



# **Doing Roma Feminist Knowledge Production in order to Challenge Hegemonic Knowledge Production**

**A Case Study of the Exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores contemporary Roma feminist knowledge production, with a focus on art. Due to the consequences of the social-economic-political system which maintains the power and privileges of white, middle-class men in Europe, the vast majority of Roma women have not been in a position that would allow them to influence discourses about knowledge production. Their experiences were therefore not taken into account. But as Michel Foucault said, „Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, 95), so it was just a matter of time for Roma women to start reacting collectively and challenge mainstream knowledge production. Inspired by scholarly works women of color have published in the USA since the 1980s, Roma feminist scholars, activists, and artists are challenging mainstream knowledge production about “Roma” in Europe and worldwide. The aim of this thesis is to discuss Roma feminist knowledge production, which challenges mainstream knowledge about Roma, by drawing on the lived experiences, culture and traditions of the Romani people, from their social-political-economic standpoints in the societies. In 2019 I did a three-month internship at the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) in Berlin. ERIAC together with the *Rumänisches Kulturinstitut* organized the Roma feminist exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”. The core of my thesis is an analysis of how six artworks that were part of the Berlin exhibition contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production.

**Keywords:** Roma women, knowledge production, Roma feminist art, intersectionality, challenging hegemony, diversity

## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no material accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no material previously written accepted and/or published by another person, except where an appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for the thesis is accurate:

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Signed: MARINA CSIKOS

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This thesis is dedicated to the Roma women, living now and lived in the past, who never stopped fighting for their voices to be heard, never let their dignity to be destroyed and their power to be weakened. We will continue the fight. We are the Future!

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction .....	1
I. Literature Review .....	4
I.1. Introduction.....	4
I.2. Challenging Knowledge Production from the Staindpoints of Women of Color.....	6
I.3. <i>Critical Romani Studies</i> .....	11
I.4. Finding Roma Feminist Perspectives in Challenging Mainstream Knowledge Production .....	20
I.5. Conclusion .....	26
II. Internship Methodology and My Positionality .....	29
II.1. Introduction.....	29
II.2. Working at ERIAC.....	29
II.3. Methodology.....	30
II.4. Positionality During the Internship .....	32
III. Doing Roma Feminist Knowledge Production-A Case Study of the Roma Feminist Exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”.....	34
III.1 Introduction .....	34
III.2. About ERIAC .....	35
III.3. Background Information about the Exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe” .....	36
III.4. Discussing Personal and Professional Experiences of the Guided Tour.....	40
III.5. About the Artists Featured at the 2019 Exhibition .....	43
III.6. Analyzing Artworks: Contributions of Six Artworks .....	44
III.7. Conclusion.....	50
Conclusion .....	53
Bibliography .....	55

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Kiba Lumberg, Messenger Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija.....	44
Figure 2 Kiba Lumberg, Black Sarah Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija.....	45
Figure 3 Anna Maria Gheorghe, One's Sight 2011, Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija.....	47
Figure 4 Anna Maria Gheorghe, One's Sight 2 2019 Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija.....	47
Figure 5 Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, Ciucholand 1, Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija.....	48
Figure 6 Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, Ciucholand 2, 2013 Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija.....	48

# Introduction

It was during my second year at the Central European University (CEU), that I started to think about the issues that inspired me to write this thesis. During the tutoring classes that I took in the Introduction to Gender Studies course in 2018 at CEU, my tutor gave us a piece of writing which absolutely changed my life and greatly influenced the way I thought about my relationship with knowledge production. Written by Alice Walker, the pioneering book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) has helped me rethink what I knew not only about the role of Black women in knowledge production, but also about the role of Roma women. In her book Alice Walker beautifully explains the different ways in which her ancestors contributed to the everyday practice of producing knowledge: singing about the pain Black women slaves endured, taking care of plants in the garden with competence, or cooking delicious food from carefully selected ingredients for their families. Due to the consequences of the social-economic-political system which is maintained by white, middle-class men, the great contributions made by women of color have long been suppressed and denied.

The vast majority of women of color (including Roma women) have not been in a social-economic or cultural position that would allow them to influence discourses about knowledge production; their experiences were therefore not taken into account. The exclusion of women of color's experiences has helped white middle-class elite men maintain their power and shape academia, art and activism in their own image. But as Michel Foucault said, „Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, 95). It was just a matter of time for women of color to start reacting collectively against their exclusion from knowledge production.

In this thesis, I would like to acknowledge those women of color scholars, activists and artists who have – through their endless efforts – contributed to challenging the exclusion in mainstream knowledge production. The thesis has two aims. First to contribute to knowledge production in the wider context of academic literature written by and for women of color. Secondly, by its very focus on Roma feminist knowledge production (which will be discussed in section I.5.), this research hopes to contribute to Roma feminist scholarship.

The background of my interest in doing research about Roma feminist knowledge production comes from my personal and professional connections to Roma women. I also belong to the Roma community and I have worked with Roma people through different NGOs, projects and events. For example, from 2012 to 2015 I was an active member of the Romaversitas

Foundation,<sup>1</sup> which aimed to help Roma university students to complete their studies. Through their programs I have been involved in many workshops, conferences and projects which have broadened my knowledge about the situation of Roma in Europe.

In order to explore an institute which is important for Roma art and culture, namely the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, I had a three-months internship there. The focus of my internship was on the Roma feminist exhibition ERIAC and the *Rumänisches Kulturinstitut* Berlin (RKI) in corporation held at that time. In Chapter 3, I will offer an analysis of six chosen artworks so as to provide examples of how Roma feminist knowledge production is conducted. The main research question of the thesis is: What contributions to Roma feminist knowledge did from the exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”, make especially as pertains to the six artworks, I have chosen to focus my analysis on?

Throughout the literature review, my analysis will demonstrate that women of color scholars, artists, and activists have been challenging mainstream knowledge production by initiating discussions about their intersectional experiences as gendered-raced subjects, challenging racial, gender, sexual stereotypes regarding women of color, questioning discourses about what knowledge means and how it should be produced, as well as making acknowledged their own ways of producing knowledge. By relying on the findings of the literature review, the Roma feminist exhibition of ERIAC will be used as case study to analyze contemporary Roma feminist knowledge production.

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I present and discuss the extant literature on challenging knowledge production. The literature review will consist of three main parts. In the first part, women of color contributions will be examined, an area that is essential for initiating discussions about the contributions made by Roma women. As the second element, I will focus on *Critical Romani Studies* journal, one of the most important platforms for Romani Studies scholars. In the last part of the literature review, I will discuss the major works by Roma feminist scholars who have influenced the ways we think about Roma feminist knowledge production.

In the second chapter, I will present the research methodologies utilized in the course of my research, discuss the circumstances surrounding the completion of a three-month internship at ERIAC, and my positionality as an intern, student, and scholar. In the third chapter of the thesis,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://romaversitas.hu/>



which is at the same time the analytical chapter, I will first introduce ERIAC and the Roma feminist exhibition, discuss my experiences as a guide and leading an exhibition tour, and subsequently analyze the six chosen artworks, asking what and how they contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production. Finally, I will outline my main conclusions and discuss some of the issues which I find relevant for any future research regarding Roma feminist knowledge production.

# **I. Literature Review**

## **I.1. Introduction**

Knowledge has been perceived as being integral to the subsistence and survival strategies of people (Gurukkal 2019, 26). Knowledge used as survival strategies has helped people cure diseases, cultivate lands and communicate with one another. Because knowledge is so essential, many academicians have tried to define what knowledge is and how it should be analyzed. Social theory of knowledge production gives us an analytical framework for how human ideas and social relationships shape our definition of knowledge. These human ideas and social relationships are generated by cultural traits, religious beliefs, rituals, social norms (Gurukkal 2019, 26). By understanding knowledge through social theory, it becomes clear that we cannot understand knowledge without analyzing humans' subjectivity. How certain group of people or societies approach knowledge very much depends on their relationships with their beliefs, rituals, social norms and so on. Having different understandings of knowledge would in fact be a great boon: the trouble comes when dominant groups begin „imposing their knowledge system through suppression, incorporation, reconstitution, subordination, marginalization, and even destruction of knowledge systems of ethnic groups” (Gurukkal 2019, 6) or any other groups.

Since in this thesis, I discuss the contributions of the Roma feminist exhibition, co-organized by ERIAC, in the beginning of this chapter is necessary to clarify what I mean by feminist knowledge production, before turning to the specificities of Roma feminist knowledge production. The problems of knowledge production are central to feminist theorizing, which has aimed to challenge the androcentric, mainstream thinking in social and natural sciences (Longino, 1993) as well as the humanities. Feminist knowledge production will be discussed here with a focus on standpoint theory, which seemed to be the most relevant approach for Roma feminist knowledge production. In the mid-1970s and early 1980s, many feminist theorists began developing feminist methods to conduct scientific research. The result of searching for alternatives way was the development of feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory explains the relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power (Harding, 2003, 1). In discussing feminist knowledge production, using standpoint theory is useful for two major reasons. First of all, because the experiences of people are socially constructed due to their social/political/economic/gender/religious/etc. position in the

societies, accordingly their knowledge is also socially constructed. In this sense, as gendered category, women have their own way of accessing, experiencing and producing knowledge (Harding, 2003, 1). In male dominated societies, focusing on how different marginalized groups of people (women, people of color, disabled people, LGBTQ) engage with knowledge production, will generate a less partial, hegemonic knowledge system (Harding, 1993, 445). Therefore, doing feminist knowledge production, in this thesis, means challenging hegemonic knowledge production by generating discussion about how marginalized groups of people, from their social-political-economic standpoints, engage with knowledge production.

After clarifying what feminist knowledge production means, in the rest of the chapter I will discuss those major works, which have influenced Roma feminist knowledge production. In section I.5. a definition will be provided, which will be based on the works discussed below. My literature review consists of three main parts. In the first part of my literature review, I focus on some of the key works on knowledge production, that had been developed by women of color scholars in the United States (US) from 1980 to 2020. My choice to focus on the US comes from the fact that women of color writers in the US have made an important contribution to challenging traditional thinking about knowledge production. These feminists, who came from very diverse national, ethnical, cultural and economic backgrounds, changed in many ways the mainstream discourse on what knowledge means.

In the second part, I will review three issues of the journal *Critical Romani Studies (CRS)*. I will specifically focus on those articles of the journal which discuss knowledge production. This part of the literature will help to understand the role of Romani Studies within knowledge production and present the different ways how *CRS* journal has challenged mainstream knowledge production so far.

Last, but not least, I will look at contemporary Roma and non-Roma feminist scholars' work within a broader context of Roma feminist knowledge production. I will discuss some of the main works which greatly have impacted Roma feminism, and at the same time have contributed to Roma feminist knowledge production.

## I.2. Challenging Knowledge Production from the Standpoints of Women of Color

Geographical locations are important because they allow us to see what kind of context literature originates from. Women of color scholars were also influenced by the Civil Rights movements (1960-1970) and started to raise their voices against racism within academia. The literature review underscores that the 1980s in the US was an important period for women of color writers. One of the first most influential works was bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman?* in 1981, in which (even though the author did not mention intersectionality) she greatly contributed to developing this new term. Whereas intersectionality as a concept was coined by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in 1989, hooks was among the first to highlight the double oppression of black women both in academia and society at large. In the Introduction of the book she writes:

Although the women's movement motivated hundreds of women to write on the woman question, it failed to generate in depth critical analyses of the black female experience. Most feminists assumed that problems black women faced were caused by racism—not sexism. The assumption that we can divorce the issue of race from sex, or sex from race, has so clouded the vision of American thinkers and writers on the "woman" question that most discussions of sexism, sexist oppression, or woman's place in society are distorted, biased, and inaccurate. (hooks 1981, 12)

While the question of women places within academia was on the agenda during first wave feminism, those women who did not fit under the category of "woman" were left out of this discourse. Black women (including other women of color) not only had no place in the world of academia but were also largely excluded from public discourse in general. It became clear for colored women thinkers that gender is very much raced, just as knowledge is. More specifically, viewing knowledge from the perspective of intersectionality explains why Black women and working-class women possess different gendered roles in society compared to white women. When it comes to knowledge production Black women's and/or working-class women's contribution are not as valued as the contribution made by white women (hooks 1981).

As more and more women of color scholars joined the fight in the 1980s to challenge both patriarchy and white privilege within academics, art, activism and academia became more diverse. Many colored scholars realized the potential within the organizing power of diversity and started to work together. Women of color therefore published books together that offered a complex picture about how women of color see academia, racism, sexism, homophobia or

simply how they live their everyday experiences. Edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, one of these books was *This Bridge Called My Back-Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981), consisting of a collection of poems, essays and academic articles produced by Afro-American, Asian American, Latina and Native American women. Because the authors included different types of sources besides “scientific” articles (such as poems inspired by the writers’ personal lives and so on), we can see that challenging knowledge production also involves the variety of genres and sources that are included in this type of venture. The need for such a book was urgent because many women of color felt uninvited to and even discriminated by the academic environment. As Anzaldua and Moraga write in the Introduction:

The book intends to reflect an uncompromised definition of feminism by women of color in the United States. We named this anthology ‘radical’ for we were interested in the writings of women of color who want nothing short of a revolution in the hands of women – who agree that that is the goal, no matter we might disagree about the getting there or the possibility of seeing it in our own lifetimes. We use the term in its original form, – stemming from the word ‘root’ – for our feminist politics emerges from the roots of both our cultural oppression and heritage (Moraga and Anzaldua 1987, xxiv).

