

# Training Course to Access Adult Education for Roma Women

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## Social, civic, intercultural development. Roma feminism



Adult Schools for Inclusion  
in the Diversity of Roma Women

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**ADULT SCHOOLS FOR INCLUSION  
IN THE DIVERSITY OF ROMA  
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# SOCIAL, CIVIC, INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT. ROMA FEMINISM, ROMA FEMINISM

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we address a central axis for building better lives, debating and learning about Roma feminism.

We urgently need to talk about Roma women, about Roma feminism, about Roma women's organisations and associative and protest movement, about racism, about gender antigypsyism and, in short, about the history and proposals of Roma women.

The exclusion of Roma women from mainstream feminist discourses has led to the development of strategies to claim the rights of Roma women based on their ethnic identity. The invisibility of Roma women and hegemonic feminism has meant the need to build an intersectional, class, gender and race/ethnic Roma feminism<sup>1</sup>.

# **2. OBJECTIVES**

- Raise awareness of gender and identity.
- Understand the concepts of multiple discrimination and intersectionality.
- Learn about the history of feminism.
- Enhance appreciation of feminist movements.
- To analyse some features and characteristics of feminist movements, with an emphasis on Roma feminism.
- Raise awareness of the need for Roma women to organise and associate in order to defend their rights.
- To know the demands and contributions of feminism and Roma feminism.

# **3. COMPETENCES**

In this topic, we shall work on social and civic skills and learning to learn.

These fundamental competences will enable students to understand how to learn, to develop their ability to continue learning. To improve the ability to organise, tasks, time, individual and collective work through training

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1 López Olvera, Sara (2020) *Mujeres olvidadas. From the silent revolution to the noisy revolution of Roma Feminism*. MASTER'S DEGREE IN APPLIED RESEARCH IN FEMINIST, GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP STUDIES. Jaume I University. Castellón.

and information on concepts such as feminism, equality and Roma feminism. The students should be able to understand and identify their abilities to overcome learning challenges.

Social and civic competences refer to the ability to relate to people, society and democratic participation in social and civil life. With this unit on Roma feminism, we aim to make Roma women aware of the need to participate and build a fairer and more democratic society in which they are also included. By raising awareness of Roma women, history and organisation, they will understand the need for social and civil engagement.

The students should be able to develop interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, such as civic competences. The idea is to convey the need for the participation of Roma women in the construction of social and professional life.

This unit is fundamental to ensure civic, active and democratic participation, primarily through the knowledge of the notions and social and political structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights) of Roma women and their organisation and defence of these.

## **4. CONTENT**

### **Our history**

The absence of historical memory of the Roma people reveals the ignorance and neglect to which the history of the Roma population, of Roma women, has been subjected to. This is why it is necessary to carry out and contribute to the historical recovery by also making Roma women visible, their contributions to the construction of organisation, demands and the struggle for the rights of Roma women.

It is necessary to recuperate memory in order to build a feminist genealogy, reclaim Roma protagonists in order to broaden and revalue their experiences, understand and write history.

It is essential to mention and reclaim the place of Roma women both in collective feminist memory and also in our story as People. It is necessary to trace a thread with the past in order to learn about and build the present and guide the future. To contribute to and extend collective feminist memory to the always forgotten women, the “other” women, who have always been present but always ignored. To incorporate the experience of Roma women organising and defending their rights to historical and feminist memory. (To preserve collective memory, recuperating it as historical memory), thus questioning the



traditional androcentric and racist narrative. And thus, making Roma women visible through the biographical genre as a legitimate way of constructing history<sup>2</sup>.

The under-representation of women in research, as studied by Henrietta L. Moore (1999), distorts the society that is being studied. Research projects portray the own ideas of the researcher, the object of study is distorted and the analysis is carried out from the ideological bias, typical of the West. The feminist perspective proposes a new paradigm where ethnocentrism and androcentrism do not bias the object of study or its analysis.

Colonialism, ethnocentrism, racism and androcentrism define the starting points and the interpretation that all social disciplines - history, sociology, etc. have made of Roma population, women and gender relations (race and class).

“Romanologists” studies on the Roma people have gone through different phases. At first, when their arrival on the European continent was detected, they aroused a fascination due to Europe’s attraction to the Orient. During Romanticism, studies viewed “the Roma” as bohemian and related it to the naturalist ideal. During the construction of the nation-states in Europe, studies on Roma people began to construct a negative stereotype,

presenting them as antisocial, without any interest in assimilating themselves to the emergence of national identities or to the societies in which they live, self marginalised, and thus legitimising and “naturalising” social inequalities. Women have also been “represented” (under-represented, distorted...) in these studies. An example of a classic study in which Roma women are represented and defined can be found in Quindalé’s Roma Dictionary:

*“Las gitanas dicen la buenaventura y venden filtros de amor; y las crónicas de los tribunales revela de cuando en cuando asesinatos de amantes o maridos por mujeres celosas, demasiado confiadas en sugerencias de esas astutas hechiceras, que lo mismo encuentran creyentes entre las personas de alto rango de la moderna Inglaterra que encontraban entre las principales de la antigua España (...) Desde las orillas del Indo hasta el campo de Gibraltar, esa ha sido siempre la peculiaridad distintiva de la gitana. Obscena en sus gestos y ademanes, obscena en sus palabras, obscena en sus cantares, pero casta en su cuerpo (...) La gitana tiene en sí además de la regularidad de sus facciones, de sus esbeltas formas, de su ligero talle, de sus agraciados modales, una mirada especial a la que se le atribuyen grandes pasiones.”* (Sales de Mayo, 1870)

Representations of Roma population

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2     Idem

and Roma women have varied over time, responding to ideological and political interests. From then until today, stereotypes and prejudices in studies of the Roma population have been constructed negatively. From romantic to negative interpretations, the Roma woman has been represented as a mother, sorceress, witch, magician, artist, fortune teller, healer, the incarnation of sexuality and sensuality, pure and chaste, passionate and fiery, vagabond, ragged, out of society, free, submissive... to current stereotypes and representation of thief and immigrant.

