidarity.

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In this very ‘local’ articulation of solidarity, she identified feminism among women in her family, despite their lack of access to or participation in activist networks. Along these lines, she visions a feminism that is inclusive of and analytically relevant to generations of women, which is an incredibly important lesson to feminists like myself. Other participants discuss solidarity in similar terms: solidarity does not necessarily come from feminism. In this context, the ‘feminist’ category is both seen as important and unimportant among Roma feminist participants and scholars, emphasizing that due to the negative connotation and fears connected to the notion of feminism, many Roma women are “doing feminism” without explicitly naming it. Such views are undertheorized but represented in the Digital Storytelling projects, as mentioned earlier in this section.

Discussions on solidarity brought attention to the function of feminist critique and judgment. How critical should we feminists be? One participant formulated this question when she shared her experiences of activism and the environment in her network; she recounted her disappointments in her activist colleagues’ lack of social and personal support when she was suffering from depression and abuse:

I am talking about women’s rights, but I didn’t see that it’s so hard at my home. I forgot to be a woman. I was Roma. I was an activist. I was a feminist for many women’s rights. But at my home, I wasn’t a woman... I did not realize that I was the woman I was talking about. I did not realize that I was a victim of abuse... Because I was a strong activist.

She told me that she was expected to be a strong woman, a feminist that did not accept injustice and was blamed for making ‘the wrong decision’ in reaching out and expressing herself to her activist friends, at home and abroad:

‘This is not about you. It’s how you act very bad against other Roma feminists’... I was [isolated] from the group. I was not an example [anymore]. ‘This is not what a feminist would look like. This is not a feminist doing. You are not looking like a Roma now. What makes you a Roma? You are talking about this issue with the Gadjo’. I did such a bad thing because I stayed with that guy [and] because I was in solidarity with my [non-Roma] colleagues...It was impressive how the things were presented to me by my Roma feminist...And it was like my action were against them. Doesn’t matter what I had accomplished. And it was my first time where I was talking about my issues...

This lack of support stems from a masculine model of strength which compromises trust and solidarity. According to Dean (1996), solidarity (affective or reflective) in this case is absent and replaced by conventional forms: “the norms and values constituting the expectations that group members have of each other so tightly confine the range of acceptable action that one

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confronts the dilemma of conformity or betrayal, of complicity or personal integrity” (p.26). Thus, through practicing what she understood as solidarity and by reaching out to the people she thought would stand in solidarity with her, the participant was seen as a traitor to her own group.

In this environment, Roma feminists struggle to talk about the personal embedded in the political, as intimate, personal struggles and experiences were secondary to so called ‘political’ struggles’ (strategic mobilization and notions of tactical solidarity rooted in identity politics). One participant suggests that Roma activist women need spaces in which they can find comfort and express themselves freely due to pressure from multiple directions:

The feminists don’t consider me feminist because I was a victim but I am feeling like a survivor. And my Roma don’t consider me Roma because of my feminist perspective. So it’s amazing between two cultures that you are. You are in two cultures because of your feminism and because of your Roma also.

This participant discussed how her feminism ‘matured’ into adopting a more inclusive concept of solidarity that addresses itself to ‘the personal’. In our dialogue, she told me that she had recently realized she never had the chance to speak to other women about personal, intimate women’s experiences, such as the female body, sexuality and pleasure. Those reflections were rarely, or never, heard:

I share... so many professional information and such few personal information. We are used to that and it’s not okay...we are seen as very strong women. And we are seen like feminists. Which is not so good [always] because it is not all the time that our men or husbands or lovers understand about the work that we do and they play with our identities, how we play with our identities...[Now] we are talking about our personal lives. We are more mature and this is because of feminism. Because of the perspective that we had. We understand our experience better.

This certainly has implications on the lack of solidarity that the locally-negotiated ‘activist’ role produces. Dean (1996) describes this phenomenon as an effect of the norms and expectations set in the activist platform which neglect individual identities; “how I can interpret and express my needs, is overlooked in favor of already existing notions of what it means to be one of us” (p.33).