I would like to highlight one particular writing from the book that serves as an example of how writing, and therefore knowledge production, is a rather complicated matter for women of color. In her article, “In Search of the Self as Hero: Confetti of voices on New Year’s Night: A Letter to Myself “ (1981), Nellie Wong explains that as an Asian American feminist she has many doubts about her legitimate place within academics. She poses herself the following questions: „Who are you who has written a book of poems, who has stored away over ten years of fiction, poems and prose? Who are you who describes herself as an Asian American Feminist, who works and writes toward that identity? That affinity, that necessary self-affirming love?” (Moraga and Anzaldua 1987, 177). By asking herself these questions, Wong not only reflects on her inner doubts about her own position within the academy, but also that of colored women in general because her position as an Asian American Feminist is not a simple issue. The writer also raises the difficulty of finding Asian American female writers within American Literature. In order to challenge this situation, Wong mentions some Chinese American feminist writers who have made significant contributions: „In your search you do not deny the writings of Hisaye Yamamoto, or Wakako Yamauchi, Jade Snow Wong or Maxine

Hong Kingston, Jessica Hagedorn or Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge” (Moraga and Anzaldua 1987, 178).

In the literature, many women of color scholars face the question of finding role models within their own communities. While searching for their heroes, women of color scholars also had to reconceptualize what knowledge means in their cultures and for their people. In her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), Alice Walker points out that, during slavery, Black women turned to music instead of writing in order to express their feelings (Walker 1983, 232). Interestingly, for Walker Black female slaves are not only victims of oppression „but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release” (Walker 1983, 233). Music in this sense becomes more than a form of creativity, it is also a form of knowledge. Music was (and is) not the only artistic form black women engaged with. In order to understand how black women, engage with knowledge production, Walker turns back to her own mother as writes: „She made all the clothes we wore, even my brothers` overalls. She made all the towels and sheets we used. She spent the summers canning vegetables and fruits. She spent the winter evenings making quilts enough to cover our all beds” (Walker 1985, 238). By recalling her own memories about her mother, the author makes us realize that we have to reconceptualize what we think „knowledge” is. Is not transmitting information about cooking a part of knowledge production? Is knowledge of sewing not as valuable as building museums? Did the songs black slaves sang on plantations not contain important lessons regarding knowledge?

Walker makes us realize that if we want to know how women of color contribute to knowledge production, we have to approach this issue from their perspectives. Turning back to our mothers, female peers and ancestors shows us that women of color have been always in the center of knowledge production because they had the social role of taking care of the house, raising children and maintaining strong social connections among one another. Even though they could not access institutions, women of color have been producing and transmitting knowledge in their communities, homes and personal lives.

In the 1980s, Women of Color Studies also focused on what connections could exist between their own way of thinking about knowledge production, their marginal socio-economic position, and power relations. One of the leading thinkers in this issue was the black and lesbian, writer and civil rights activist, Audre Lord. In her essay ”Age, Race and Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference\*” (1984), Lord underscores the specific differences which are

sometimes forgotten and problematic in the case of Black women. She claims that class inequality is very important because class differences cause many invisible and unspoken challenges for Black women. These challenges could be, for instance, that they do not have enough money to buy certain things (books, notebooks or tools for paintings) to provide the circumstances of creation. They also have to work a lot and simply do not have the time to sit down and spend time on writing, which requires more time and patience.

As we can see, the writers mentioned above agree on the importance of intersectionality in terms of accessing and creating knowledge. Another important leader in reinterpreting intersectionality and knowledge was Gloria Anzaldua, who brought to academia a concept that helped many women to express their ideas in this regard. In her revolutionary book *Borderlands =: La Frontera* (1987), Gloria Anzaldua introduced the notion of *mestiza* consciousness. She writes: „At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological cultural and biological cross-pollenization, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*” (Anzaldua 1999, 99). In the book, Anzaldua speaks about her experiences from the position of “borderland,” which at the same time refers to the literal border between Mexico and the US and to the cultural/political/social/gender. In terms of knowledge production, the book initiates new ways of thinking about how migration, colonization, non-Christian spirituality, non-binary gender relations and so on, while simultaneously shaping what and how we think about knowledge.

Yet some scholars think that it is almost possible project to challenge Western dominance in knowledge production. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who is well-known for her contributions to post-colonial studies., in her 1988 article entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” critically deals with the question of “epistemic violence” and the agency of the “subaltern”. Spivak accuses Western scholars, such as Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze of an “epistemic violence” that they commit through constituting the Third World as the Other (Spivak 1988, 282). Due to its subordinated position, the subaltern is not the owner of the knowledge, but rather is an object of the West. When it comes to third-world women, she refers to the practice of Sati to demonstrate this hopeless situation: „Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (Spivak 1988, 302). According to Spivak’s

understanding, there is no place for third-world women in Western-dominated knowledge production their voices erased by both patriarchy and imperialism.

Women of Color Studies scholars have been through difficult times while questioning the hegemony of heterosexual, male, white academics. These challenges, however, did not stop them from creating; instead, they inspired them to open new spaces where colored women could express their opinions. One examples of this is Patricia Hill Collins` *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, a volume which was first published in 1990. In her book, Hill asks the question: „Why are African American women and our ideas not known and not believed in?” (Hill Collins 1990, 3). For Hill it important to create a “separate” discourse about Black Feminist Thought due to the marginality of the black woman voice in feminism. By discussing and comparing the ideas of influential black woman writers, poets and activists, Hill gives us an overview of Black Feminist Thought and its canon. Similar to Anzaldua` and Moraga` book *This Bridge Called My Back-Writing by Radical Women of Color*, Hill Collins` book is also an example of a scholarly work that includes poems, letters and personal essays as a means of challenging what people think an academic book should consist of.

Besides Black feminist scholarship, there is another area of Women Studies literature that has contributed to changing the dominant discourses about knowledge production. Decolonial theorists, such as Maria Lugones or Walter D. Mignolo, try to understand the different mechanisms of colonialism, speak about them, name them, understand them and confront them and most importantly as a way of resistance, create new ways of understanding and living the world.

In her article, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism” (2010) by moving forward from the postcolonial field, Maria Lugones suggests that we look at the Third World from a decolonial perspective. She does so by looking at gender as a Western-created category which was imposed on colonized countries. In colonized countries, the West used its own terms and discourses to understand the Third World. Since gender as a social category was coined by Western scholars and was defined based on their knowledge, it is very problematic to use a Western category in the colonies to understand social relationships. Therefore, in order to claim back their own histories and cultures and fight against colonial power, colonized peoples have to turn back to their own understandings of the world and de-colonize themselves. This decolonial process has to extend to all areas of their lives. In terms of knowledge production,



Lugones suggests we rethink what certain subjects mean/do not mean from a Western perspective in the colonial context and use local approaches to understand knowledge and its manifestations.

As we summarize the contributions of feminist women of color scholars, it becomes obvious that this very diverse group possessing very different experiences regarding knowledge production still displays many common areas in which they have similar standpoints. One of these stances is that women of color were systematically excluded from mainstream knowledge production and therefore their voices are heard less often than their white peers'. In Black women's cases, slavery exerted an enormous impact, while women from Latin America and Middle East suffered from the consequences of colonization and imperialism. Secondly, many of them think that in order to discover what knowledge means in the non-dominant societies, we first have to look at how colored women engage with knowledge production in ways which differ from writing. Finally, although more and more colored women have the opportunity to shape knowledge production at high levels (academia, activism, art), their voices are somehow still marginalized within mainstream society. They explain this by analyzing the colonial power relations that are still maintained after the end of colonization and slavery.

### ***1.3. Critical Romani Studies***

In the first part of my literature review, I focused on the contributions of women of color scholars in challenging mainstream knowledge production. Using their works, I wanted to show the diverse approaches women of color scholars have used to question academia and what we think usually about knowledge. Those diverse fields of studies (Black Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Decolonial Studies) were not only influential in the context of the USA where they were written, but in Europe as well. Since my thesis especially focuses on Roma feminist knowledge production, in the second part of my literature review I will discuss what were/are the contributions of Romani scholars to Roma feminist knowledge production. First, I will discuss a very important term, antigypsyism, which helps to understand why creating Romani Studies was so important for Roma people. Then, as a means of demonstrating the complexity of the issue, I will explain why I chose a particular source (Critical Romani Studies) as the field from which my literature was mainly gathered. Next, I will turn to the journal, *Critical Romani Studies*, one of the most important platforms for contemporary Roma activists and scholars to publish their works in. Finally, I will offer a short conclusion regarding how Romani Studies

has been challenging mainstream knowledge production and how this goal is connected to Roma feminism.

As can be seen in the case of people of color, fighting against racism worked as the main drive for them to create their own institutions. During the Civil Rights Movement in the US, Black activists united to fight for equality in politics, education and simply in everyday life. The fight against racism not only improved the situation of black people, but of other groups of people of color as well, such as Latin Americans, Asians and Native Americans. In the case of Romani people, however, it is not enough to speak about racism. Since the appearance of modern racism is usually linked to idea of the concept of Europe in modernity (Lentin 2008, 492), or to the age of Enlightenment, and Roma people's oppression goes back to their first presence in Europe (approximately 800 years ago), we cannot fully comprehend the situation of Roma merely through the lens of racism. Instead, a new concept was necessary in order to provide a more in-depth explanation of the special form of racism that is directed toward Roma. The term "antigypsyism" was therefore recently coined to help Roma people in their fight for justice. Because this term is a very new one and is still evolving, defining it is a challenge. In my thesis, I will rely on one of the most commonly used definitions, which was provided by the Alliance Against Antigypsyism, an occasional coalition of organizations that promote equal rights for Roma:

Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as 'gypsies' in the public imagination. Although the term is finding increasing institutional recognition, there is as yet no common understanding of its nature and implications. Antigypsyism is often used in a narrow sense to indicate anti-Roma attitudes or the expression of negative stereotypes in the public sphere or hate speech. However, antigypsyism gives rise to a much wider spectrum of discriminatory expressions and practices, including many implicit or hidden manifestations. Antigypsyism is not only about what is being said, but also about what is being done and what is not being done. To recognize its full impact, a more precise understanding is crucial (The Alliance Against Antigypsyism, 2017).

When writing about Romani Studies, the importance of fighting antigypsyism is clear. For those who produce knowledge about Roma it is almost impossible to avoid antigypsyism either as a phenomenon or a cause. Antigypsyism can be defined in many different ways, considering the perspective. From a knowledge production perspective, the denial of the persecution of Roma during the Holocaust, the absence of Roma history from textbooks, creating and

maintaining misrepresentations of Roma are just a few examples of antigypsyism (McGarry 2017). Just as the question of racism is very much central to Critical Race Studies, so antigypsyism is also a crucial element of Romani Studies. On the same note: just as the definition of antigypsyism should be further discussed and clarified, so should the concept of Romani Studies.

Since Romani Studies is a relatively new field of academic scholarship, it is hard to know where its main focus lies or who its actors are. There are many reasons why there is not joined Romani movement. First of all, Roma in itself is essentially an umbrella term for a widely diverse group of people. In each country of Europe, we can find particular elements in their culture which make them “different,” i.e., diverge from what is viewed as mainstream culture. Their language, the religions that they practice, the percentage of the Romani language speakers, and so on vary from country to country and often even within a given country. In the case of Hungary, for instance, there are four main subgroups of Roma which might have different cultural practices, relationships with Roma language, and social issues. It therefore follows that different Romani movements have emerged in different countries throughout the years, but many people consider the first Roma World Congress a starting point, which was held in 1971 London. On this congress the leaders, with all of their inherent complexity, and the combined forces of many Romani movements made it possible to launch Romani Studies as an academic discipline. In my literature review I focus on one particular resource for Romani Studies, the academic journal *Critical Romani Studies*. There are two reasons for choosing this particular publication, that are related to my case of study. First of all, several members of ERIAC have published in *CRS* and these examples therefore allow us to trace some connections between the nature of ERIAC and knowledge production. Secondly, *CRS*’s publishing scholars also contribute to the Romani movement in other ways, such as by organizing exhibitions, teaching at universities, working at NGOs and other institutions and creating artworks. Lastly, but maybe most importantly, *CRS* also challenges the ways in which we think about academia by posing the questions of how Romani Studies scholars should share their knowledge, whether a journal is more accessible to anyone than for instances conferences are, and how should an academic unit be established and operated.

As mentioned above, Roma people are so diverse that there cannot be one particular kind of Romani Studies. Any kind of essentialization of Romani Studies would be harmful for Roma people one way or another. The field of Romani Studies must take into account language diversities, different historical pasts, the different situations in their nation states and the diverse

approaches that make a field intersectional. Even when we think about locality, we have to be very careful to remember that there is no country in the world where Roma people would have their own institutions.