Feminism identifies with women, but “*not with women situated in different social and historical contexts, but with women who are part of the same sociological category*” (Moore, 1991:24).

The history of Roma women is also the history of women’s oppression. The perception and importance of women, and of Roma women throughout history, has not been taken into account or studied in a rigorous or scientific way by historians.

Among the demands of the Roma associative movement is the need for the historical study of the Roma people and Roma women, in an attempt

to avoid the Eurocentric, patriarchal and racist bias that operates in the hegemonic thinking of academia. Constructing history from the respective historical contexts and elaborating their own foundations, thus positioning themselves as subjects of thought, ceasing to be objects of analysis and elaborating and legitimising the production of knowledge as situated (Donna Haraway, 1995).

## **A Brief History of Feminism in the West**

In this section we will briefly review the history of feminism in the West, the most relevant contributions and theories throughout its history. Feminist theoretical discourse is a cultural construct that is the product of a bourgeois and Western social and cultural context from which “*other women*” were excluded for decades.

Feminism<sup>3</sup> as a theory, social practice, politics and thought aims to raise awareness and put an end to the oppression of women, thus achieving a fairer society.

As Ana de Miguel explains<sup>4</sup>, there are three main periods in which feminist

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3 Alda Facio calls all feminisms “Feminism with a capital F”. FACIO, Alda: “Hacia otra Teoría Crítica del Derecho”, in FRIES, Lorena and FACIO, Alda (Comp.): Género y Derecho.

4 Ana de Miguel. “Feminismos” in 10 key words on Women. Directed by Celia Amorós. Ed. Verbo divino, 1998.

theories and practices are developed<sup>5</sup>. Premodern feminism, modern feminism and contemporary feminism, where Roma feminism would come.

## Premodern Feminism

Premodern feminism covers the period from the first manifestations of “feminist polemics” to the Enlightenment. There are manifestations of these in the classical past, the sophistic enlightenment puts forward the idea of equality between the sexes. The Middle Ages were a period of obscurantism for women, who could be accused of witchcraft and executed at the stake. The Renaissance introduced the concept of autonomy, but it did not include women. The debate on the sexes was opened. Christine Pisan’s “*The City of Ladies*” (1405) already attacked the idea of women’s inferiority, praising “feminine” virtues, but it was not until the 18th century that the idea of equality was formulated.

In the words of Ana de Miguel, the historical recuperation of feminist memory is still in progress. Research adds new names. From the new feminist perspectives, it is claimed that this historical construction of

premodern feminism is not unique and exclusive to white Western women, so that authors such as Mernissi rescue women with rank and power throughout the centuries from the forgotten history of the East and the West, black women reconstruct their history from “the black point of view”, indigenous women maintain and care for their legends. Roma women reclaim romni studies to be able to investigate, learn about and reconstruct their history in order to decolonise the construction of the history of the Roma people, Roma women by Romanologists, from an exhaustive and objective analysis without the bias of the outside gaze, both androcentric and racist, stereotyped and prejudiced in its interpretations.

## Modern feminism

Modern feminism began with the Enlightenment, when a new political and social order took shape. Poulain de la Barre’s “*On the Equality of the Sexes*” (1673) is considered the first work based on the inequality of the sexes. The Enlightenment affirms that people are born free and equal, with the same rights, therefore Feminism would be the radicalisation of the

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5 Reference is also made to feminist “waves”. The first wave corresponds to the movements of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (right to suffrage). There is no agreement on this, Amelia Valcárcel points out that the first wave arose with Enlightened Feminism and not with suffragism. The second wave began in the 1960s with the resurgence of feminism and the third wave in the 1980s focused on the diversity of women.

Enlightenment project of equality.

During the French Revolution, when women were excluded as they were during the Enlightenment, strong demands for sexual equality were generated by writing “*Cahier de doléances*”<sup>6</sup>, women’s clubs were created, they took part in the armed popular movement, they defended their participation in the army. Olympe de Gouges wrote “*The Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizens*” (1791), Wollstonecraft wrote “*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*”<sup>7</sup> (1792). She claimed concrete political and civil rights in addition to the demand for women’s individuality and the ability to choose.

For Ana de Miguel, “*the French Revolution was a bitter and probably unexpected defeat for feminism*”<sup>8</sup>. The Jacobins closed the women’s clubs and prohibited women’s participation in political movements, with the guillotine or exile being the solution to the problem of trying to surpass the laws of “nature” and attempt to be “statesmen”.

It was during the 19th century that feminism reappeared with greater force as a social and international movement. The claims of the enlightened

feminists for egalitarian principles were reflected here in order to provide a solution to the problems brought about by the Industrial Revolution and capitalism. Inequality, misery, poverty, exploitation, women were denied civil and political rights, the working class and working-class women did not benefit from the achievements of the Industrial Revolution. It is this context that leads to the development of emancipatory and social theories. The movement re-emerges in the face of another new offensive against women as a consequence of capitalism.

Proletarian women are massively entering the labour market, as Angela Davis points out:

“*Yet the incipient industrialisation of the economy was simultaneously eroding women’s prestige in the home—a prestige based on their previously productive and absolutely essential domestic labour. Their social status began to deteriorate accordingly. An ideological consequence of industrial capitalism was the shaping of a more rigorous notion of female inferiority.*”<sup>9</sup>

While in the bourgeoisie women spent more time at home, women organised

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6 List of grievances presented by women when they were excluded from the three estates (clergy, nobility, and the commoners) to write complaints to Louis XVI. They called themselves “*the third estate of the third estate*”. In “*Feminismos*” Ana de Miguel. op, cit.