New formulations of solidarity emerged out of these discussions. Many participants describe the experience of learning about solidarity from feminist perspectives and in practice, especially from feminists in their transnational networks:

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They offer me solidarity without any changes. Solidarity can be something offered by not having anything exchanged... I'm not judging what you are doing as a woman. Because I know and I understand. Because of feminism I understand your struggle that you have.

This participant speaks of a reflective solidarity beyond identity and which does not fall apart in the face of conflict or change, “not tied to the outcomes of particular decisions but to our commitment to dialogue and discussion...to the efforts to keep going and working together (Dean, 1996, p.16-17). Other participants mean that it is important to be empathetic to Roma women's struggles despite the presence of problematic ideas and praxis, and not to judge them, but to offer unconditional support:

To strengthen women - this is a sensitive question - requires that we have to move forward a bit slowly, step by step, so that we do not steal energy from... given that women are expected to be the main caregiver in the family, and if you then remove women from this environment and place them in the majority society, in working positions, activist networks, it can of course be difficult for the community, especially with the elderly's judgment. We cannot push it too hard.

Besides the emphasis on refraining from judgement, they claim that given the “social chaos” in their everyday life, every step toward change is a major achievement and celebrated as such. Two of the participants were amazed that they had reached so far, describing how difficult it was to establish their Roma feminist NGO in Sweden.

While the ‘unity as strength’- argument is significant to all Roma feminist participants' discussions on solidarity, they stress that the Roma identity does not guarantee a relationship of solidarity, and that there is an incorrect assumption that all Roma are united. They critique this homogeneous, reductionist attitude: “it's not like we unconditionally accept anyone into our lives just because they are Roma”. In the same conversation, this process of gaining trust, as a prerequisite for solidarity, loyalty was raised as a significant factor. One participant shared that, during the time when she was founding her feminist NGO, she hired young Roma women interns and ‘tested their’ loyalty over the course of the internship period - the same sense of loyalty that she had admired in her family, who did not leave her when she was going through mental health issues. The same participant also describes how she left her position in a feminist NGO for her Roma colleague to be able to support herself, when they depended on limited project-based salaries. To her, equal distribution of power and power-sharing was ‘true’ solidarity. Many of these concepts - unity, solidarity, trust, loyalty, hope, love and support - were interdependent and also connected to ‘familiarity’ and values of togetherness, developed

within the community or the family. Describing reflective solidarity, two Swedish-Roma participants spoke about interdependence, about ‘complementing’ each other, the importance of different forms of support, and how the help of a ‘sister’ who “put her thoughts into words” (which she literally struggled with due to dyslexia) enabled the participant to establish her own Roma feminist NGO.

During my fieldwork in relation to the Digital Storytelling projects, I witnessed firsthand this closeness and the strong bonds Roma feminist activists had developed amongst each other. In the process of reading feminist theory to locate Roma feminism, I had a similar experience, where I, through each reference, got to know the seemingly close and small circle of Roma feminists. I was impressed beyond explanation by such amazing women who dared be themselves and simultaneously actively challenge masculine models of leadership and knowledge in their everyday life, despite the always-present risks of violence and suppression from multiple directions, from male members of the community who portrayed them as traitors placing their loyalty with the ‘gadje’, or from non-Roma women and men, including activists, who rendered their feminism illegitimate and impossible. Roma women, however, have proved these beliefs wrong; they can be Roma and women and feminists and whatever they want to be. To conclude this section, in these Digital Storytelling projects, some of the greatest lessons from Roma feminism are the hybridity of identity and the failures of identity politics, humility, the location of mental health and socio-cognitive development in feminist analysis, the complex meaning of dialogue and dialogical feminism, the critique on education and notion of (feminist) agency, the compatibility between ‘traditional institutions’ and feminism, and finally, questions on feminist critique, feminist praxis, solidarity and transnational feminism. On the latter, much of the material suggests a need and longing for solidarity. Many of the participants discuss this term differently, but they all express its value in strengthening Roma women’s activism. Several examples challenged conventional solidarity, pointing to its failures and how to move forward. Thus, reflective solidarity was highlighted to articulate solidarity beyond identity and a feminism across borders.