Therefore, taking consideration all of these challenges, rather than focusing on one institution, country or association, I chose the more unconventional method of examining a scholarly journal which—as a periodical—can cross borders and institutions, yet still apply the *lingua franca* of scholarly discourse and universal, academic methods. *Critical Romani Studies* operates as my window into how scholars have been thinking about knowledge production within Romani Studies. *Critical Romani Studies* is an interdisciplinary, international journal which provides a platform both for Roma and non-Roma scholars to publish their works about several topics related to Roma, including racial oppressions, human rights issues, inequalities<sup>2</sup>. In 2011 in the eighth district of Budapest, a group of young Roma scholars and activists started to gather and discuss issues regarding Roma. Among those young Roma intellectuals figured Angela Kocze, the current director of the Romani Studies Program at CEU; Iulius Rostas, human rights defender and visiting professor of CEU; Timea Junghaus, executive director of ERIAC, and Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, the deputy director of ERIAC. As can be seen, beyond their contributions to launching this journal, they also helped to open ERIAC. My decision to choose *Critical Romani Studies* to discuss Romani Studies comes from the interconnected relationships that this group of people have within the Romani movement. They not only helped to launch *Critical Romani Studies* and develop it into one of the most important sources of Romani Studies, but also took part in many other initiatives that aim to fight antigypsyism.

The journal itself grew of the informal Roma Research Unit Empowerment Network which was founded in 2011. Roma and non-Roma scholars and activists wanted to launch a journal which “seeks to create a platform to critically engage with academic knowledge production and generate critical academic and policy knowledge targeting—amongst others—scholars, activists, and policymakers. Scholarly expertise is a tool, rather than the end, for critical analysis of social phenomena affecting Roma, contributing to the fight for social justice. The Journal especially welcomes the cross-fertilization of Romani studies with the fields of critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, critical policy studies, diaspora studies, colonial studies, postcolonial studies, and studies of decolonization.” (Bogdan et al., 2018, 3).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://crs.ceu.edu/index.php/crs>

Interestingly, in the first issue the very first article of the journal published in 2018 was written by the deputy director of ERIAC, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, who wrote about challenging antigypsyism within academia. In her article, Mirga-Kruszelnicka discusses how the Roma identities of Romani scholars challenge the hegemony of academia while simultaneously questioning Roma identity within Roma communities. In the beginning of her article, she points out a very important thought about why creating a “new” Romani Studies was important for Romani scholars. As she explains, the Gypsy Lore Society (GLS) was the first academic institution which aimed to produce knowledge about Roma and Travellers. Originally founded in 1888 in Great Britain, since 1989 GLS has had its headquarters in the United States. GLS headed several research and projects about Roma, held many conferences and became an influential academic unit. The founders of the association were non-Roma and due to their “outsider” position, they faced many troubles throughout their work. It is important to mention, that despite the “good intention” of creating such an academic unite, GLS through many years was profoundly racist and suggested scientific racism regarding Roma (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2017).

With the increasing number of Romani scholars, the need for breaking racist, sexist, etc. approaches in academia has become the “new” focus of Romani Studies. In these new Romani Studies, the “inside” knowledge possessed by Romani scholars, their experiences as “outsiders” within majority societies, their work in challenging what being „Roma” means, and the many different ways in which Romani scholars are connected to the Romani movements have helped Romani Studies in its development and in challenging academia (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2017). Ionida Costache, a PhD candidate in (ethno)musicology at Stanford University, goes further regarding the issue of identity and more specifically “Romani-ness”. In her article 2017 article “Reclaiming Romani-ness“, Costache discusses how a universalist approach ignores Otherness from the interpretation of the “human” and creates a color-blind environment. When essentializing the human as a white man, those who do not identified as whites, will be left out from the mainstream discourses. In the case of Roma, for instance, „We, Roma are not (unmarked, universal) human first and Roma second; rather are both at once. Undoing this deleterious universalism is the first step towards intermeshing identity and subjectivity, which in turn will force us to take seriously the power of identity” (Costache, 2017). In terms of Romani knowledge production, acknowledging the importance of Romani identity is crucial in many ways. First of all, since Roma have been facing racism for centuries, we cannot believe in an unbiased and objective environment when it comes to

academia, or any other institution. “Roma” as an identity category has to be taken account in any kind of knowledge production regardless whether Roma or non-Roma produce it.

The second issue of the journal that was published in 2019 mostly contains policy papers on Roma issues. In addition, in one of her articles, “Decolonizing the Arts,” Sarah Carmona, an educator of decolonial methodology in the field of history, examines thirteen, well-known paintings from two museum collections (the Musee de Louvre and Museo del Prado) which depict Roma people. Her analysis of these works is focused on “talking about not the truth but justice” (Carmona, 2018, 159) by using decolonial methods to discuss the “othering” of Roma both in the society and art.

Paintings in the museums; news on the television; scientific research in books; Roma people are seen every day without non-Roma knowing much about them. In the article Carmona highlights this phenomenon as follows: “At the Louvre in Paris and the Prado in Madrid, they have been depicted by the greatest masters of European painting. Here, Roma are seen every day by thousands of people without even being noticed. Even if a visitor were to seek out and glimpse the realities of Romani people in these two collections, it would be impossible to experience either the power or the vulnerability of their Otherness.” (Carmona, 2018, 146). It does not really matter what kind of platform is involved; the issue remains the same. As Carmona writes in her article above, the process of “othering” penetrates literature, media, art and other fields in very similar ways. Fantasies, projection and creating fear are forms of colonial discourses from which is are hard to change.

The article by Katarzyna Pabijanek “From Gypsyland With Love: A Review of the Theater Play *Roma Armee*” (2018) in the second issue of *CRS*, Pabijanek examines a theater play which plays an important role in contemporary Roma art. Directed by Yael Renon, the play, *Roma Armee*, was first shown in 2017 in Berlin at the Maxim Gorkij Theater. Pabijanek reviews this play and discusses the potential of storytelling, which has the power to “elevate the voices of underprivileged groups” (Pabijanek, 2018,170). Pabijanek also claims that “*Roma Armee*, with its unapologetic Roma-ness, undeniable coolness, and overall brilliance, is much more than an elegant j’accuse directed at skewering antigypsyism.” (Pabijanek, 2018,170). A curator, critic and lecturer for the Gender Studies program at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Pabijanek highlights three main points through which she analysis the *Roma Armee*. Firstly, by making themselves visible rather than being made invisible or hyper visible, Roma artists share their own representation with the viewers. Through the personal

stories of the artists, we can learn not only about their singular struggles, but also about the wider socio-political-economic situations of Roma. Self-representation thereby helps to challenge mainstream representation of Roma, rendering it one of the most powerful tools in questioning knowledge production. The second point that Pabijanek is about the importance of the space. *Roma Armee* is played in Berlin, a city regarded by Roma artists and art lovers as the capital of Roma art in the last few years. After the racist ideologies of Nazism, the persecution of Roma during the Holocaust and then the fall of the Berlin Wall, Berlin has made many contributions to the “rebirth” of Roma identity. With its tragic past and “progressive” future, Berlin provides a “home” for Roma artists to flourish (Pabijanek, 2018, 172). In her last point, Pabijanek highlights what I think is the most important feature of the *Roma Armee*, the potential of Roma resistance. Despite hundreds of years of systematic oppression, persecution, cultural appropriation, Roma culture has persisted, and in fact, Roma people are stronger than ever.

Pabijanek further mentions that in *Roma Armee*, we can see the strengths of the actors, who at the same time question rigid understandings of Roma identity, and challenge mainstream thinking about knowledge production. Continuing this thread of thought, I would like to introduce a fourth point, which Pabijanek in my view does not emphasize enough. Beyond the importance of the self-representation of oppressed groups, reclaiming spaces and highlighting the potential of the resilience of Roma, *Roma Armee* challenges gendered and racial stereotypes regarding Roma. The artists of the play provide an “alternative” image of Roma. The circumstances surrounding being queer, lesbian, gay, or so-called non-heteronormative sexualities are all present in the play; viewers are therefore shown the complexity of sexuality both within Roma and in non-Roma communities. Seeing a gay/lesbian/ queer person who is at the same time Roma is not very common in mainstream society. *Roma Armee* not only decolonizes knowledge about Roma, but also challenges heteronormativity. This intersectional feature of the play makes *Roma Armee* one of the most powerful Roma plays of contemporary Europe.

From the third issue of CRS, I will discuss three articles. The authors of these articles come from very different backgrounds and write about different issues. However, they have one thing in common: they write about how whiteness interferes in the lives of Romani people. Sarah Werner Boada, a PhD candidate at the Central European University, discusses how “*gadjo* feminism” shapes agendas on intimate partner violence in Spain and what are its consequences for Roma women. In her article, “They’re Saying That to Us?” (2018), Werner Boada argues

that mainstream Spanish feminist strategies against intimate partner violence (IPV) „culturalise IPV within Kalé communities and construct women, in particular, as trapped within the confines of patriarchal traditions, unable to move forward, dragging their children down with them” (Werner Boada, 2019, 37).

Domestic violence against women is a highly debated topic within feminist scholars and activists. In order to understand the nature of the issue and find solutions for it, feminist scholars have discussed the different aspects of how gender-race-class-sexuality intersect in women’s experiences regarding domestic violence. When discussing this issue, mainstream feminist scholars (among many other aspects) have debated cultural differences and tended to link domestic violence against women of color to features of their cultures (Sokkolof-Dupont, 2015). Despite the huge progress feminism has made regarding violence against women, we can see that racism is still a crucial issue when it comes to women of color victims. Victims who also happen to be women of color not only have to fight against patriarchal oppression, but also against the racist institutions that are supposed to “save” them. As bell hooks wrote in her 1981 book, *Ain’t I a Woman?*: „The assumption that we can divorce the issue of race from sex, or sex from race, has so clouded the vision of American thinkers and writers on the ‘woman’ question that most discussions of sexism, sexist oppression, or woman’s place in society are distorted, biased, and inaccurate.” (hooks 1981, 12). In Werner Boada’s article, we can read how Spanish mainstream feminism failed to understand the intersection of race and gender in the case of Roma women. Following Werner Boada’s argument, explaining IPV against Roma women by characterizing Roma communities they live in as backward, patriarchal and naturally violence, shows the existing racist approaches of *gadjo* feminist organizations in Spain (Werner Boada, 2019). In terms of knowledge production, this article excellently shows that Romani Studies must take into consideration the diversity of the issues Roma people face. It is not enough to produce knowledge about literature, history and art: scholars must also look into how, for instance, legal institutions use their “knowledge” about Roma, “facts” which are frequently based on racism. Through discussing such issues as racism within mainstream feminism, Romani Studies helps create strategies/academic knowledge/art which will fight against intersectional oppressions on many levels.

Secondly, Esteban Acuna Cabanzo, a PhD candidate at the Cultural Anthropology for the Cultures of Mobility Research Group, in his article “A Transatlantic Perspective on Romani Thoughts, Movements, and Presence beyond Europe,” discusses how Romani Studies was influenced by critical approaches before the publication of the *Critical Romani Studies* journal.



Acuna Cabanzo revisits Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), who investigated how colonial discourses divided the world into two parts: the West and the East. In his article, Acuna Cabanzo looks at the ways the separation of "Gypsies" from "non-Gypsies" shaped Romani Studies. The urgent need for Romani Studies also owes much to the orientalist approach of non-Roma scholars, who produced inaccurate and biased knowledge about Roma. Acuna Cabanzo underscores two other important points. Firstly, he writes that within Romani Studies many scholars speak about the "Roma Awakening" or "Roma Spring," which can be also related to the European Union's Roma Inclusion strategy which was in place from 2011 to 2015. The European Union's "intention" to accelerate the progress toward the welfare of Roma (a goal that also included Roma policymakers, scholars and experts in the decision-making process) helped Romani Studies in its development. Although many debates within Romani Studies critically view the intentions and implementations of the Roma Inclusion strategy, it cannot be denied that the "Roma Awakening" has greatly impacted the mainstream academia. (Acuna Cabanzo 2019, 56).

The second point the author makes is about the importance of cross-fertilization within Romani Studies. In modern times, as scholars travel all over the world, read texts which were written in many different parts of the world and meet with people from different fields, scholars have to start to question what we consider to be European/non-European, Roma/non-Roma, ours/theirs. Instead of creating divisions within Romani Studies, Acuna Cabanzo directs our attention to the countless possibilities that the cross-fertilization of knowledge can bring to the development of Romani Studies (Acuna Cabanzo 2019, 56).

Concluding this part, *Critical Romani Studies* journal and the authors who publish in this journal have had an enormous impact on the shape and development of Romani Studies. They use diverse approaches and methods during their research, which not only resonates with the diversity of Roma, but also with the increasing need for interdisciplinary debates in academia as well. Debates that challenge academia or rethink Roma identity, the role of Roma art, racism within institutions, or transnational movements help us, Roma and non-Roma scholars alike, to create more open and progressive discussions about and within Romani Studies.

#### **I.4. Finding Roma Feminist Perspectives in Challenging Mainstream Knowledge Production**

In addition to being steeped in the work of feminist academics of color that I discussed in the first part of the literature review, Roma feminist knowledge production is also an integral part of Critical Romani Studies. Most of the works that I have read regarding Roma feminist knowledge production are part of the academic field of Romani Studies. Many Roma scholars who have published works on Roma feminism or in connection to the ways in which knowledge production is challenged by Roma feminism did not do so with the aim of developing Roma feminist knowledge production, but rather to develop Romani Studies.