7 In 1790, Wollstonecraft wrote “*Vindication of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*” defending the philosophy of human rights, and two years later she broadened it to include the extension of rights to women.

8 Ana de Miguel. “*Feminismo*” op.cit, p. 9.

9 Angela Davis, “*Mujeres, raza y clase*” 1981. Akal, Madrid.

themselves to demand the universal right to vote, a cross-class demand. In the United States, they also joined the struggle with the abolitionist movement, in 1848 the “Seneca Falls Declaration” was approved, the<sup>10</sup> first convention on women’s rights in the state of New York, the fundamental text of suffragism, where women declared their independence from the authority exercised by men and from an oppressive system, and proposed resolutions to improve women’s rights. The critique of black feminists in the words of Angela Davis:

*“The Seneca Falls Declaration proposed an analysis of the female condition which disregarded the circumstances of women outside the social class of the document’s framers.”*<sup>11</sup>

In 1866, Stuart Mill presented the first petition for women to vote in the English parliament, in Spain the debate did not take place until the Second Republic, in 1931, same as in Portugal (but during Franco’s dictatorship the right to vote was lost). In France in 1944, after the Second World War, in Romania since 1948.

In the well-known socialist feminism, it was the utopian socialists who analysed the situation of women on the basis of the analysis of the economic and social situation of the

working class. Fourier, Owen, Saint Simon, Flora Tristan “*Unión Obrera*” (1843). They conceived the institution of marriage as a repressive institution.

Marxist socialism developed theories on the origin of women’s oppression, establishing that the cause of inequality was social and not natural. Private property and the sexual division of work exclude women from social production, relegating them to the private sphere, so one of the ways of emancipation was their incorporation into production and economic independence. For Marxist socialism, gender unites women and class divides them. They supported the suffragette demands for tactical reasons, criticising the fact that bourgeois women did not take into account the situation of proletarian women. The emancipation of women is impossible under capitalism. The struggle of women is the struggle of the working class. Kollontai in her works “*The Social Basis of the Women’s Question*” (1907), “*Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*” (1911). Theorising about equality and the situation of women in capitalism, she elaborates an emancipatory strategy through three areas, work, family and relations between the sexes. Clara Zetkin promotes a women’s socialist movement by organising an international women’s conference in 1907. They

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10 Document based on the US Declaration of Independence. In which they denounce the political restrictions to which women were subjected.

11 Angela Davis op.cit. p.62.

analyse the intersections of oppression, gender and class. They add the class perspective and class struggle to the analysis. Patriarchy and capitalism go hand in hand.

The anarchist movement as a social and political movement also included women who participated in the struggle for equality, although it did not have as extensive a theoretical elaboration as Marxist socialism. Anarchist free women rebelled against hierarchy, authority and the state (neither god, nor master, nor party). They did not attach importance to the struggle for the vote, nor did they, like the socialists, consider the need for a regulating state.

They do not participate in the suffragette demands.

## Contemporary Feminism<sup>12</sup>

During the interwar period, feminism declined due to political, economic and social circumstances. Simon de Beauvoir's "*The Second Sex*" (1949) attempts to construct an explanatory theory of women's subordination, starting from the question "*What does it mean to be a woman?*". She argues that you are not born a woman, you become one.

Betty Friedan<sup>13</sup> in "*The Feminine*

*Mystique*" (1963) analyses the situation of women's dissatisfaction, they cannot realise personal projects due to the role of mother and wife and those who are not content with this role assignment are blamed.

Black or Roma women for example, due to their situation of marginalisation and exclusion, and because of the need to survive, hadn't been relegated to the domestic sphere. Whether as live-in maids in North America (Black women) or due to the situation of persecution, marginalisation and imprisonment (Roma women) they have always been forced to find means of subsistence outside the domestic sphere. So, the debate and the struggle for socio-labour inclusion for them is more tied to getting to jobs that are neither precarious nor marginalised. The jobs they occupy, or the form of subsistence has the same characteristics as that of their partners, they carried out similar jobs (slavery, street vending, scrap metal, etc.). Post-war women were, after having joined the labour market, were excluded from the public space and the labour market, relegated to the domestic sphere. Hence the call for the inclusion of women in the public sphere. During the 1960s, the inequalities of the system - classist, sexist, racist, imperialist, etc. came to the surface and feminism

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12 López Olvera, Sara. (2014) "Construyendo el feminismo gitano" Universidad de Granada

13 Leading representative of liberal feminism.

organised itself independently. This led to a split between radical feminism, the “political feminists” who claimed that the origin of women’s oppression was capitalism, and the “feminists” who were critical of the sexism of the left. Kate Millet’s *“Sexual Politics”* and Shulamith Firestone’s *“Dialectic of Sex”* (1970) are key works that introduce concepts such as patriarchy, gender and sexual caste. Awareness-raising groups are created. Feminism of difference<sup>14</sup> argues that inequality is the patriarchal characterisation of women and the efforts of feminism of equality are not necessary as women neither want nor can equalise men in a world made by men.

Feminism in the 1970s differentiated sex from gender, the biological from the culturally constructed. The construction of the sex-gender system does not make the difference between women visible. The rejection of monolithic, universalist, elitist and elitist visions that lack cultural, racial and sexual plurality and that ignore the situations and causes of women’s oppressions.