VI. Conclusion

Lessons from Roma Feminism: Retrospectives

In this thesis, the dialogue with Roma women activists is central, as it sheds light upon feminist perspectives and knowledge production that usually occupy a marginal position in mainstream feminist debates. The idea of this research emerged in my own activism and

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connections to the community in Gothenburg, which later materialized in transnational projects with Roma women activists in Romania (Bucharest), Spain (Córdoba, Granada) and Sweden (Gothenburg), captured through my multi-sited ethnographic approach and main method, Digital Storytelling. Recording personal stories and aspects of the research participants' lives and activism, we added visual representations and built these narratives digitally, together, which constitute practices that were inspired and informed by FPAR. Alongside the Digital Storytelling projects, six interviews were conducted with Roma feminist and activist networks and/or NGOs in each site, to understand the history of the community and to facilitate the initial contact. From six interviews and five Digital Storytelling projects, from which the material and stories were understood as feminist theory and contextualized in feminist theoretical perspectives and debates (Roma feminism and intersectionality, transnational feminism, liberal versus cultural and/or different-centered feminist thought), four main lessons emerged: the critique of academic knowledge production and feminist dialogue as its antithesis, notions of 'invisible' feminist praxis and slow change, feminist solidarity in a transnational context, and the compatibility of feminism with factors such as culture, religion, motherhood and family.

In this research, I also aimed to contribute to the development of transnational networks between Romania, Spain and Sweden, through the sharing of research and activist resources, including offering aid in developing the Digital Storytelling method and to support local and transnational activist platforms. Altogether, these components call for a larger project which operates alongside the Digital Storytelling projects; therefore, I continue to pursue Digital Storytelling activism with the Roma community outside of my role as a student. I have facilitated contacts and new forms of cooperation that could serve the interests of the different actors involved in this research. For example, I have committed myself to support a participant from Romania in her 'urban Roma' projects and to expand them in Europe, potentially seeking cooperation with the University of Gothenburg. Also, I have helped bring together Romanian and Swedish Roma feminist networks for the purpose of planning and setting up an educational Erasmus project that aims to increase awareness on Roma issues. Additionally, I have connected the Swedish Roma feminist network with feminist scholars at the University of Gothenburg to discuss critical gender equality policy and the process of reporting in preparation for a conference in Budapest. All of the incredible stories I have been able to listen to, and all of the insightful knowledge I have gained over the last few months have instilled in me visions of new transnational feminist projects. This includes the establishment of a forum for developing new shared critiques, and ideas such as the invitation of guest speakers from the three different sites of this research for a seminar on Roma feminism at the University of

Gothenburg. Beyond these ongoing projects, and two Digital Storytelling projects in progress, these digital archives remain active and accessible, and will be available upon request.

Finally, I believe that I have met the objectives and aims of this research through the implementation of my dialogical approach to understand Roma women's activist demands, and my emphasis on how Roma feminism provides irreplaceable lessons to feminists interested in social change across borders. My thesis is relevant for the field of Gender Studies, as it challenges the most basic constructions of ways of being and knowing as well as notions of resistance, identity and knowledge. In regard to my research focus on knowledge production, bringing real life experiences to theoretical levels and vice versa, I can contribute to my field with critiques on the very constituents of the standards and institutions on which this submission relies, and the premises on which I have been able to enter the academia, and others suffered exclusion. This thesis further points to inconsistencies, the limitations of dichotomies, binaries and the separation of identities and experiences, and recognizes fluidity and subjectivity that constantly cross the 'borders' and narrow frames that categories fabricate, both challenging and drawing from identity politics simultaneously, which altogether, offers complexity to gender perspectives. Gendering practices is certainly an important concept for me as a feminist, and to which I have come to add many meanings since my enrollment in the program. This term encourages me to navigate the complex entanglements of my social location, position as a woman in a patriarchal society, and my relation to other subjects, as well as the practices of transferring values amongst ourselves, including our practices of gendering and misgendering others; it leads me to reflect on the social constructions we materialize, but also our power to challenge, re-negotiate and transform their meanings, as soon to be graduates, now equipped with more analytical tools to face the world around us and the courage to say 'an impossible no'.