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss some of those works of Roma women scholars (Angela Kocze, Nicoleta Bitu, Ethel Brooks, and so on) who made important contributions to how we now think about Roma feminist knowledge production. For the analysis of my case study, it is important to discuss such fields as art, activism and academia. In this part of the Literature Review I will discuss those fields and their connections to Roma feminist knowledge production.

When people refer to “knowledge production”, they mostly relate it with academia. However, besides and beyond academia, there are other places where Roma feminist knowledge production takes place. Contemporary Roma art is one of the most important and critical fields where Roma feminists contribute to knowledge production. Roma artists such as Selma Selman, Delaine Le Bas, Mihaela Dragan, Alina Serban, Daniel Baker, Emilia Rigova, and many others with their art have been challenging discourses on whiteness, Romani identity, gendered roles, sexuality and politics. In her 2014 article, “Roma Art: Theory and Practice,” the art historian and the executive director of ERIAC, Time Junghaus, uses decolonial, post-colonial and critical race theories to deconstruct the hegemonic ways Roma art has been discussed and developed from 1968 until 2013 despite the oppressions it faced. Junghaus writes that, „Young Roma artists and intellectuals are building creative social and artistic networks, they make conscious media and public appearances, they are creating interactive and community projects using the means offered by computer and mobile technology and online solutions to achieve the highest possible impact. Roma media art and activism appears to be an effective alternative” (Junghaus 2014, 27). To explain why Roma feminist artists are important in Roma feminist knowledge production, I will discuss the example of the Giuvlipen Theater Company, the first independent Roma feminist theater. Founded in 2014 in Bucharest by

professional Roma actresses (Mihaela Dragan and Zita Moldovan), the name of the theater itself was already an interesting point in Roma feminist knowledge production. Since previously there was no special word in Romani language which reflected on forms of oppression and political consciousness of Romani women, Dragan and Moldovan used the word *Giuvlipen*, which means feminism. For the founders ‘Giuvlipen’ is not a simple word or just the name of their theater, „but a way of problematizing entrenched prejudices and epistemic injustice” (Asavei, 2019, 6) toward Roma women. The theater works a lot with memory, which is extremely important for those oppressed groups whose memories/experiences/histories have been excluded from hegemonic discourses. One of the examples of the close relationship between memory and Roma feminist knowledge production is the play *Who Killed Szomna Granca?*, a work based on the true story of a 17 year old Roma girl who was found dead at her home in 2007. It turned out that this Roma girl had killed herself after her parents stopped sending her to school. The play not only breaks taboos regarding depression and suicide, but also critically reflects on the racial and gender stereotypes Roma women face in Romanian society at large, to which the suicide may also have been a response (Giuvlipen, 2020). Beside breaking taboos and reflecting on different issues, the theater demonstrates its engagement with the ideas of feminist women of color regarding challenging hegemonic knowledge production, through its theater play, *Who Killed Szomna Granca?*

Firstly, as Alice Walker suggests in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, women of color have to turn back to their own communities and find inspiration there in order to challenge hegemonic discourses from which women of color were mostly excluded. The theater play, *Who Killed Szomna Granca?*, is also a good example of how Romanian Roma women turned to their own communities’ memories and created their own discourses, which may help them to challenge their exclusion from mainstream knowledge production. Secondly, in her article, ”Age, Race and Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference\*” Audre Lorde writes about the intersectional oppression women of color face in the majority societies (unprivileged economic situation, racism and sexism) and the differences in this causes in accessing education, public services and the job market in comparison to white women.

When the audience of *Who Killed Szomna Granca?* thinks about the Romanian Roma girl committed suicide, people may blame her parents, of the Roma culture, for such a tragedy. Since many people believe the common stereotype that Roma culture encourages Roma girls to stay at home instead of educating themselves, bringing an intersectional approach in analyzing this particular tragedy is one of the achievement of women of color scholars. They

suggested intersectional issues which may have caused the death of a 17-year-old Roma girl, such as her disadvantaged economic situation, experiencing discrimination in her school because of her ethnicity, and the oppression of women in the Romanian society at large (Lukacs, 2018). This demonstrates the engagement of the Giuvlipen Independent Roma feminist knowledge production. Through these two examples of how the theater engaged with the idea of feminist women of color ideas about challenging hegemonic knowledge production, I aimed to highlight the innovative role of Giuvlipen Independent Theater in Roma feminist knowledge production.

Since academia is still a white-male-middle-class dominated place, the chance for Roma women to participate in knowledge production there is quite limited. Despite the low number of Roma women present in academia, those within have started to ask questions and challenge old notions about academia. Such Romani feminist scholars as Nicoleta Bitu, Angela Kocze, Carmen Gheorghe and others have started a debate within and outside of the academia about what Roma (feminist) knowledge production is. In her article “The Possibilities of Romani Feminism” (2012), Ethel Brooks opened the academic debate about Romani feminism. Brooks starts her article with a poem written by the Romani woman poet, Bronislawa Wajs, Papusza. By starting an academic discussion with a poem from the first publicly acknowledged Roma female poet, Brooks might have wanted to show the diversity of Roma feminism. By extension, her gesture may have also indicated the wealth of possibilities present within Roma feminist knowledge production. The main purpose of Brooks’s article was to present the challenges Romani feminism has been facing within the mainstream feminist movements, as well as provide examples of how Roma feminist scholars and activists have been fighting for acknowledgment of Roma women’s issues both within and outside of the Roma movement. Brooks mentions Romani women as Nicoleta Bitu, Alexandra Oprea and Debra L. Schultz in order to provide a range of examples of their struggles and how they overcame them. In my reading, this article not only aims to acknowledge the works and efforts of Roma feminists but also implies to us that many challenges are yet to come. Brooks writes at the end: „With increasing violence against Romani people all over Europe and beyond in the twenty-first century, the need for activism and theory, and the possibility of Romani feminism, take on an urgency that cannot be denied” (Brooks, 2012,10). Brooks therefore encourages us to take the opportunity offered by Romani feminism seriously in order to fight against antigypsyism. In this regard, Romani feminism is not merely a tool for Romani women to fight for their own issues, but rather becomes a means for anyone who decides to battle antigypsyism. Brooks’

argument can also be viewed as an excellent example of how Roma feminist knowledge production is intertwined with activism in a way that makes them inextricably connected and therefore inseparable from one another.

Moving forward to the article “Transgressing Borders”, written by Angela Kocze in 2018, the writer elaborates on the importance of bringing epistemic change in academia, which is necessary for creating new knowledge, methodologies, and understandings. In order to demonstrate the role of Roma women in changing epistemologies, Kocze discusses the different ways in which Roma feminist scholars and activists shape critical Romani studies by transgressing borders between activism and scholarship. By raising issues as the (in)visibility of Romani women scholars, the objectivity of knowledge production, the question of positionality and the issue of activist knowledge within academia, Angela Kocze explores the different ways Roma and non-Roma feminist scholars challenge academia in its racist and sexist grounds (Kocze, 2018). The last piece that I would like to mention in connection to Roma feminist knowledge production is Nicoleta Bitu and Enikő Vincze’s 2012 article entitled, “Personal Encounters and Parallel Paths Toward Romani Feminism.” In the article, the two writers tell their personal stories parallel to one another, which is not a common mode of writing an academic article. These parallel stories demonstrate how a Roma and non-Roma scholar who come from different social positions, face different challenges, still found a common goal: to bring Romani feminism into the Romani movement (Bitu-Vincze, 2012). This article is a good example of how we can discuss Romani feminism from different points of view and without being judgmental toward anyone who is trying to be part of the Romani feminist movement. These different experiences might be due to the different social-economic status, experiences with sexism, cultural peculiarities, connections to religion, sexual orientation, professional background, or other factors, which can influence one’s positionality when contributing to Roma feminist knowledge production. In this way, non-Roma and Roma feminists coming from diverse backgrounds can mutually learn from each other and develop Roma feminist knowledge production from multiple angles.

As mentioned above, when examining Roma knowledge production from feminist perspectives, we must include activism. Many Roma feminist scholars (Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Nicoleta Bitu, Ethel Brooks, Angel Kocze) work(ed) or volunteer(ed) for Roma or non-Roma NGOs, do research for and about the NGOs’ work, or have different working and friendship relations with one another. Beside working or volunteering at Roma or non-Roma NGOs, Roma feminist scholars might have been invited to trainings, events or researches

organized and carried out by NGOs. One of the best examples of the strong connection between Roma activism and scholarship, is the book *The Roma Women's Movement- Struggles and Debates in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Angela Kocze, Violetta Zentai, Jelena Jovanovic and Enikő Vincze. Published in 2018, this pioneering book brings together both Roma and non-Roma scholars and activists to provide a platform for discussing Roma feminist activism and scholarship from perspectives as the connections between the Roma women's - mainstream and Roma LGBTQ movement, social relationships within country borders and beyond, how Roma women influence and are influenced by social categories, and many other interesting aspect.

According to the Acknowledgements of the book, the idea for the book goes back to 2013 when some of the authors realized that Romani women activists and scholars should theorize Romani women's social-political mobilization, and to discuss, as well as react to the different gender-related social-political changes in their environments. The book consists of eleven articles written by both Roma and non-Roma women and is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the different social categories and agendas that shape the Romani women's movement, such as masculinity within the Roma movement, discussed in the article "Gender Relations and the Romani Women's Movement in the Eyes of Young Romani Men: The Potentials for Transversal Politics" written by Jovanovic and Zentai, debates between the wider Romani movement and mainstream LGBTQ movement, and the diverse political positions of Romani women. The second section is dedicated to different national debates (in Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Serbia) regarding the transnational Romani women's movement. The authors share their personal and professional experiences about the Romani women's movement, especially in the view of the meaning of gender, race, and class. Beside the article of Jovanovic and Kurtic will discuss below, the article of Balogh Lidia "Roma Gender Politics in Hungary and Feminist Alliances in Practice" or "The Dilemmas of the Romani Women's Movement in Bulgaria: From Assimilation to Empowerment?" written by Teodora Krumova, also generate interesting discussions about the Roma women's movement within particular national contexts. As the title implies, even though the geographic context of these articles is Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the book does not only aim to explore the Romani women's movements only within this geographical location but also beyond CEE. The third section of the book includes chapters about how the activism of Roma women in Spain influenced the Romani women's movement in CEE, and provide more insights about the work

of Roma feminists in Spain, like in the article “Kali NGOs and the Spanish Model: A Resistant or Complacent Framework?” written by Patricia Caro Maya and Sarah Werner Boada.

I will discuss two of these articles in order to understand how they contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production. In “Heroines of Ours: Between Magnificence and Maleficence,” Jelena M. Savic writes about the problem of how hegemonic canonization of the Roma women’s movement creates and reproduces mainstream discourses about Roma women. In order to challenge this problem, Savic recommends using a critical epistemic approach to the historization of the Roma women’s movement in Europe, as a possible tool against potential canonical knowledge production. In this way, a critical epistemic approach will help Roma women to deconstruct and reconstruct their histories, do research that takes into consideration Roma women’s experiences, and produce knowledge with methodologies which provide reliable information about Roma women. Savic emphasizes that in order to write about the Roma women’s movement from feminist point of view, first of all, the extant knowledge about Roma women should be problematized. Since in general, history has been written from patriarchal and white-dominated point of views, there is an urgent need for rewriting Roma women’s history from Roma women perspectives. Savic mentions some of those critical feminist scholars (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldua, Heide E. Grasswick) who have been helping feminist knowledge production for many years (through feminist archiving, writing about the experiences of women and so on).

The second article exemplifies why *The Romani Women’s Movement* is an essential part of Roma feminist knowledge production. The article “Romani Women’s Friendship, Empowerment and Politics: Views on Romani Feminism in Serbia and Beyond”, by Jelena Jovanovic and Vera Kurtic is based on personal emails (letters). They have chosen this format in order to explore their experiences as Romani feminists, their relationships with mainstream and Roma politics, personal paths of empowerment and with the potential Romani leadership within the Roma movement. Interestingly, in one of the first US collections of women of color writers, *This Bridge Called My Back-Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981), edited by Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, we can also find letter writing as a mode of knowledge production. While in that book Nellie Wong wrote a letter to herself, in *The Romani Women’s Movement* Jovanovic and Kurtic addressed mails to each other. Jovanovic and Kurtic, beside sharing their political views on the Roma feminist movement and exchanging knowledge about different issues, also share their personal feelings, not only with each other, but a wider audience (the readers) as well. Expressing one’s feelings and including them in academic

writing is one of the feminist ways of performing knowledge production that many critical feminists, such as Gloria Anzaldua, Audre Lorde or Alice Walker, argue for. Therefore, Jovanovic and Kurtic's example of how the *The Romani Women's Movement* book fits into a broader movement of alternative knowledge production.