The “third wave feminism”<sup>15</sup> or feminism of the 1980s emphasises the diversity of women. They question the term “woman”, as essentialist

and homogenising. It focuses on the variables of the diversity experienced by women. The analysis is based on the variables and intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, country of origin. They claim feminism should pay attention to race-ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, as it has reduced the category of analysis assuming heteronormativity and heterosexist assumptions, in opposition to the “modern colonial gender system” (Lugones, 2008).

“Decolonial” feminism takes on the critiques of “classical” feminist thought made by women that come from the margins, the subaltern, the other voices of feminism.

Classical feminist thought has been elaborated by white women, who have occupied a privileged social status due to their class and racial conditions.

Every different moment of theoretical and practical elaboration of feminism responds to the situations of oppression perceived by women in the historical context in which they live. Latin American women, Black women, impoverished women, migrant women, women from impoverished countries, do not begin their struggle demanding equality or the difference between genders, they fight against

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14 Equality feminism encompasses Marxist, socialist and liberal feminism. According to Celia Amorós “Feminismo, Igualdad y diferencia”, equality feminism has its roots in the Enlightenment.

15 It is also referred to by various authors as postcolonial feminism, intersectional feminism, Third World feminism, postcolonial or peripheral feminisms.

discrimination, poverty, marginalisation, social injustice. Once these situations have been overcome, men and women will be freer and more equal, and it is then that one of the basic premises of feminism, equality, can start to be partially realised. The difference or addition to this “wave” is that women are aware of the unique challenges they face, socioeconomic status, religion, origin, migration, “race”, equality with men from their own culture.

The main criticism of classical feminist theory is that this theory does not serve to interpret the reality of oppression of all women (racialised, impoverished, lesbian, immigrant, Muslim, indigenous...).

We are witnessing the “*fact of the pluralisation of feminist theorising*”<sup>16</sup>. This fact of theoretical pluralisation that occurs between the different intersections, gender, sexual orientation, “race”, culture, class, etc, emphasises the “social ethics” of feminism by denouncing other prejudices and discriminations that are added to sexism (racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, classism, etc).

Feminist critique focuses on how

gender influences the production of knowledge and how sexism constructs bias in this production. Gender does not operate independently, as it does not account for the multiple forms of oppression to which other women are subjected. This point of view assumes that the category “gender” represents all women. This is what some critical decolonial feminist theorists propose to call “gender racism”<sup>17</sup>.

The “other” feminists, the Roma feminists, highlight the intersection between the structures of domination between the androcentric system, racism, coloniality, heteronormativity, etc.

Feminism has not taken up the demands of all women, it has been constructed drawing from a specific history and specific women who belong to the majority culture, consequently it needs to revise its principles and it has brought the emergence of “other” feminisms by ethnic minorities.

## **Intersectionality.<sup>18</sup> Voices and experiences of Roma women.**

In order to understand the situation

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16 María José Guerrero Palmero. “Contemporary feminist theory. Una aproximación desde la ética” Instituto de investigaciones feministas. Complutense University of Madrid. 2001

17 María Lugonés proposes that the gender category should only apply to people of European origin.

18 Basado en la intervención de Gregoria Lincan, Roma feminist activist, en el Salto, Inclusion Diversity (2021) <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4178/IDTalksIntersectionalArticle.pdf>



and the analysis of Roma women, it is necessary to understand and deepen our understanding of the concepts of sex, gender, “race” and class: these are categories of analysis that intersect their social, cultural and identity reality.

<https://youtu.be/hOnVo78-6b0>

Intersectionality is the concept that focuses on the multiple identities of individuals in a system of jointly interfering oppressions.

It was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, a Black feminist woman, professor of Law at the University of California. It is very important to know that intersectionality has its roots in Black feminism.

Crenshaw explains intersectionality analysing how Black women are discriminated against in the labour market without having access to the jobs that white men and Black men have.

Over time, the concept of intersectionality has been given more definitions and has been complemented by more identities, different perspectives and different life experiences, which have made the notion more complex. The most important thing to know is that **intersectionality focuses on the voices of the most vulnerable groups that are part of society.**

We may think that intersectionality is challenging to put into practice, and yes, it is. The systems of oppression

that affect individuals based on their multiple identities, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, age, religion, colour, systems such as racism, sexism, classism, are not easy to deal with either.

Why is it essential for feminist movements today?

It is essential because intersectionality theory helps us to see the inequalities that exist in the societies which we are a part of. It emphasises the differences between women, the diversity of people’s identities, the struggle for empowerment, solidarity and at the same time shows very clearly the power relations in society, community, oppressions and privilege.

As feminists, the proposal is to balance the scales of the different systems of inequalities so that we are all aware of how we use our privileges, step back and bring the most vulnerable voices to the forefront.

Only in this way will the feminist struggle be successful in achieving gender equality.

How can an intersectional perspective be incorporated and developed?

It is necessary to know that there are multiple identities and multiple struggles which means that for some of us it is more difficult to obtain equal opportunities.

Women are discriminated against based on the intersection of their

identities. Identities cannot be viewed separately; for example, a Roma woman is discriminated against because of her gender, ethnicity and class. It is impossible to choose a single identity. Also, muslim women are discriminated against on the basis of gender and religion, black trans women are discriminated against on the basis of their gender, race, colour, sexuality. So we must address the problem by considering all the identities without reducing the person to a single one and creating intersectional policies.

Listen to the voices and needs of those most affected by the oppressive system. Step back and support them to speak for themselves and their communities, create partnerships and alliances with Roma women working at local levels. Develop projects and campaigns that enable access to resources and spaces where Roma women can participate for themselves.