Further Remarks

Based on the limitations of my research, it would be highly interesting to explore Roma women's transnational activism and its connections to the EU and European civil society further, through case studies or Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) from different ethnographic sites in Europe than those in my study. Spain, for example, is particularly relevant given that it is one of the sites which has been able to develop a strong, solid Roma feminist movement. Other sites than Europe are certainly also relevant, and I believe that the transnational activist network between Native, Dalit and Roma women require further

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attention. In addition, as seen in my research, the concept of solidarity holds many meanings, and many feminists, including myself, struggle to define this term. Thus, further studies on solidarity, either through FPAR or discourse analysis, may be helpful to offer new analytical tools for political action, and to conceptualize and navigate future possibilities of transnational feminism. Further, the theme of ‘invisible’ or nameless feminism as well as feminist perspectives from the margins and/or dialogical feminisms in this research deserve more attention. For this purpose, feminist scholarship should be attentive to knowledge production beyond the academic realm.

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Appendix 1: Participants

- Alicia: Spanish Roma feminist and single-mother who works in a furniture store, providing for herself, her mother and son, and is actively participating in projects and courses provided by the Federation of Roma Associations in Andalusia.
- Ana: Spanish Roma feminist graduate in Tourism and Economics, active in the Roma feminist movement and the Roma Association in Andalusia. Her daily work includes increasing awareness on Roma culture and Roma women's history.
- Cristina: Romanian Roma feminist from Ferentari, Bucharest. Currently active with a project that explores urban Roma history, responding to the stereotypes of the 'nomadic Roma'.
- Diana: Romanian Roma community worker from Ferentari, Bucharest, a survivor of domestic violence and a strong children's rights advocate who works in local schools with children and youth.
- Iulia: Romanian Roma community worker from Ferentari, Bucharest, who works with Diana and collaborate with the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities in the "Mother's Club".
- Alina: Swedish Roma feminist NGO founder and a member of the Council for Roma Inclusion in the Municipality of Gothenburg, who has a leading position in working towards a Roma women's movement in Sweden.
- Daniela: A friend of mine and homeless migrant Roma woman from Romania who has lived in Sweden for the last few years, teaching courses and holding a lead role in projects at the library of Biskopsgården in Gothenburg, Sweden.
- Sorina: Homeless migrant Roma woman from Romania, recently collaborating in a Faktum-led (a social company and collective for and by homeless individuals in Sweden) production of a book and photo collection depicting the daily life and struggle as an EU-migrant in Gothenburg, which she sells and shares in events such as this year's International Roma Day celebration at the library of Biskopsgården in Gothenburg.

Appendix 2: Information about NGOs

NGOs in Romania

E-Romnja:

E-Romnja is an association established in August 2012 by a group of activists that advocates for a public agenda that must include Roma women's issues. E-Romnja advocates for the respect, integrity, and dignity of Roma women. Our focus is on working for images of Roma women to reflect the diversity and reality of their lives. Over time, negative images of Roma promoted by media, literature, and even art have had a major impact upon the lives of Roma women, making them invisible and marginalized. They're voices have yet to be documented – from their experiences as slaves, their inferior position inside their communities and/or families, or the patriarchal system which kept them illiterate, economically dependent, and subjugated to cultural traditions. But most importantly, their invisibility as women has had a major impact upon the policies and programs adopted to improve their situation, which over time reflects the role that they are allowed to have in community and society. This is why we believe that it is important for Roma women to be reflected as they are and to be represented on the public agenda as a first step in asserting their rights.

Why an association for Roma women?

Because Roma women don't exist on the public agenda and their issues are not solved through government policies. Because Romanian society is dominated by negative perceptions and stereotypes regarding Roma women and we need to dismantle them. Because Roma women need a frame/community to affirm their interests and manifest their beliefs; they need a community that can champion lives and experiences that they can relate and associate with. Because Roma women must be present and visible in public sphere through their contribution in community and/or society. Because Roma women don't have sufficient NGO's that can stand up for them.