The aim of this section was to discuss some works which have influenced Roma feminist knowledge production in the field of art, activism and academia. In the beginning I discussed how Roma art provides a powerful platform for feminist ideas. The Giuvlipen Theater Company is certainly one of the most impressive places where taboos and stereotypes are challenged, the voices of Roma women are heard and expressed, and knowledge of the mainstream societies regarding Roma is questioned, by using the intersectional approach discussed by Audre Lorde, and going back to the community for finding inspiration, as earlier highlighted by Alice Walker. Then I turned to such Roma feminist scholars as Nicoleta Bitu, Ethel Brooks or Angela Kocze, who as part of the mainstream academia with their Romani identities develop Roma feminist knowledge within academic discourses. Finally, I introduced the importance of the activism of Romani women, who not only are an integral part of the mainstream Romani movement, but by creating their own space also contribute to the development of Roma feminist knowledge. In order to discuss this issue, I used one of the most first and crucial books on Romani women activism, *The Romani Women's Movement* published in 2019. In this book both Roma and non-Roma women scholars/activists discuss their personal and professional experiences and ideas about the contemporary Romani women's movement in Europe. This book is important because it explores Roma women's diverse experiences within the Roma women's movement. It also provides a range of approaches to challenging knowledge production from the social-political-economic standpoints of Roma women, which is extremely important for feminist knowledge production. The authors come from diverse educational/professional/national backgrounds and discuss different issues from gender relations to epistemic challenges in Roma women's movement. Therefore, its great diversity makes the book a crucial contribution to Roma feminist knowledge production.

## **I.5. Conclusion**

In order to explore Roma feminist knowledge production within the existing Romani Studies literature, first I clarified what feminist knowledge production means in this thesis. By using standpoint theory, I stated that „feminist knowledge production, in this thesis, means challenging hegemonic knowledge production by discussing on how marginalized groups of



people, from their social-political-economic standpoints, engage with knowledge production.”

In order to examine the contributions of Roma women in challenging knowledge production, first I have discussed literature about the contributions of women of color to feminist scholarship on knowledge production, which included Black Studies, Latina Studies, Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies. Two points became obvious. Although this very diverse group of authors has different experiences and ways of producing knowledge, there are many points through which they are connected to each other. Their marginal position as minorities within the major societies excludes them from mainstream discourses and practices of knowledge production, although there were many authors who have been successful in academia. Secondly, despite their similar experiences as minorities, these groups of women have different needs and ways of producing knowledge. In the second part I explored the works of the *Critical Romani Studies* journal. This journal is one of the most important platforms for Romani scholars to discuss and challenge knowledge production from Roma perspectives. Most of the articles I discussed in the second section were inspired by the critiques, theories and methodologies women of color feminist scholars have developed, such as the article “They’re Saying That to Us?” (2018) written by Sarah Werner Boada, which explores how “*gadjo* feminism” (white feminism) shapes agendas on intimate partner violence in Spain and what consequences this has for Roma women. In the last part of the literature review, I introduced some of the significant works of Roma and non-Roma feminist scholars who have greatly impacted the ways in which Roma feminist knowledge production has been discussed and practiced. Doing Roma feminist knowledge production in art was demonstrated by a play of the Giuvlipen Independent Theater, where taboos and stereotypes are challenged, Roma women’s voices are heard and expressed, and knowledge of the mainstream societies regarding Roma is questioned. Moreover, Roma feminist scholars have made contributions to challenging the hegemony of academia. Lastly, I discussed how the activism of Roma women can generate diverse discussions about knowledge production, through the book *The Romani Women’s Movement*. I looked at specifically these three fields, art, activism and academia; despite their differences, they are very much connected to each other by their actors, aims, challenges, approaches.

Based on all this, it is now time to provide a definition for what I mean by Roma feminist knowledge production. In this thesis, Roma feminist knowledge production means challenging and impacting the hegemonic knowledge about Roma, by drawing on the lived experiences, culture and traditions of the Romani people, from their social-political-economic standpoints

in the societies. In the next chapter I will analyze the Roma feminist exhibition of ERIAC and its contributions to Roma feminist knowledge production, for which I hope the literature discussed here and the definition I just provided have created a firm ground.

## **II. Internship Methodology and My Positionality**

### **II.1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces some background information about the working at ERIAC, the research methodologies I have used for gathering data for the analytical chapter (Chapter 3) and discuss my positionality during the internship. I did the internship at ERIAC from 1 April to 1 July 2019 in Berlin. The most important source for my analysis was the exhibition, “Roma Women Weaving Europe”, itself, which I had the chance to visit multiple times. Also, I conducted a number of interviews between June 2019 and May 2020 in order to gather information about ERIAC and the exhibition. Moreover, I employed the method of document analysis for the information collected from social media and the webpage of ERIAC, where a lot of information was published. Below, I will share some background information about the working environment during the internship, then describe the way I collected information about the exhibition and the chosen six artworks. I discuss the interviews in more details and lastly, the way I gathered information from ERIAC’s webpage and Facebook page. Lastly, I will discuss my positionality as a former RGPP student and a Roma woman.

### **II.2. Working at ERIAC**

Beginning in April 2019, I started work as an intern at the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture in Berlin, Berlin-Mitte. I joined to the ERIAC Team, which back then consisted of six people. The executive director, Timea Junghaus, who is an art historian and contemporary art curator; the deputy director, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, anthropologist and Roma activist; the project coordinator, Zsolia Bihari, holding a BA on Cultural History and Theory from Humboldt University (Berlin); a project assistant, Joanna Khandjieva, activist and social scientist and two interns, Almir Huseini and Kata Nemeth, who both graduated from CEU Roma Graduate Preparation Program. The working hours were from 9 am. to 5 pm., from Monday to Friday. Because there are no separate offices in the main building of ERIAC, ERIAC colleagues work in the same office which contains three bigger tables. Two to three people work at these tables, which has many advantages. First of all, ERIAC devotes a lot of attention to teamwork, an element that was emphasized many times at internal meetings. When completing projects, it is very useful if people can ask a question anytime and not have to go

to a separate office for advice or consultations. Secondly, the big office also creates a sense of togetherness which is conducive to teamwork. Lastly, this type of a set-up might also be a good tool for motivating one another and themselves, since if someone is procrastinating or feeling low, the colleagues can either act as critics or supporters of each other.

In addition, the ERIAC office is not only a working place but also an open museum, which means that anyone who would like to view the current exhibition can easily enter the office/museum, the office and the artworks were at one location. My experiences with this layout are mostly positive because sometimes it was refreshing to see other people in the office beside the ERIAC colleagues I worked with. Also, it was motivating to see that people are interested in Roma art and culture and that the work ERIAC (including me) does is valued by society.

During the internship my tasks were diverse, which also reflects the variety of work that ERIAC has done since its launch in June 2017. The main objectives and work of ERIAC will be discussed in Chapter 3. In addition to learning about the different fields where ERIAC is present, I had the opportunity to broaden my knowledge about contemporary Roma feminist art through the exhibition, to develop my organizational skills and establish contacts with acknowledged Roma feminist scholars, activists and artists while additionally developing my research skills. My specific tasks included leading a tour of “Roma Women Weaving Europe” exhibition and organizing a panel discussion on Roma feminist political movement, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Moreover, I took part in organizing the Roma exhibition as the official collateral event at the 58th La Biennale di Venezia<sup>3</sup> in 2019, as well as co-editing the FUTUROMA magazine which was a special issue of ERIAC for the Biennale.

### **II.3. Methodology**

The analysis in Chapter 3 is built on a variety of qualitative research methods. In this part I will explain how I collected the information and data upon which my analysis is based. Firstly, the main way of gathering data was to spend three months at the ERIAC office, which at the same time meant that I have visited the exhibition many times. Because I participated in the daily activities of the ERIAC Team, developed ongoing relations with the people and the artworks there, and have observed what was going on among the colleagues and with the visitors of the exhibition, the internship could be understood as an ethnographic research

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2019/58th-exhibition>

(Emerson, 1995, 1). Therefore, one part of the research methodologies are those methods, that are mainly used in ethnography, including participation observation. As an intern, I was an active participant in the work of ERIAC, while as a researcher I still had my outsider (ethnographer) position. By "living rather than simply regularly visiting the field setting" (Emerson, 1989, 16) I could study the exhibition during the internship. However, instead of primarily focusing on the behavior of the people within the institute, my participation more focused on the exhibited artworks, the people who visited ERIAC, and the people I gave the guided tour to. In order to find possible answers to my research question, which focuses on the contributions of the Roma feminist exhibition and the six chosen artworks to Roma feminist knowledge production, the findings of my participation observation were crucial. Being among the artworks for three months, observing how the visitors have reacted to the exhibition, and attending different events which were organized around the exhibition were important elements of my data gathering.

Moreover, my internship supervisor, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, provided me with all the necessary information that they had about the exhibition, the artists, artworks, etc. She was the greatest help for me during this process. She personally sent me the captions that appeared along with the artwork and helped me to find information on social media and the ERIAC website.

Another researched method that I used to collect information, was interviewing. I used this method because through interviews, the researcher can understand the experiences of the people in their own words, and the reasons and contexts behind their actions (Seitz, 2005, 1). During the internship, I had the chance to prepare four personal interviews which I conducted in June 2019 with the colleagues of ERIAC. An additional interview was conducted with an ERIAC member via WhatsApp Messenger because a personal meeting was not possible. Another interview was conducted on 20 May 2020, which was needed to ask to follow up questions after the internship and clarify a few things connected to the exhibition. These interviews focused on collecting information about ERIAC and its team. Also, the interviews helped me to get a clearer understanding about the aim of the exhibition, as well as looking at the exhibition from other people points of views. The interviews I conducted will not be cited in Chapter 3, except the interview I took with the deputy director, because I used those four interviews only to get a better picture about ERIAC and the exhibition. However, the interview which I conducted with the deputy director in May 2020, who was at the same time the curator of the exhibition, will be used at several places in Chapter 3.

The selection of the interviewees was not based on any criteria because the ERIAC Team that actually worked in the office on a daily basis, only consisted of 6 persons at the same time. Out of the six people, I conducted interviews with 3 Roma and a non-Roma colleague, whose ages ranged from 27 to 35 years. Each interview approximately lasted 1-1.5 hours and took place in the ERIAC office, in Berlin. The questions mostly focused on the person's social-educational background, his/her relation to ERIAC, and his/her opinion about the institution.

As Sarah N. Gatson writes in the article "The Methods, Politics, and Ethics of Representation in Online Ethnography" (2011): "Online research can provide either the same level of depth as a one-shot, one-hour interview, or the same level of depth as that produced by the daily participating, embedded offline ethnographer." (Gatson, 2011, 250). Since researching online has become an essential part of doing research, in the thesis I also used this method for gathering data for the analysis. Using this method was really useful and effective, because ERIAC has published a great deal of information on its webpage ([eriac.org](http://eriac.org)) and on its Facebook page too (European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture - ERIAC) about this Roma feminist exhibition. I could find information about the opening ceremony of the exhibition, how many people were present, the program for the opening event, as well as pictures about the exhibition. Mostly short summaries were published about the different events which were organized around the exhibition on the webpage, such as guided tours, a follow-up panel discussion and an artistic performance. Online sources therefore proved to be an essential part of the analysis featured in the next chapter.

#### **II.4. Positionality During the Internship**

While considering my positionality, the article of Binaya Subedi, "Theorizing a 'halfie' researcher's identity in transnational fieldwork" (2006) was really useful for understanding the contradicting feelings and situations I experienced during the internship. In this article, Subedi discusses the complexities of doing research, while one experiences both her outsider and her insider position. Subedi suggests, that in order to negotiate between two positions, the researcher has to be always self-reflexive and acknowledge her positionality during the research (Subedi, 2006, 5).

I had two simultaneous positions, which affected the work/research during the three-months internship at ERIAC. Since I also worked with the ERIAC colleagues on a daily basis through three months, and I contributed to many tasks which they worked on, I was a partial insider in the ERIAC Team due to my position as a Roma student. Moreover, since 2011 I have been

involved in many projects and events within the Roma movement in Europe, and I am also a former student of CEU's Romani Studies Program through which I have met the two Roma interns first in 2018 Budapest. Therefore, I was also an insider of the social network ERIAC is connected to through their work because of being a Roma student. I was familiar with the people they contacted and the topics they organized events about. However, despite these connections with ERIAC, I was also a partial outsider. As a researcher I had definitely a very different position than the ERIAC colleagues had. I spent there a limited period of time, and they knew that I will write an academic paper about them and their exhibition, which obviously I will share with them.

As both insider and outsider sometimes really useful, and sometimes burdening as well. During the work, when I had to contact people or organize an event, my insider position was useful since I knew many Roma scholars, activists, artist due to my previous involvement in the Roma movement, and being a fellow student of Romani Studies Program since 2015. However, there were occasions when my outsider, researcher position, was more dominant. The colleagues and I were aware that after three months I would leave the office, therefore I consciously did not want to create too close relationships with them. I tried to focus on the work and the research, and less on getting to know the people I was working with. Keeping some distance sometimes influenced the dynamic of my relationship with the colleagues. However, I have to say that we ended up being acquaintances, who liked to have discussions with each other, outside of work as well.

After introducing the internship circumstances, the different research methodologies that I used to collect information in order to analyze the Roma feminist exhibition in in Chapter 3, and discussing my positionality, in the next chapter the "Roma Women Weaving Europe" exhibition will be analyzed.

### **III. Doing Roma Feminist Knowledge Production-A Case Study of the Roma Feminist Exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”**

#### **III.1 Introduction**

In the Literature Review I demonstrated the different ways in which feminist women of color and Romani Studies scholars have challenged mainstream knowledge production. Even though these individuals are a diverse group and sometimes possess very different experiences regarding oppression and the fights against it, they also have similar standpoints. One of these is that women of color were systematically excluded from mainstream knowledge production and therefore their voices remain less heard than those of their white peers.