An understanding of the evolution of the concepts of race and gender is necessary to understand antigypsyism in order to pinpoint the intersections and oppressions faced by Roma women. In the unit “CULTURE AND INCLUSION: Identity, stereotyping, prejudice and antigypsyism”, we focus on gender antigypsyism.

CHALLENGES OF INTERSECTIONALITY: VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF ROMA WOMEN. Carmen Gheorghe

[https://fb.watch/6rb\\_KHj2oG/](https://fb.watch/6rb_KHj2oG/)

## Roma Feminism

Unlike Western feminism, and especially European feminism, Roma women have maintained a double militancy, connecting their work for women’s rights to the struggles for the dignity of their community and for the defence of their civil rights, hence their interest in continuing to participate in Roma non-governmental organisations. This double militancy, however, has had to overcome a lot of resistance, both from the feminist movement and from the Roma movement. Both movements have been influenced. On the one hand, feminist organisations have seen the need to incorporate cultural diversity into their analyses of gender inequality and, on the other hand, the Roma movement has had to contemplate the demands and aspirations of Roma women and add them to their demands regarding racism and classism suffered by the Roma community. Since the 1980s, in the field of social anthropology, gender definitions already had introduced the concept of cultural diversity.

It is precisely the same paternalist, universalist, ethnocentric and essentialist ideology that underlies Western feminist movements, that stimulates insurmountable prejudices -in this case, Roma culture is seen as the generator and cause of gender inequalities. Feminists advocate for cultural rupture and for “consciousness-raising”

of women from other cultures, while Roma women retreat in the face of these ethnocentric attacks. In this situation, Roma women are often unable to recognise what “hegemonic”, white, gadjo feminism has meant in their lives.

*“We consider our feminism to be a matter of social justice.” (Guru)<sup>19</sup>*

This phrase connects the struggle of Roma women and the denunciation of the situation of Roma people. It is these women who face difficulties and are faced with the challenge of constructing a feminist discourse that is permeable and accepted by Roma women where patriarchy and racism meet, and that at the same time is based on their own experiences and cosmologies. Roma women’s struggles for emancipation are linked to economic, social and cultural demands due to the shared experiences of racism, marginalisation and exclusion that have shaped their gender identities. Roma culture and Roma women are perceived and represented as submissive to the patriarchal order, with the only viable model of emancipation being “conversion” to the civilised, gadjo world.

Demands for equality cannot imply the homogenising “equality” of other women from other cultures. Likewise, defining Roma cultural identity is

complicated, due to the heterogeneity within the group, which is one of the characteristics of the identity itself.

For decades, administrations, associations and NGOs that assume “gender policies” have tried to work with Roma women based on ethnocentric analyses, in an attempt to assimilate Roma women. These practices have had a low impact on the transformation and emancipation of their lives and the situations they suffer.

These women continue to be constructed and perceived as passive subjects, victims of patriarchy and/or capital. Their struggles, both internal and external, are never taken into account, nor are they represented as active subjects in the construction of their communities and the emancipation of women, even though surveys and sociological analyses consider them the driving force for change and transformation of the society, due to the cascade effect they have over them and their approaches of “modernity”, recognising their importance and value in their environment.

Feminism, understood as an ideology and a practice of opposition to patriarchal power, has not been exclusive to the West, nor has it been exclusive to white women. The construction of feminism from the perspective of Westernism has resulted in “colonisation”.

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19 María José Jiménez Cortiñas. Social worker. President of Asociación Gitanas Feministas por la Diversidad en 2012. Universidad de Murcia. Junio 2012.

Coloniality has also penetrated feminism, thus converting the discourse of Roma women (as is the case with women in Latin America, Africa) into the object and not the subject of their demands, history and experiences. There is thus “another” history, another part of history, theory, movement and feminist practices that have not been taken into consideration or have had little importance for academic study.

Feminism has not taken up the demands of all women, it has been constructed with a specific history and specific women belonging to the majority culture, which has meant a revision of its principles and the emergence of “other” feminisms by ethnic minorities.

Our starting point is the social position of Roma women; as a group, they are shaped by the intersection of, at the very least, ethnic, gender and class inequalities, facing multiple discrimination.

The relevance of gender in understanding anti-Roma racism and the importance of gender for the Roma movement in general are topics of debate among Roma women activists and in their interactions.

Some forms of discrimination, exclusion and violence affect Roma women disproportionately or exclusively.

Their emancipatory and equality models don't pretend to copy gadjo

feminist models; they pretend to change and create new models through their own culture.

Roma women vindicate the changing nature of their cultures, the history to be rewritten by their own people, and they reject assimilation or other forms that attack their dignity and culture. It is a double struggle: to maintain their cultural difference from the majority society and at the same time the struggle to change the uses and customs that they consider contrary to their rights as women. Their struggle, like that of other women who don't belong either to the “majority” or “dominant” culture, is the right to reconstruct their history and culture, to confront it and to be able to construct their options from the cultural pluralism to which they belong.

## **Present times**

Roma women are currently “building bridges” between the different struggles they are involved in by having to participate in the various movements, feminist, Roma and LGTB, by the importance of racism (in the first one), the relevance of feminism (in the second one) and of diversity (in the third).

From a culturally situated gender perspective, Roma women discuss sexism and “Romanism” with some Roma or pro-Roma organisations and question academic feminism that has

not taken them into account in its analysis by not including the intersectional analysis of the multiple axes of discrimination to which their lives are exposed and of which they are aware.

The demands and forms of struggle and organisation of Roma women are giving rise to the emergence of a new Roma feminism, which coincides with the demands of mainstream feminism but differs in some respects. The specific ways in which their gender identities are constructed, due to their cultural identity, history, relations with the majority society and class position or socio-economic situation mark these differences. The Roma women's movement, at national, European and international level, is calling on academic feminism to build a more inclusive and intercultural feminism that takes into account cultural specificities and respect for difference. At the same time, they are fighting within the Roma movement and trying to ensure that it takes up the specific struggles of women from the ranks of the broader demands for human rights for their people and creating spaces for the exchange of experiences, struggles and agendas.