Retrieved from: http://e-romnja.ro/e-romnja/about_eromnja.html

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities:

- Non-governmental, non-profit think-tank organized and founded in 2008, in Romania.
- Based in Bucharest

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- Two main programs: Alternative Education Club and Mother's Club
- Mission
 - We act towards solving social inclusion issues of Roma and other ethnic minorities and truly dream about a world where these issues no longer need answer.
 - We believe in the kindness of people and know that the solution to all our concerns lie in every community's readiness of embracing this kindness.
 - We are ready to combat injustice and prepared to help others get ready as well through sustainable educational programs that fight prejudice and negative attitudes.

Retrieved from: <https://policycenter.eu/en/about-us/the-mission/>

NGOs in Spain

Federación Nacional de Asociaciones de Mujeres Gitanas - Kamira:

[Translation]

Kamira is a Federation of Roma women's associations, operating since 1999, focusing on four main work areas:

1. **Community**: We are a network of associations working together for a common goal.
2. **Resources**: In Kamira, you will find a multitude of resources, links and necessary information, whether you reach out to us as an association or a private individual.
3. **Activities**: Kamira organizes multiple activities, training courses, writes and conducts reports and studies, and is committed to its objectives
4. **Complaints**: If you witness acts, behaviors or discriminatory actions toward the Roma according to the criteria for hate crimes, you can report it to Kamira.

Retrieved from: <http://federacionkamira.es/>

Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas Romi:

[Translation]

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- Founded and based in Granada, Spain
- The first Gitana Association in Spain, founded in 1990
- Initially started by a small group of radical activists and students who wanted to start their own feminist movement as the Spanish feminist national movement did not consider Gitana women's issues. Thus, in the early 1990s, it helped consolidate a Roma feminist movement both at local and international levels.
- Consists of Roma women activists, students, teachers, volunteers and women across all professional areas
- Goals and philosophy: fights for women's rights, "in a serious and demanding way, without losing our cultural identity". "We are convinced that another reality is possible, and if we unite our strengths, the future will be better".
- Objectives: To help other women, especially Roma women; to contribute to Gitana women's awareness of their rights, capacities for activism and leadership in the community; to promote Gitana artists (such as writers, poets, painters, doctors, politicians); to improve the community activist platform; to promote unity and solidarity across borders and to demand that Gitana activists are listened to and respected as women and feminists;

Retrieved from: <http://mujeresgitanasromi.blogspot.se/search?updated-max=2015-04-27T22:45:00%2B02:00&max-results=7&start=7&by-date=false>

NGOs in Sweden

Trajosko Drom:

[Translation]

Trajosko Drom was formed to strengthen women belonging to the Roma minority group in Sweden, to support and protect individuals from social vulnerability, as well as strengthen their own capacity to achieve personal and collective developments.

The long-term objective is social inclusion for the Roma group. Thus, the organization aims to gather women from many different Roma groups to, in collective efforts, offer support and instill a sense of pride in the Roma identity, but also encourage and equip them with skills to face society and the majority population, to enable political mobilization, interactions and

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asserting political pressure and influence, overcoming difficulties in terms of trusting societal actors and finally, to gain access to society facilities and services.

By organizing Roma women who have gone through such processes, they are able to stimulate further development and competence in the group. Those struggling with basic needs are helped to access various forms of assistance, including access to knowledge and support.

Trajosko Drom's objective is to be a safe, supportive and encouraging meeting place that brings new hope and self-confidence to people and motivates them to pursue their own initiatives and to assert their ability to fight the injustice they are facing and improve their living conditions. The purpose is to provide both social support and practical assistance to both strengthen their own capacity and to continue supporting pro-Roma policies in the public sphere.

The association aims to educate the majority population revolving the Roma group in order to inform and challenge the public sector, to influence politics, instill social change and fundamentally, to promote inclusion, equality, gender equality and human rights in Sweden.

Retrieved from: <http://trajoskodrom.se/index.php?pageId=559>