Romani scholars have joined the efforts of challenging dominant understanding and the practices that are a part of knowledge production. Similarly to people of color in the USA, Romani scholars face many barriers in academia, art or activism whether within the European context or beyond. Romani feminist scholars/activists/artists (Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Angela Kocze, Ethel Brooks, and many others) powerfully tackle antigypsyism<sup>4</sup> which has a great impact on the position of Roma people in knowledge-making institutions and how they can access knowledge or contribute it. In this chapter, I will rely on those important works that helped me understand Roma feminist knowledge production. In order to look at how the European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture uses Roma feminist methods to create knowledge about Roma, I will analyze its feminist exhibition entitled “Romani Women Weaving Europe” which was held in 2019 in Berlin. The main question of this chapter is: What contributions to Roma feminist knowledge production did the exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe” make, especially as pertains to the six chosen artworks?

In section III.2, more information will be shared about the institute. Then, I will introduce the “Romani Women Weaving Europe” exhibition, including details about the concept, works of art, the artists featured in the exhibition and the reasons behind organizing this specific exhibition. In section III.4, I will discuss the guided tour that I had the chance to lead with one of my colleagues at ERIAC and share my personal and professional experiences. In III.5, I will present and analyze some of the art pieces displayed in the exhibition based upon feminist

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<sup>4</sup> “Antigypsyism.eu.” antigypsism.eu. Accessed April 17, 2020. <http://antigypsism.eu/>.



scholarship and the arguments I discussed in the Literature Review, as well as other works, which I found relevant to the discussion. I will look at ways in which these particular works of art contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production. In the Conclusion, I will discuss the main findings of this chapter.

### III.2. About ERIAC

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations and the Alliance for the European Roma Institute. As an association ERIAC was officially registered under German law on June 7, 2017 in Berlin, Germany. As an idea, however, ERIAC stretches back to 2014, when a group of young Roma activists, scholars and artists got together and tried to envision an institute that could promote Roma culture and art in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Among their missions today, their aims include advocating for Roma art and culture, breaking stereotypes and prejudice maintained by the majority population and increasing the self-esteem of Roma. ERIAC does this by serving as a main information, consulting and resource center through the ERIAC *Barvalipe* (which in Romani language means pride) Sections. The *Barvalipe* Sections' tasks are to produce and disseminate knowledge of Roma art, culture projects and initiatives, organizations and talented individuals. *Barvalipe* Academy is the agenda-setting and strategic body of the Institute which plays an advisory and inspirational role in order to fulfill the ERIAC's objectives<sup>6</sup>.

The Academy is composed of fifteen highly regarded and publicly acknowledged artists, scholars and activists, such as the political philosopher, Dr. Ismael Cortez-Gomez, the playwright and actress, Mihaela Dragan, the influential Roma activist, Romani Rose and the scholar, Delia Mandalina Grigore. Two thirds of the members of the Academy have to declare themselves as Roma, and ERIAC emphasizes the importance of a gender balance as well. As I discussed in my Literature Review, Mirga-Kruszelnicka's analysis of the Gypsy Lore Society (an international association of persons interested in Gypsy and Traveler studies) criticized the fact that this association was mainly comprised of non-Roma and produced racist knowledge about Roma/Gypsy/Travelers (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2018). Although producing knowledge about Roma as a non-Roma scholar does not have to be a problem in principles from my point of view, due to the experiences we have with associations as GLS, I think ERIAC's decision

<sup>5</sup> Eriac. (n.d.). Retrieved June 3, 2020, from <http://eriac.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Eriac. (n.d.). Retrieved June 3, 2020, from <http://eriac.org/>

to involve Roma as two-thirds of the *Barvalipe* Academy is reasonable and may help in ending the production of racist knowledge about Roma.

The *Barvalipe* Academy members, come from diverse professional, social and cultural backgrounds<sup>7</sup>. In the case of knowledge production of Roma, this level of diversity is a key point because Roma culture, language, religion, traditions, etc. differ from country to country, and/or even between Roma subgroups. With the diverse backgrounds of *Barvalipe* members, it may be more possible to represent the many aspects of Roma societies and break stereotypical understandings of what “Roma” culture and art mean. I also think that the members’ very diverse professional and personal backgrounds make the projects and events of ERIAC more accessible to the public.

### **III.3. Background Information about the Exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”**

On the occasion of International Roma Day (8th of April 2019), as a joint initiative the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture and the *Rumänisches Kulturinstitut* Berlin (RKI) in Berlin co-organized the exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe”: Roma Feminist Thought and Contemporary Art. The exhibition took place in Berlin from 21 March 2019 to 30 July 2019. One half of the exhibited works were shown in the RKI Gallery while the other half were exhibited in the ERIAC Gallery. The two galleries are only a five-minute walk from one another; therefore, it was easy to visit both places. The curator of the exhibition was the Polish Roma anthropologist-activist and deputy director of ERIAC, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka. Since there was no funding to make a catalogue, I unfortunately cannot present all the exhibited pieces of art, only the list of artists. In the following I will rely on the information I gathered from Facebook, where ERIAC published an invitation for the opening ceremony, and the webpage of ERIAC, where a short text and flyer are available<sup>8</sup>. My data was also gathered based on the interview I took with the curator on 20 May 2020.

The exhibited artists found in the “Roma Women Weaving Europe” exhibition consisted of Ionela Mihaela Cimpeanu, Ionida Costache, Mihaela Dragan, Ana Maria Gheorghe, Delaine Le Bas, Kiba Lumberg, Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, Emilia Rigova, Selma Selman, Alina Serban,

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<sup>7</sup> Barvalipe Academy. (n.d.). Retrieved June 03, 2020, from <https://eriac.org/barvalipeacademy/>

<sup>8</sup> ERIAC Program. (n.d.). Retrieved June 03, 2020, from <https://eriac.org/roma-women-weaving-europe-exhibition-opening-eriac-and-rki/>

George Vasilescu, and urban\_roma. The artists come from four countries: Poland, Romania, Finland, Slovakia, and Great Britain. Because the exhibition was co-organized with the Romanian Culture Institute and partially funded by the Romanian government, the most exhibiting artists were Romanian. The curator, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, herself chose the works of art. As she said in the interview, the diversity of the artists' experiences as Roma women and their artistic styles formed crucial criteria for her selection. Among the exhibited artworks there were videos about performances, sculptures, paintings, dresses, and patchwork. The two themes that the curator focused on were first, the sisterhood of Romani women, through which she wanted to emphasize the unity of Roma women as a community, including the everyday rituals which help to strengthen their sisterhood. The second theme explored the power of Roma women to challenge and change those social structures which might oppress them, such as patriarchy, racism, classism, and homophobia. The themes of the exhibition were intended to attract the attention of Roma women and the Roma community, as well as to initiate joint discussions about social issues between Roma and mainstream society.

The numbers of visitors are not known unfortunately. The Facebook event of the opening ceremony indicated that 144 people were interested in the opening ceremony; a further 929 people expressed their interest and stated that they might join the ceremony. When taking into consideration that fact that ERIAC was only 1.5 years old in 2019 and not many people could afford to travel to Berlin to participate in the opening ceremony even if they were interested in the exhibition, the attendance of more than a hundred people at the exhibition opening was a great achievement for ERIAC and RKI. It must also be emphasized that the number of people who visited the exhibition from 21 March to 30 July 2019 most probably was much higher. During the three-month internship I completed at ERIAC, I witnessed that many people entered the office to visit the exhibition and there were also organized group guided tours. In section III.4, I will discuss my experiences regarding a guided tour I led for a group of French high-school students during my stay at ERIAC.

Following the opening speech held by Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Mihaela Dragan and Ionida Costache gave an artistic performance at the opening ceremony.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Roma feminist exhibition was not the only event that ERIAC organized around the theme of Roma

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<sup>9</sup> ERIAC Program. (n.d.). Retrieved June 03, 2020, from <https://eriac.org/roma-women-weaving-europe-exhibition-opening-eriac-and-rki/>

feminism in the period of March-July 2019. On International Roma Day, 8 April 2019, in the gallery of RKI, another artistic performance was presented by the Roma actress and playwright, Alina Serban. The performance, *The Best Child on Earth*, presented a few excerpts from her autobiographical, one-woman-show, *I Declare at My Own Risk: The Best Child in The World*, a work that explores the challenges affecting a girl from poverty-stricken Roma community in Bucharest. At the Facebook event 50 people indicated their presence and a further 148 people showed an interest toward in event.

On 11 June 2019, a follow-up panel discussion was organized by me as an ERIAC colleague, and RKI. The aim of the panel discussion was to talk about the social-political contributions of Roma women to the mainstream and Romani movement, as well as draw attention to important works by Roma feminist scholars, activist and artists. The panel discussion was another example of ERIAC's attempts to bring Roma feminism closer to both Roma and non-Roma people<sup>10</sup>. The panelists included: Carmen Gheorghe, president of E-Romnja; Dotschy Reinhardt, CEO of Landesrat der Roma und Sinti Berlin e.V (Germany); Jelena Jovanovic, scholar and research coordinator at ERGO Network (Serbia/Belgium); Ramona Cara, young Roma activist and social worker (Romania/Germany); Sandra Selimovic, actress, artist and singer (Serbia/Austria/Germany) and finally the moderator was Mihaela Zatrenau, ERIAC *Barvalipe* Academy member, linguist and activist.<sup>11</sup> ERIAC has published a short summary of the event on its webpage, in which ERIAC writes that the event brought:

„together outstanding Roma women figures to discuss the diverse approaches to Roma feminism today. The conversation – at the intersection of scholarship, politics, activism and arts – will present diverse approaches to the struggle for gender and ethnic equality. Drawing from rich and diverse strategies of opposing sexism and racism, Roma women become an important source of inspiration for women worldwide.”<sup>12</sup>

To return to the Roma feminist exhibition, in the interview we had, the curator mentioned three major reasons to organize it. First of all, the idea of organizing a Roma feminist exhibition came from the lived experiences of female members of ERIAC. Inspiring Roma women not only participate in the management of ERIAC, but also hold positions on the board as well. By

<sup>10</sup> <https://eriac.org/a-feminist-reading-of-roma-political-movement-a-conversation-with-roma-women-activists-scholars-and-artists/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://eriac.org/a-feminist-reading-of-roma-political-movement-a-conversation-with-roma-women-activists-scholars-and-artists/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://eriac.org/a-feminist-reading-of-roma-political-movement-a-conversation-with-roma-women-activists-scholars-and-artists/>

building upon these Roma women's successes and power, ERIAC wanted to highlight the strength and positive impact of Roma women within the Romani movement. Secondly, ERIAC wanted to provide a counter-discourse to the misrepresentation of Roma women which usually pictures Roma women as being backward and victims of their own culture. This type of representation is mostly articulated by non-Roma professionals (including scholars, media experts, journalists, etc.), who lack proper information about Roma women. ERIAC members were not only distressed by the misrepresentation of Roma women and Roma culture on a professional level, but on a personal one as well. In the interview, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka said: "I always felt really frustrated especially since I come from very powerful women you know, and I never felt like a victim of my own culture. I always felt that actually my culture listens to women and there are a lot of roles that Roma women in my family have played"<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, having Roma women's experiences within ERIAC also greatly influenced why the institute organized the Roma feminist exhibition. As a third component, the curator highlighted the fact that there are many "provocative, innovative and inspiring" Roma women artists in the contemporary art scenes, whose works are acknowledged by non-Roma artists and connoisseurs. ERIAC wanted to provide a space for these amazing Roma women artists so that more people could learn about these artists and their works.<sup>14</sup>

Two other points need to be mentioned regarding the importance of organizing this specific Roma feminist exhibition. International Roma Day (8 April) aims to celebrate Roma culture and raise awareness toward those issues which Roma people face mostly in Europe. This Roma feminist exhibition was held on this important occasion. In 1990 in Sierock (Poland), the leaders of the International Roma Union, Rajko Djuric, Sait Balic and Ian Hancock, decided to name April 8th the International Roma Day in order to commemorate the first World Roma Congress which was held April 7 to 12, 1971 in London (RomArchive, 2020). At the time, in 1990, the number of Roma women leaders was very low, therefore their voices and opinions were not really represented at the world congress. Of course, this does not mean that Roma women were not politically active, simply that they were not truly represented in political decision-making processes. Organizing an exhibition as a main event of ERIAC on this day emphasizes that Roma women have a crucial role both in Roma culture and in the Romani movement. Providing a place for Roma women artists to express their political, emotional, private and social thoughts

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<sup>13</sup> Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka (Deputy Director of ERIAC), in discussion with the author, May 2020

<sup>14</sup> Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka (Deputy Director of ERIAC), in discussion with the author, May 2020

on the day that is one of the most important occasions for organizing Roma communities, recognizes their efforts and underscores their importance in the Roma political, and social movement.