The creation of spaces and meetings for Roma women, who also find the need to self-organise, fight and make visible their situation, their identity,

and analyse the factors of inequality, has favoured the construction and demands of Roma's rights and Roma feminism.

Roma feminists are doing feminist intervention in communities, developing theory and contributing to feminist thinking by expanding their knowledge, advocating and supporting Roma communities and Roma women. They aim to ensure diversity by putting the experiences and problems faced by Roma girls and women at the centre of political and policy agendas.

Within the demands, we also find successes and advances of Roma feminism.

In Romania, the concept of multiple discrimination was first introduced into Romanian law in 2006. The initiative came from a group of Roma feminist activists who fought for gender equality legislation to recognise the discrimination faced by Roma women and other women of other ethnicities, women with disabilities, etc.

In Spain, the Congress of Roma Feminism was held in 2017. There, Roma activists and academics from around the world debated on Roma feminism.

In Portugal, they are Roma feminist women who have taken the lead in the Nao Engolimos Sapos<sup>20</sup> campaign and

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20 In some shops, the figure of a toad is placed at the entrance in order to prevent access to Roma, as it was traditionally considered a sign of bad luck. The aim: to scare Roma away from access to goods and services.

multiple activities for the continuity of formal training, the empowerment of women and the fight against racism and stereotyping. In France, they commemorate and celebrate the Romani Resistance Day by reclaiming memory, struggle and dignity.

## **5. ACTIVITIES**

### **5.1 Activity 1. Does it Happen Every Day? Multiple Discrimination**

This activity will help students to express and verbalise the daily violence they face due to their condition as impoverished Roma women. It will help teachers to understand better the students' context, experiences and life perspectives.

We introduce the concept of multiple discrimination and intersectionality. Afterwards, we propose to the students to write and/or express situations they have experienced or have been told about that can be identified as situations of discrimination and multiple discrimination and they develop and present them to the large group. Define multiple discrimination in your own words.

Following the exercise, in another

session, we presented and developed “*Together we rewrote Florica’s story*”.



A bus driver physically assaults a Roma woman with a broom when she tries to get on the bus. The case became known after one of the bus passengers filmed the incident and posted it on social media. After the aggression Florica called the emergency service, but the operator not only did not take her seriously, but insulted her, “You talk like a crow! You must have driven him crazy!” (referring to the driver) “Go to hell!”

<https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/rasismul-de-la-112-o-operatoare-sts-injura-o-femeie-roma-batuta-vorbi-ti-ca-ciorile-trazni-v-ar-du-te-drea-cu-2736227>

A partir de 2020 Florica puede acceder a una vivienda a través de una campaña realizada para comprar un hogar.



Florica's story reveals all the forms of discrimination to which Roma women are subjected: racism, sexism, classism, etc. A person like Florica is denied all rights: access to housing, property rights, housing conditions. And unfortunately, many women like Florica go through situations like this on a daily basis. The system is not set up to support them, but the solidarity you have shown has strengthened and given us and Florica hope, because we felt that we were not alone in the struggle against oppression. (E-romnja)

The outcome of feminist solidarity. Phenjalipen.

Again we return to the large group to discuss the news and how life has developed after the intervention and

support of Roma feminist solidarity to discuss the needs for organisation, advocacy, mutual support.

**Materials:** Paper, sheet of paper, projector to project news and images of Florica

**Duration:** 2 sessions of 2 hours

## 5.2 Activity 2. The Strength of my Women

This exercise allows students to learn about their own life history and the genealogy of their women's struggle. For teachers, it will allow them to learn about the historical context and life of Roma women.

The activity consists of establishing a historical line of women relatives, their historical context, and their different life struggles. They shall draw a family tree, which can be in the form of a tree or boxes and lines of kinship. The names of women from previous generations, family members, close relatives, whether or not they are related by blood (mothers-in-law, neighbours, cousins...) are written in these boxes.

Once the tree has been established with the familiar and close women, we will tell a brief story of their lives,

their context and their struggles or courage at the time, emphasising their strengths. We will describe each one in 3 sentences.

Then we will put all these phrases together and finally put them in each student's box as a compilation to remember that we are the sum of all that they were.

The activity is done individually, but by talking and sharing ideas with the group, there may be women who are referents and family members of the same group and shared stories may emerge.

Teachers can make a comparison with their family structure and the lived context of their family experience in order to verify or not the historical privileges they have enjoyed. Review their life experience and that of their family members. Contextualise Roma women's lives and access to rights.

**Materials:** Poster board, sheets of paper, colours, pencils... perhaps a projector to project an example of a family tree drawing, poster board with a pre-designed tree

**Duration:** 2 sessions of 2 hours each

### 5.3 Activity 3. Let's Draw Feminism

This activity offers the possibility of creating a feminist timeline and of seeing the conquests made by women in the West in a visual way and in a mural. It provides students and teachers with a vision and knowledge of the improvements and achievements in women's rights against patriarchy.

In this activity we will make a mural with historical milestones in the struggle for women's rights.

We propose a series of events that mark the history of feminism.

The aim of the mural, the exhibition, is to represent relevant moments throughout history with drawings and a poster made with the artist's own words. The mural ends with the interpretation or representation of Roma feminism.

**Materials:** Pintura, proyector, fotocopias, folios, carteles, papel continuo, plantillas, papel pluma, lápices... necesario para realizar un mural.

