

“They’re Saying That to Us?” The Unspeakable Racism of Spanish *Gadjo* Feminism

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Abstract

The Spanish state advertises itself internationally as a leading example of “Roma inclusion” and takes particular pride in its policy towards women from the Kalé minority, the main Romani group in Spain. This is reflected in a carefully deployed political communication that centres on the trope of the “empowered Gypsy woman” who will soon reach emancipation thanks to state-funded programmes. On the ground, however, Kalé women’s persistent social marginalisation is imputed on them, while antigypsyism remains unaddressed by institutions. This paper investigates the discursive strategies mobilised by institutional actors in order to rule out discussions on racism. Based on eight months of ethnographic observations as well as semi-structured interviews with professionals in Madrid, I argue that this occurs through a translation of feminist agendas, particularly on intimate partner violence (IPV), into discourses that stigmatise Kalé “culture” as intrinsically patriarchal while promoting a *gadjo* (non-Romani) norm. This phenomenon, which I refer to as “gadjo feminism,” manifests itself within the justice system, where professionals disproportionately resort to culturalist representations of IPV in Kalé communities, and also within NGO-piloted empowerment programmes for Kalé women which rely upon racial hierarchies while systematically dismissing women’s experiences of institutional racism.

Keywords

- Feminism
- Culture
- Race
- Romani women
- Intimate partner violence
- Spain

Introduction

In August 2018, *El Diario Aragón* published an interview with María Esther López, a gender equality professional working for the largest organisation implementing “Roma inclusion” policies in Spain, *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* (Sánchez Borroy 2018). Referring to women from Kalé communities – the main group of Romani people in Spain – and to what she believed was holding them back from gendered emancipation, López argued:

The heaviest burden for Gypsy^[1] women is the risk of being guilty of ‘gadjo-isation’ (*apayamiento*). [...] When a Gypsy woman builds herself a gender identity more in line with majority society norms, [...] with autonomy, freedom of decision, [...] she ceases to be recognised as Gypsy by her group. [...] It is easy for [Gypsy women] to gain recognition outside of their community, where it is expected that they work for another employer, have a professional career, share family responsibilities with their partner, take their children to day care from the first months on... But [...] seeking recognition within their group causes very strong internal conflicts.^[2]

Shortly thereafter, Kalé feminist researcher Patricia Caro Maya wrote an opinion piece condemning a “vast repertoire of colonialist and exclusionary metaphors” that portrayed “gadjo-isation” as an “intra” rather than “inter-group stigma” and failed to consider instead the institutional violence historically inflicted by the Spanish state upon Kalé women (Caro Maya 2018).

The idea defended in López’s interview – that women from the Kalé minority carry the weight of their culture and community as a burden, while aspiring towards the “modernisation” and emancipation that women from “majority society” reportedly enjoy – remains widespread among Spanish society and regurgitates colonial thinking. What might be more surprising is that, as illustrated by López’s professional background, the “patriarchal Gypsy culture” rhetoric, or what López herself called “Gypsy patriarchy” in her doctoral thesis (Sánchez Borroy, *op. cit.*), is remarkably prevalent among feminist-identifying professionals, particularly those employed within so-called pro-Gypsy organisations (*organizaciones pro-gitanas*). In a country that has been referred to as at the vanguard of state feminism in Europe (Valiente 2008), in particular with respect to state response to intimate partner violence (IPV) (Casas Vila 2017), the framework of state-NGO partnerships – which historically was set up to aid socially marginalised Kalé populations – now is adopting a discourse on gender empowerment that, however, translates systemic

1 My use of the word “Gypsy” is limited to quotes to remain faithful to the wording of research participants or to the original names of the various institutions I am mentioning. Although *Gitanos/Gitanas*, literally “Gypsies,” was reappropriated by Kalé people, it is a word that bears racist connotations, and translation into “Roma” or “Kalé” would misleadingly embellish the meaning that many ascribe to *Gitanos/Gitanas* in Spanish. Besides quotes, I prefer *Kalé/Kaló/Kalí* over *Gitanos/Gitanas*, in line with several Kalé activists from Spain, to give credit to a word that comes from the community rather than to a term coined by majority society.

2 Ana Sánchez Borroy. 2018. “La mayor carga para las gitanas es la culpabilidad por ‘apayamiento’, esa sensación de que tú ya no pareces gitana” [The heaviest burden for Gypsy women is the guilty feeling of “gadjo-ization,” that feeling that you no longer seem Gypsy]. *El Diario Aragón*. August 11, 2018. Author’s translation.

analyses of patriarchal oppression into culturalist ones in order to justify paternalistic state policies. Relying on Romani language, I refer to this framing strategy as “gadjo feminism”: a reinterpretation of feminist agendas, notably on IPV, that stigmatises Kalé culture as intrinsically patriarchal while actively, albeit surreptitiously, promoting a *gadjo* (non-Romani) norm. Interestingly, gadjo feminism in Spain goes beyond the white saviour attitudes of state agents working in colour-blind institutions. It also reveals itself in projects implemented by NGOs that work specifically with Kalé women and claim expertise on their “culture.”