Yet another important point remains to be explored regarding the significance of organizing a Roma feminist exhibition. This reason was explained in the speech that the curator, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, gave on the opening ceremony on 21 March 2019 in Berlin, which is available on the online webpage of ERIAC online.<sup>15</sup> In her speech, the curator spoke about Roma feminism within the European context. As discussed in the literature review, due to similar manifestations of racism, Roma women share similar experiences with other women of color, such as Black women, Asian women and Latinas. These common experiences connect them and inspire them mutually. Therefore, the “Roma Women Weaving Europe” exhibition not only intended to express the views, struggles and experiences of European Romani women, but also aimed to reflect on the similar manifestations of gendered/racialized oppression toward minority women in a wider context. All of this shows its Romani feminism and Roma feminist art have crucial roles for ERIAC. ERIAC demonstrated their commitment to Roma women not only through the exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe,” but also through the subsequent events, both the panel discussion and the performance by Alina Serban at the International Roma Day.

### **III.4. Discussing Personal and Professional Experiences of the Guided Tour**

This part is based on the guided tour took which place in the ERIAC Gallery, Berlin in May 2019. A group of high-school students came from Lycée Jacques Amyot in Melun, France and were participating in a study visit in Berlin to learn about the social-political issues in Germany. Approximately fifteen French high-school students accompanied by three teachers came to the exhibition. The teacher who contacted ERIAC had received the recommendation from an Open Society Foundations-Roma Initiatives Office (OSF-RIO) colleague to visit the ERIAC exhibition. OSF-RIO is part of the OSF, an international grant-making network founded by George Soros in April 1993. OSF-RIO works on different issues which concern Roma, such as housing, education, increasing knowledge about Roma culture and history, advocacy, etc.<sup>16</sup> Because ERIAC and RIO are in partnership to promote and maintain Roma heritage, it is not surprising that someone from OSF-RIO recommended that the French teacher visit the ERIAC

<sup>15</sup> [https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Roma-Women-Weaving-Europe\\_SPEECH.pdf](https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Roma-Women-Weaving-Europe_SPEECH.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are/programs/roma-initiatives-office>

exhibition. Tours at ERIAC were usually led by the curator (Mirga-Kruszelnicka) with one of the colleagues. But since the curator had to travel abroad, she asked me to lead a guided tour for the group of high-school students from France. Frankly, I initially did not think I would be able to do it well: even though I may be knowledgeable about contemporary Roma feminism, my knowledge had not really extended to Roma art. Because I wanted to prove to them and myself that I can learn new skills and am committed to feminist knowledge production, I took the two to three days at my disposal to learn as much as I could about the exhibited artists and works and practice guidance skills. Below, I will share the main points of the guided tour and discuss my personal and professional observations as well.

In the beginning of the guided tour, my colleague and I introduced ourselves. After introducing himself, the colleague also shared some information about ERIAC, such as its main goals, history and the importance of having such an institute. Moreover, he also shared some important facts about Roma, such as their origin, their language called *Romanes* and that all over the world there are many stereotypes and prejudices against Roma. After the general information, I started to talk about my personal and professional background. I did so, because I wanted to demonstrate to the visitors that, although Roma people face many challenges, it is possible for us to get a higher education and study at a prestigious university such as CEU. Showing positive examples to non-Roma people might be one of the most efficient tools in fighting against stereotypes, since many non-Roma get distorted images about Roma through the media, books and daily discourses.<sup>17</sup> Most of the students had not met any Roma in their lives, therefore it was additionally important to provide a positive example of a Roma girl who, unlike the common stereotypes, was not married at an early age, is educated and is as much of a valuable human being as they are.

In the second, main part of the guided tour, after sharing information about the curatorial concept,<sup>18</sup> I started to introduce the artists and the exhibited artworks one by one. While introducing the works of art, I also spoke of the issues that were related to the particular theme explored in the artwork. For instance, I talked about Kiba Lumberg's piece entitled *Black Sarah* (to be discussed later in the chapter), I reflected on how Roma people were excluded from Catholic rituals and communities, or what a female saint may symbolize in a patriarchal religious system. Of course, I tried to articulate my thoughts in a way high school student can also

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574451fe37013bd0515647ac/t/589b3eabbefb6528348cb5/1486569148341/out-of-site-education-pack.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> [https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Roma-Women-Weaving-Europe\\_SPEECH.pdf](https://eriac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Roma-Women-Weaving-Europe_SPEECH.pdf)

understand without any gender education background. I also talked about pieces of art by Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, which I will discuss below in more detail as well. Because Mirga-Tas's works are very colorful and depict everyday people in an everyday environment, the students could more easily relate to these pieces. In this case too, after introducing the artist and the captions which were attached to the artworks, I tried to generate a short discussion about the themes the artworks represented. Since Mirga-Tas's pieces raise questions about sisterhood and community, I spoke to the students about the importance of acknowledging the efforts and works of Roma women not only in the Roma community, but in majority communities as well. The main reason for me to speak about the artworks and the themes they represented in a broader context, was to make the students reflect on the social issues that Roma women might face.

In the last part of the guided tour, I wanted to deepen their impressions of the exhibition, and therefore I divided the students into smaller groups. I asked them to choose one specific artwork that had caught their attention and about which they had questions or something to say. After a few minutes, the students were asked to explain their choices, allowing them to share their opinions about the tour and the exhibition. In general, the students liked the works and the exhibition because they did not really have the chance before to learn about Roma. Moreover, because the students were mature enough to think more deeply about social issues, the discussion showed that they also understood that most of the information they knew about Roma had not been based on the experiences of Roma people, but were rather distorted images and discourses created by majority societies.

In conclusion, the guided tour made two major contributions to Roma feminist knowledge production. Firstly, from my social-political-economic standpoint, as an educated Roma woman, I served as a positive example in contrast to the mainstream discourses about Roma women. Secondly, it contributed greatly by displaying the diversity of Roma art and culture through presenting different themes and art styles in a way that represented the diverse experiences of Roma women. In the next part of the chapter, I will discuss below more detail some of the exhibited pieces that I chose for my analysis and thereby explore the contributions ERIAC made to Roma feminist knowledge production by organizing this exhibition.



### III.5. About the Artists Featured at the 2019 Exhibition

Before analyzing the chosen artworks, some information will be shared about the creators of those works of art. The information provided here is important for my analysis below, and it is intended to give credits for the creators of the amazing works I had the chance to see and write about them.

**Kiba Lumberg** (Kirsti Leila Anniki Lumberg) is one of the most visible and versatile Romani activists and artists in Finland. She studied art, design and music in Finland and became an influential artist and writer. Her artistic work spans visual art, installations, video art and performances. She was born in 1956 in Lappeenranta, into a Finnish *Kalee* (*Kalee* is the self-domination of Finnish Roma) family. Due to the fear and conflicts she experienced in her family regarding Roma women's roles, she ran away from home at the age of 13. Beyond the fact that her art is very much inspired by Roma culture and her childhood experiences, she expresses strong criticism when it comes to discrimination against women and LGBTQ members of Romani communities.<sup>19</sup>

**Ana Maria Gheorghe** is a Romanian artist, who was born in 1988 in Bucharest and currently lives in Nuremberg, Germany. She studied easel painting at UNARTE (national art university in Bucharest). Since she also attended an art school for her secondary education, it can therefore be said that she has always been surrounded by artists and art. For more than a decade, her work has focused on female portraits and seldom on visionary surrealist images. She finds the gestation of ideas that she gathers from social media and the female muse as her true creation. Her inspiration comes from consciously collected images depicting the norms of beauty in our contemporary society.<sup>20</sup>

**Malgorzata Mirga-Tas**, is a Bergitka Roma (Roma ethnic sub-group, living mostly in Poland) visual artist whose main technique is sculpting in cardboard. She was born in Zakopane, Poland, in 1978 and grew up there. She currently lives and works in a Roma settlement in Czarna Góra in Poland. After finishing Antoni Kenar Art School in Zakopane, she graduated in 2004 from the sculpture department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Finding inspiration in Roma culture, her works feature Roma motives and ornamental shapes that

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/literature/kiba-lumberg/>

<sup>20</sup> The information was provided by Ana Maria Gheorghe herself through Facebook on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2020

pulsate with bold colors and decorative, strong lines. Mirga-Tas is also active as an activist and participates in several different social and artistic projects that aim to tackle social exclusion, xenophobia, and racial discrimination.

### III.6. Analyzing Artworks: Contributions of Six Artworks



Figure 1 Kiba Lumberg-Messenger

Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija

In this part of my chapter, I will analyze six works from the 2019 exhibition “Romani Women Weaving Europe”. Works by Kiba Lumberg and Malgorzata Mirga-Tas were exhibited in the ERIAC Gallery, the works of Ana Maria Gheorghe could be viewed in the RKI Gallery. I use the images below with permission of ERIAC. There are three reasons why I chose to write about these six artworks. First, I chose works that could be photographed and viewed by the reader of the thesis from a similar point of view I had. Paintings seemed

to be the best option in fulfilling this criterion. The second criterion was choosing artworks which in one way or another discuss or are related to mainstream discourses about Roma people, and more specifically Roma women. Lastly, I chose the works based on the impressions they made on me, in particular associations they generated with Roma feminist knowledge.

The first work I would like to introduce and then further analyse, is one by Kiba Lumberg, titled *Messenger*. This artwork is a gouache on paper and was painted in 2015. The size of the artwork is 146 x 100 cm. The ‘Messenger’ depicted in the painting is lying on the stone as a part of a religious ritual. The sword next to her implies that the ‘Messenger’ is part of a sacrificial ceremony. When viewing the whole picture, we can see that this sacrifice is not depicted in a way most would imagine, i.e., as a vulnerable situation in which the victim is resisting her murder and death. The sacrifice is due to take place in a yard outside, in the sunlight, while people watch from the windows in the house next to her. Despite the situation, she is not a symbol of martyrdom, but rather displays rebellion and courage. Her body language and facial expression contradict her position as a woman about to be sacrificed. The brilliant red colour of the dress that she wears (which can symbolize blood) is also a powerful expression of her feelings and resistance.

What the painting shows and reminds one of is the relationship between power and vulnerability. Here Gloria Anzaldua's work can be relevant, as discussed by AnaLouise Keating in her article, " 'I'm a Citizen of the Universe' : Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change" (2008). For Anzaldua, pain can be part of self-transformation: no self-change or even social change occurs without some kind of suffering. The reason is that when we decide to move forward, we also push ourselves beyond our boundaries. Stepping out from our boundaries or changing bad habits renders us vulnerable in order to become stronger. Making this kind of a decision therefore requires the courage to take the accompanying pain (Keating, 2008). At this painting, we see a strong woman who is not afraid to lie on the altar and sacrifice herself for something better. However, "this better thing" is not for someone else (for instance, not for patriarchy) but for herself, since she is alone on the picture and performs the sacrifice on herself.

The style of painting reminds me of the works of Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter born in 1907 in Mexico, who died in 1954. Best known for her colorful and uncompromising self-portraits that confront topics as identity, death and the human body, due to her personal experiences and efforts to challenge gender roles within the Mexican culture and beyond through her artistic activities, many feminist scholars have analyzed Kahlo's works and continue to do so (Bakewell, 1993).



Figure 2 Kiba Lumberg-Black Sarah

Copyrights: ERIAC/ Nino Pusija

The second painting of Kiba Lumberg that I will discuss is entitled *Black Sarah* and was made in 2016. It is an acrylic painting on canvas and measures 120 x 160cm. For the analysis of this artwork, Gloria Anzaldua's work is again relevant. In her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999), Gloria Anzaldua writes about *Guadalupe*, the saint of the Mexicans. *Guadalupe* was the saint of fertility, creation and Earth. A mixture of feminine and masculine characteristics, she was 'destroyer' and 'creator' at the same time. Beyond her protective role, *Guadalupe* "mediates between humans and the divine, between this reality and the reality of spirit entities" (Anzaldua 1999, 79). *Black Sarah* is known as the saint of the Romani people, who symbolizes the creator and protector of the

world, as well as the destroyer of those who threaten the life of her people.<sup>21</sup> *Guadalupe* and Black Sarah were both appreciated for their femininity and viewed as the embodiment of love and genesis as they gave life to the Earth and everything that was created on it. They were also appreciated for characteristics are often regarded as masculine sides: they were powerful, protective and dangerous. Of course, splitting Black Sarah and *Guadalupe* into feminine and masculine is not unproblematic; what I am trying to explain is the issue of separating and combining femininity and masculinity within a person. This is well-shown on the webpage of *Ranker*<sup>22</sup>, where we can see, how the Virgin Mary is completely deprived of the masculine characteristics shared by the saints described above. The *Ranker* webpage listed the most famous Virgin Mary depictions in the world, a selection which generally reveals that the Images of the Virgin Mary were instead asexualized, limited to feminine roles (symbol of virginity, birth, care) and subordinated to the Godhead, who is mainly imagined as male. Besides the separation of feminine and masculine characteristics within religion and spirituality, there is another important issue women face within religion. Because of men historically getting more and more power in the developing patriarchal societies, the roles of Goddesses and female saints have become less and less important (Daily 1973(El-Saadawi 1980).

Therefore, portraying a female saint of the Romani people (Black Sarah) from a Roma woman standpoint, has a contribution in challenging the mainstream, patriarchal way of thinking about religion and spirituality.