**Duration:** 3 sesiones de 2 horas



Premodern Feminism	Modern Feminism
<p>Debate “<i>Feminist Controversies</i>”.</p> <p>Middle Ages: Witchcraft</p> <p>Renaissance: “<i>The Book of the City of Ladies</i>” (1405) by Christine Pisan</p>	<p>Illustration: Poulain de la Barre “<i>On the Equality of the Two Sexes</i>” (1673)</p> <p>French Revolution: Olympe de Gouges writes the “<i>Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen</i>” (1791). Wollstonecraft wrote “<i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>” (1792).</p> <p>Suffragism: Women’s right to vote. (Year of the country)</p> <p>8th March. International Working Women’s Day. Women and the labour movement.</p>
Contemporary Feminism	Gitano Feminism. Roma Feminism.
<p>Interwar period: Simon de Beauvoir “<i>The Second Sex</i>” (1949)</p> <p>Betty Friedan “<i>The Feminine Mystique</i>” (1963)</p> <p>“<i>Third Wave Feminism</i>”: Women’s Diversity, Black women, indigenous women, Intersectionality.</p>	<p>Intersectionality. Multiple discrimination.</p> <p>Privileges</p> <p>Gender/Race/Class/...</p> <p>Georgiana Lincan</p> <p>Carmen George</p> <p>M<sup>a</sup>José Jimenez Carmen Fernández</p> <p>Maria Gil...</p> <p>16 May: Romani Resistance Day</p>

## 5.4 Activity 4. We Draw our Feminism

This activity will help both students and teachers to get to know and recognise the genealogy and demands of Roma feminists, projecting their history in a visual way.

In this activity, as in the previous one, we will make a mural with the historical milestones in the fight for Roma women’s rights. We will propose a series of milestones for the drawings, the mural, and the text. The students can also propose specific local or national events that they consider relevant. They can also propose figures

and references to be included in the mural.

As proposals we can count on the women we present on the website [www.skolaromani.org](http://www.skolaromani.org).

<https://www.skolaromani.org/personalidades-feministas/>

**Materials:** Pintura, proyector, fotocopias, folios, carteles, papel continuo, plantillas, papel pluma, lápices... necesario para realizar un mural.

**Duration:** 2 sesiones de 2 horas cada una

## 5.5 Activity 5: Are Women Born or Made?

This activity will allow students and teachers to reflect on the sex-gender system, the weight of culture and the construction of the concept of gender.

The exercise consists of a reflection around the question posed by Simon de Beauvoir in *“The Second Sex”* (1949) when she attempts to construct an explanatory theory of women’s subordination.

What does it mean to be a woman?

Are women born or made?

What does it mean to be a Roma

woman?

Do all women suffer the same oppressions? Why?

**Materials:** Classroom or space to discuss in a circle

**Duration:** 1 session of 2 hours

## 5.6 Activity 6. Reflections on Privilege

In this assignment, students and teachers will be able to reflect and discuss the idea of privilege, how it manifests itself, who has more privilege and why.

We will do an individual reading of the text, then we will read it aloud together in the group, each student reading one paragraph (depending on the level of the group).

Following the text, we shall now proceed to the debate on

How do they feel? What is your opinion about the author’s experience and statement? What do they understand by privilege?

TEXT

OPINION - *“I am a Roma and I feel privileged because my skin is white”*. An editorial about a relatively unknown reality.

-”In my community in Mizil, I always heard people say: *Dikta, mandro kai si, penes che si gadji!* (Look how pretty she is, she looks like a Romanian girl!)” by Georgiana Lincan

- Even though I am part of a marginalised Roma community in Mizil, I nevertheless have white skin. Most of the time I can pass as “gadje” (non-Roma).
- I have Roma friends who don’t want to stand out in the sun, so that they don’t get tanned, or who buy skin bleaching cream.
- I think I need to talk more about white skin privilege.

Georgiana Lincan is 24 years old and has been working for 6 years for E-Romnja, an NGO working to promote Roma women’s rights.

I am Roma, from a “traditional” Roma community in Mizil. From the age of six months until I was eighteen years old, I was raised by grandmother whose only source of income were my uncle’s disability pensions. I was supported by different people throughout my life, both financially as well as spiritually, until I completed my Master’s degree in political science.

I have been working for E-Romnja for six years – The Association for the Promotion of Roma Women’s Rights. Through this work I try to offer to

Roma women growing up in similar communities the same support I received.

As a Roma woman coming from a very precarious community, I can say that the access to education is not only dependent on your will to achieve something in your life, but also on an entire context: the parents’ mentality, the family’s financial situation, the home environment, the educational system, sexism, discrimination, unequal opportunities, etc.

**I realised I needed to speak more about the privilege of white skin once I got to the U.S.**

Even though I come from a marginalised and stigmatised Roma community, I nevertheless have white skin. I didn’t realise how important it was for me as Roma to talk about “white privilege”, meaning the privilege you can hold purely on the basis of having white skin, until last month, when I visited the U.S.

I visited the U.S. through the “Professional Fellows Program”, an exchange experience for burgeoning leaders financed by the U.S. State Department and coordinated by Ce-Re (The Center for Resources for Public Participation). The duration of the program is a month and a half and targets people in Eastern Europe who work or would like to work in community organising.

Colorism is a subject that is not often discussed in Europe; however it is

quite well-known and important in the U.S. “*Colorism refers to discrimination based on skin color. Colorism disadvantages dark-skinned people while privileging those with lighter skin*”, writes American journalist, Nadra Karem Nittle.