By drawing on the previous connection regarding the painting style of Kiba Lumberg and Frida Kahlo, I could recognize similarities in how the two artists paint Mother Earth as well. In her feminist reading of Frida Kahlo, Bakewell writes: „In her paintings Frida transforms the passive earth into an active, sexualized woman, by focusing on her own embodied experiences. In so doing she grants subject status not only to the preconceived earth-mother and Indian-mother, but to her children, the Mexican mestiza and mestizo” (Bakewell 1993, 178). On Kiba Lumberg`s painting, we can also see that using Roma woman identity was very important for Lumberg when she created this painting. From my point of view, depicting Black Sarah as the protector of the Earth and emphasizing her feminine, protective, active and powerful role

<sup>21</sup> Information was gathered from the caption of the artwork.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ranker.com/list/famous-blessed-virgin-mary-art/reference>

suggests the strength and efforts of Romani women. Moreover, using specifically a Roma identity for a protector of the Earth, may help Roma people feel more protected and important in a non-Roma dominated world.



Ana Maria Gheorghe-Figure 3 *One's Sight* 2011, Figure 4 *One's Sight 2* 2019

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The works of the second artist to be discussed here, Ana Maria Gheorghe, will be discussed together. As can be seen in these paintings, Gheorghe painted heroines which are part of the painting series entitled “She-roles.” Made in 2011, the painting on the left is entitled *One's Sight*, while the painting on the right is entitled *One's sight 2* and was painted in 2019. Both of the paintings measure 40x50 cm and are oil and acrylic on panel. The captions for these paintings describe the experiences of the artist who, as a girl from a mixed Romanian and Roma family, had difficulties with her identity. For her, having a Roma heritage was not always positive. While living in a Romanian majority community, being Roma was a burden because of antigypsyism. Although the caption contains no specific information about what kind of burden she referred to, because Gheorghe was faced with the social-economical-political disadvantages that arise as a result of the special form of racism Roma people experience, it can be understood why Gheorghe conceived of her Roma heritage as a burden. In order to deal with her confused feelings, she painted her own heroes to help her through difficult times. As we look at the paintings, we can see that both are kinds of portraits. Without knowing who the artist is without background information about these paintings (as often happens), it would be hard to decide whether these paintings are self-portraits or not. From the captions inform us that the reason why the women she portrayed look straight back at the audience is to make the



audience wonder whether the image is a reflection of the artist's heroes or a projection of the artist herself. Ana Maria Gheorghe's work is very much connected with how women of color feminists problematize the question of role models. As discussed in the literature review, women not only have to deal with the challenges of racism but with sexism as well (hooks, 2000). In order to challenge their misrepresentation and underrepresentation, women of color artists began to express their own experiences as gendered-raced subjects (Chadwick, 1990, 386). Gheorghe's aspiration to create or find her own heroes demonstrates the difficulties Roma women have to face. This idea was also expressed in the book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* written by Alice Walker. Walker reflects on the issue of how dominant cultures perceive knowledge and what happens when marginalized groups are excluded from traditional knowledge-making processes. Walker offers similar, alternative ways as Gheorghe does: looking back to the everyday life in order to find female heroes. From her standpoint as a Romanian-Roma woman, portraying her own heroines in a white-middle-class male-dominated society, Gheorghe attempts to challenge hegemonic discourses about role models.



Malgorzata Mirga-Tas-Figure 5 *Ciucholand 1*, Figure 6 *Ciucholand 2*, 2013

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The last works which will be analyzed here, again together, are made by Malgorzata Mirga-Tas and titled *Ciucholand 1* and *Ciucholand 2*. The artist used acryl and different fabrics to create the pieces which are 80x120 cm and were made in 2013. There are three main points that I would like to highlight regarding *Ciucholand 1* and *Ciucholand 2*. First of all, the artist collected the materials for the works from her family business, a second-hand shop in Poland. Some of her family members who work in the shop are actually depicted on Mirga-Tas' artworks. From the captions we can learn that by using special fabrics from the family business, depicting her own family members, and using many colors and patterns, Mirga-Tas wanted to create art which exhibits the multi-colored and joyous state of "Gypsy-ness."

Therefore, these pieces are both physically and symbolically the products of her Roma sisters.

The common assumption is that knowledge is something created by an individual person, separate from her surroundings, human relationships and so on. Because knowledge in the dominant discourse should be “objective,” there somehow is no make space for thinking about the production of knowledge as a collective project. Ethel Brooks discusses this in her article “The Importance of Feminists and ‘Halfies’ in Romani Studies: New Epistemological Possibilities “ (2015), in which she writes: ”In fact, ‘success stories’ almost never happen without family or community – and the narrative of the (deracinated) exception as heroic individual struggling against community is, at the core, an impossibility that simply serves to reinforce liberal, capitalist, and fundamentally classist and racist, conceptions of expertise, knowledge production and class mobility” (Brooks 2015, 60).

In these few sentences Brooks emphasizes the essential role of the family in terms of knowledge production. Knowledge is not something that can be understood without its "origin" and the acknowledgement of those with whom we together produced that knowledge. In the next sentences she continues: “It is also sexist and patriarchal, allowing the myth of the (male, individual, liberal) hero/expert to be pitted against community, family and that which is learned from our mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters. Over and over again, the myth of the individual – as expert, as hero, as anomaly, as token – is one that serves to deny community support, engagement and interest in knowledge production, and in the Romani artistic and cultural archive” (Brooks 2015, 60).

“The myth of the individual” denies the roles of children, women, other family members, communities` contributions due to the fact that mostly men are those who control knowledge. In a patriarchal-led society, in order to maintain male power and status, they need to control knowledge production. In this sense, the works of Mirga-Tas and other Romani artists who “use” materials, experiences, to create something without denying the importance of their families’/communities’ “input”, is challenging dominant practices and understanding of knowledge production.

My last point here relates to Brooks' concept of “halfies.” Brooks defines “halfies” as those Romani artists, feminists, scholars, etc., who are not only critical of the majority culture but of their own Romani culture as well. At the same time, these “halfies” have the power to create bridges between these (sometimes oppositional) cultures (Brooks 2015, 58). This concept of

Brooks reminds me of Anzaldua's *mestiza* concept, which also describes the multiple gender/racial/spiritual/etc. identities one can have. *Mestizas* and "halfies" move between cultures, create new interpretations of everyday life and, perhaps most importantly, in terms of knowledge production they constantly challenge what and how we think about art, academia or activism. By showing the everyday life of Roma women to non-Roma people and acknowledging Roma women crucial roles in their families as financial providers, works by Mirga-Tas help to build bridges between Roma and non-Roma communities, her works contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production.

### III.7. Conclusion

In section I.5., I have defined Roma feminist knowledge as challenging and impacting the hegemonic knowledge about Roma, by drawing on the lived experiences, culture and traditions of the Romani people, from their social-political-economic standpoints in the societies. This chapter aimed to analyze ERIAC's and RKT's exhibition. "Roma Women Weaving Europe" and, more specifically the six chosen works of art, contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production. In the beginning of the chapter, some information was provided regarding the importance of launching such an institute and ERIAC. Because in European societies, where Roma people are marginalized in social, political, economic and cultural spheres, ERIAC does a crucial job in fighting against their marginalization. Moving to the case study through which I more specifically focused on the contributions ERIAC makes to Roma feminist knowledge production, the exhibition "Roma Women Weaving Europe" was introduced and discussed in more detail. The discussion of the exhibition made two things clear: As the deputy director, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, said in our interview,<sup>23</sup> ERIAC thinks about itself as a feminist institute and it acted upon this by organizing several events on the topic of Roma feminism. Beyond the "Roma Women Weaving" Europe exhibition which clearly focused on Roma feminist issues (intersectional experiences of race-class-sexuality in the lives of Roma women, challenging mainstream stereotypes against Roma, sisterhood among Roma women.), ERIAC has organized other events which additionally aim to discuss Roma feminism (panel discussion, performance on the International Roma Day).

Regarding the contributions of ERIAC to Roma feminist knowledge, the guided tour of the exhibition also has to be mentioned as an important element of the exhibition. Overall, the

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka in 20 May 2020



guided tour was one of the events of the internship which I benefited from both professionally and emotionally. Thank to this guided tour, I widened my knowledge about contemporary Roma Art, learnt many things about how to lead an exhibition tour, and how to speak about gender-racial-etc. issues by using artistic works. The guided tour certainly helped me to think about Roma feminist knowledge production from new perspectives. Doing Roma feminist knowledge production, as the title of the chapter also indicates, was/is an essential part of ERIAC`s work.

Six works of art were discussed in the last section to explore in more depth how the exhibited pieces contributed to Roma feminist knowledge production. Works by Kiba Lumberg contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production in three major ways. First of all, the piece, *Messenger*, challenges mainstream ways of thinking about the relationship of vulnerability and power. This artwork initiates discussions about how feminine characteristics, such as vulnerability, might be a powerful source for Roma women. While analyzing the artwork, I relied on Gloria Anzaldua`s idea of the role of pain in spiritual transformation, in which pain itself as a transformative force and catalyst of social change was highlighted. The second painting by Lumberg, *Black Sarah*, underscores the importance of women in religion, a topic which is barely discussed within mainstream discourses and generally remains unacknowledged Both in Roma and non-Roma societies. The next two works by Ana Maria Gheorghe focused more on the question of role models. In my analysis, drawing on the critique of women of color such as Alice Walker who in her book *In Search of Our Mothers` Gardens* writes about how Black women engage with knowledge production. The pieces created by Gheorghe demonstrate how Roma women also struggle to find their own role models due to their social-political-economic position in the society. In societies where Roma women are underrepresented in History, Literature, Music and other fields, it is extremely difficult for Roma women to find their own heroines with whom they can identify with. Therefore, by creating her own “she-roes”, Gheorghe initiates discussions about this important issue. The third artist`s works I analyzed was Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, who raised issues about authorship and creating bridges between Roma and non-Roma communities. By depicting her own family members and using materials, which she got from their family business, Mirga-Tas challenges the mainstream way of thinking about creatorship. The artwork becomes the product of not the individual, but of her community as well. Moreover, by showing the everyday life of Roma women to non-Roma people and acknowledging their crucial roles in their families as financial

providers, works by Mirga-Tas help to build bridges between Roma and non-Roma communities, and challenge mainstream knowledge or assumptions.

The topics which the ERIAC artists worked with are part of the feminist debates all over the world. Such topics as racial, gendered, sexual discrimination, breaking patriarchal boundaries on religion and spirituality, the issue of role models in women of color communities and the question of authorship are all well-discussed within feminist scholarship. Concluding the analysis, it became clear that the exhibition “Roma Women Weaving Europe” has made an enormous contribution to Roma feminist knowledge production, according to the definition I provided in section I.5.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to analyze the contributions of the “Roma Women Weaving Europe” exhibition, co-organized by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture in Berlin and taking place from 21 March to 3 May 2019, to Roma feminist knowledge production.

In my literature review (chapter I), I discussed works that have influenced Roma feminist knowledge production. I first briefly discussed the work of feminist theorists on knowledge production; in the conclusion, based on the works discussed in that chapter, I defined Roma feminist knowledge production as challenging and impacting the hegemonic knowledge about Roma, by drawing on the lived experiences, culture and traditions of the Romani people, from their social-political-economic standpoints in the societies.

The bulk of chapter I consisted of three parts. First, I reviewed some of the main books of women of color in the US published since the 1980s. This was followed by a discussion of the *Critical Romani Studies* journal, from which I chose some articles that particularly discuss knowledge production from Roma point of views. Thirdly, I introduced some of the significant works of Roma and non-Roma feminist scholars, who have greatly impacted the ways in which Roma feminist knowledge production has been discussed and practiced.

In the second chapter, I have presented some information about working at ERIAC during the three-month internship I had at ERIAC in 2019. Then I presented the research methodologies which I used for gathering data for the analysis in the third chapter, and I also discussed two components of my positionality during the internship.

In the third chapter, which served as the main analytical chapter, I provided information about the work of ERIAC, background information about the “Roma Women Weaving Europe” exhibition, and shared my personal and professional experiences about the guided tour I gave to French high-school students in May 2019. Moreover, I analyzed six chosen artworks from the exhibition and discussed their contributions to Roma feminist knowledge production. The exhibition has generated discussions and changes through the exhibited artworks, the guided tour and related events which were organized during the exhibition period. In this thesis, I focused on six exhibited artworks created by Kiba Lumberg, Ana Maria Gheorghe, and Milgorzata Mirga-Tas. In my analysis of their artworks, I explored how these contribute to Roma feminist knowledge production. I found that the six artworks challenge how women’s vulnerability and power are perceived in mainstream discourses, reflect on the roles of Roma

women in religion and spirituality, and raise the issue of finding Roma women role models in a non-Roma dominated society, authorship and sisterhood.

The thesis aimed to contribute to academia in two major ways. First of all, since the thesis focused on challenging hegemonic knowledge production from Roma feminist point of views, it hopes to offer new perspectives to Romani Studies. Secondly, throughout the thesis I tried to make connections between the works and experiences of Black, Latina, Asian, and Roma women, in order to draw attention to solidarity and future corporations within academia.

A lot more critical research is needed about Roma women and men, their histories and societies, and the ways in which they have opposed oppression and exclusion. Further research is also needed about the topic I focused on, how Roma women contribute to knowledge production on an everyday basis. I would suggest focusing on how oral history told by Roma women challenges hegemonic narratives about Roma history and culture. Moreover, in my view, there is a huge potential in bringing together Roma LGBTQA\* and women artists into the fight against antigypsyism; more work should be done about the possible ways to develop this promising and powerful collaboration.

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