**“*Dikta, mandro kai si, penes che si gadji!*” (Look at how pretty she is, she looks like a Romanian girl!)**

Because I have white skin, I mostly pass as “gadjie” (non-Roma). Even if I strongly take hold of my ethnicity, because I am proud that I am a Roma and that I am a part of the community in Mizil, my identity is often questioned.

Many times, non-Roma (the majority population) tell me I am an “exception”, Roma activists I meet tell me I am too white to be Roma, and in the community, where everyone knows me, I often hear “*Dikta, mandro kai si, penes che si gadji!*” (Look at how pretty she is, she looks like a Romanian girl!) from many people.

The Roma have internalised the racist perspective that white skin is automatically a sign of physical beauty and have lower self-esteem if their skin is darker. “To be white” becomes synonymous with “to be beautiful”, therefore “to be beautiful” is equal to “to be in the majority” in a white European country. Consequently, it can be understood that a person coming from an ethnic minority, who is affected by

colourism, is prone to developing an inferiority complex in regards to the majority.

In the book “*Black Skin, White Masks*”, Franz Fanon explains that ‘In a white society, from early childhood, a person learns to associate “blackness” with “wrongness”’. And when children of colour are exposed to such experiences, they will develop a childhood trauma as a mental wound that affects their personalities. Those affected by colourism will often feel reduced to just their dark skin.

**Girls with white skin who are about to become brides are valued much more than those with darker skin.**

I know cases where arranged marriages are still planned, and girls with white skin who are about to become brides are valued much more than those with darker skin.

I have Roma friends who don’t want to stand out in the sun, so that they don’t get tanned, or who buy skin bleaching cream as a reaction to the beauty standards fixed by the majority society, and are met with negative attitudes from the majority society in public spaces.

**The feeling of guilt will always put you in a defensive, selfish position.**

I am certainly not trying to suggest that in becoming aware of one’s own privilege causes someone to feel guilty because you are white or part of

the majority. The feeling of guilt will always put you in a defensive, selfish position, while actually and more importantly, those who are underprivileged are in need of alliances and allies.

When I was in the U.S., I spoke with African-American and Hispanic women about their work and the problems they encounter in their communities and found that there were many similarities between our communities: they also face challenges in terms of discrimination, racism, sexism, and segregation in schools and cities. They, like us, wish to get involved in more activities, yet family life occupies a lot of their time.

I resonated with a lot of the problems and barriers that the African-American community faced, yet, however much I can understand all the systems of oppression, I will never feel discrimination in the same way as African-American women, or in the way that Roma girls and women in my community with darker skin do.

**Materials:** Text by Georgina Lincoln “*I am Roma, and I feel privileged because I have white skin*”

**Duration:** 1 session of 2 hours

## **6. GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

### **6.1 Group discussions**

At the end of each session, we discuss in the group what we have learnt and what we have been able to do during the training about feminism and Roma feminism.

What did you think of the topic, and did you know about feminism and Roma feminism?

What did you learn during the activities, and were your expectations met?

How has your perspective on feminism changed?

Do you think this could be the answer to the current situation of Roma women?

## **7. EVALUATION CRITERIA**

In this topic, the assessment will be continuous throughout the activities and focused on the collective discussions and reflections and the group learning and debates. Together with the teachers, the students will reflect and expose themselves throughout the activities.

As an evaluation instrument, we propose to observe attitude, involvement, and participation. Follow-up the proposed tasks.

The final presentation about the strength of their women and history, and their argument and reflection on their struggle will be considered for the unit assessment. We will also evaluate the participation in the debate about privilege.

## **8. LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- The learning outcomes pursued in this unit are recognising the feminist struggle and the specificities of Roma feminism as a tool and instrument for the organisation and defence of Roma women's rights.
- To develop a capacity and a historical vision of women's struggle and the conquest of rights.
- To recognise the historical moment and the concrete struggle of the moment.
- Develop the tools to analyse ethnicity, gender, class and other oppressions.

## **9. WEBGRAPHY**

Some interesting websites where you can find information:

ID Talks Intersectional by Georgiana Aldessa

<https://youtu.be/hOnVo78-6b0>

ID Talks Intersectional: We are all so different in different ways.

<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-4178/IDTalksIntersectionalArticle.pdf>

The urgency of intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw

<https://youtu.be/akOe5-UsQ2o>

<https://www.womankind.org.uk/intersectionality-101-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important/>

<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>

Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989) Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics

<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>

COLECTIVA FEMINISTA LA REVUELTA. Dos categorías de análisis que nos aporta la teoría feminista: Patriarcado y género.

[http://www.larevuelta.com.ar/articulos/ST\\_2010\\_01\\_31\\_c.html](http://www.larevuelta.com.ar/articulos/ST_2010_01_31_c.html)

JABARDO VELSACO, MERCEDES. (2013) “*Apuntes para una genealogía del pensamiento feminista negro*” n°56 de Pueblos. Revisya de información y debate. Abril 2013.

<http://www.revistapueblos.org/?p=14081>

CHALLENGES OF INTERSECTIONALITY: VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF ROMA WOMEN. Carmen Gheorghe

[https://fb.watch/6rb\\_KHj2oG/](https://fb.watch/6rb_KHj2oG/)

Carmen Fernández y Sara Olvera. Movimiento ruidoso de mujeres gitanas feministas

<https://youtu.be/SNarrzRcljs>

Nao engolimos sapos

[https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/07/08/mundo\\_global/1562589607\\_950398.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/07/08/mundo_global/1562589607_950398.html)

<https://www.facebook.com/naoengolimosapos/>

<https://www.lavoixdesrroms.com/>

[www.skolaromani.org](http://www.skolaromani.org)

<https://www.skolaromani.org/personalidades-feministas/>

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*reproductivas*". Viento Sur N° 104, págs. 42-54.

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