In the winter of 2017, I worked as a volunteer for one such organisation in the suburbs of Madrid. Funded and piloted under the authority of the Community of Madrid, its daily operations are run by gadje social workers and Kalé mediators, all of whom are women. One morning, as I return to the premises after attending a documentary screening with the NGO’s beneficiaries, I find myself in the middle of a heated discussion with staff. Shaking their heads, they argue that the documentary, which tells the stories of Romani genocide survivors, had the wrong kind of impact on the beneficiaries. The social workers report to me, appalled, that a couple of women, after watching the film, walked into the office and claimed: “After everything you *payos*^[3] put us through, we should all be getting EUR 2000 compensation!” Shocked at what she sees as ungratefulness, one of them asks rhetorically: “And they’re saying that *to us*?” While her colleagues nod, she stresses how “shameful” it is for women living on social benefits thanks to their NGO to then come and request extra money. When I try to argue that they were referring to the lack of compensation offered to Romani survivors of concentration camps, I am asked to avoid talking about racism and ethnic persecution with them in future. “It isn’t a good idea to bring up these topics,” one of them says, “In this organisation, we don’t want to encourage victimisation. They need to stop referring to themselves as victims.”

This scene powerfully reflects the dynamics at play within the organisation and within Spanish society. It is common to believe that Spanish Kalé, and Kalé women in particular, benefit from a very generous institutional framework which provides them with all the right tools to improve their living conditions and social status (Maya and Mirga 2014). The “Spanish model” often is considered as one of the best in Europe for Romani minorities (*ibid.*; Magazzini and Piemontese 2016), as well as in terms of gender equality machineries (Bustelo 2014; Morondo Taramundi 2016). Following this line of thinking, in a context where Kalé women are sent to empowerment programmes and racism allegedly has disappeared, there should be no reason why they would remain unhappy – those who do so are just unwilling to move forward, despite everything that was handed to them. Underlying the question “They’re saying that to us” is the assumption and expectation that Kalé women should be pleased to be where they are and grateful to those making it possible. How dare they complain while living in generous and emancipatory Spain? Carolina Moulin argues that expressing ingratitude is an act of insubordination that may be tolerated among citizens as “participants of their political communities” but is not permitted among refugees “who are not entitled to climb the steps towards properly authorized citizenship status” (Moulin 2012, 55). Although the binary opposition between the right to protest for rightful citizens and the

3 *Payos/payas* or *jambos/jambas* is a term used by Kalé people in Spain to refer to non-Romani people. An assumption of whiteness also underlies its use – i.e., in the Spanish context, it refers to the dominant (and oppressive) ethnic group.

expectation to keep silent for “undeserving [...] others” (*ibid.*) makes sense if we take on board that racialised groups of citizens such as the Kalé remain “guests” in the collective mind of Spanish white society, the fantasy of a “happy” place goes beyond a mere prohibition to protest by making discontent outright absurd. Drawing from Marilyn Frye’s argument that oppression requires the oppressed to be cheerful and complacent with the status quo (Frye 1983, 2–3, cited in Ahmed 2009, 48–49), Sara Ahmed claims that being invited into a white institution as “[embodied] diversity” implies “[showing] signs of happiness, as signs of being or having been adjusted” (*ibid.*). In other words, any issue that groups who are considered outsiders may encounter would be due to their failure to adapt to their otherwise perfectly welcoming environment – not the other way round.

The tolerance that majority society claims to show Kalé women materialises in a feminist mission to rescue them from their allegedly patriarchal culture and to guide them towards emancipation. Portraying this endeavour as benevolent reinforces the power dynamics which prevail at the societal level and makes it practically impossible to speak out. Based on extensive research conducted within state and state-funded institutions working with IPV and/or Kalé women, including within the justice system, this paper unravels how discourses on IPV are used to avoid addressing antigypsyism. I argue that the politicisation of feminist discourses on IPV as a manifestation of systemic power relations of men over women in Spain was reframed into culturalist terms by institutional actors in their approach to Kalé communities, with a view to maintaining discrete control over them and with total impunity.

My research findings show that this occurs on three different levels. First, professionals working within networks of protection against IPV disproportionately adopt culturalist discourses on violence against Kalé women, as opposed to reflecting on interactions between the interpersonal and structural forms of violence that affect them. Second, Kalé women are coerced, through welfare schemes, into attending gender empowerment programmes where strong racialised hierarchies prevail. Finally, I provide an account of the various efforts on the part of professionals to dismiss personal experiences of institutional racism whenever they are being voiced, whether publicly or in more private settings.

1. Methods

Data used for this article were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation in 2016–2017. I interviewed about 40 professionals in courts, police stations, health facilities, specialised support services, social services and NGOs, all based in Madrid. I also spent approximately eight months volunteering at an NGO which is entrusted by the Community of Madrid regional authorities to implement social projects specifically directed at Kalé women. My position as a researcher was made explicit there, and my role largely consisted in observing activities rather than truly assisting the staff in their everyday work. I routinely attended the organisation’s activities as well as the monthly “excursions” (*salidas*) the beneficiaries were taken to, many of which revolved around gender equality and empowerment. The opinions and experiences of NGO beneficiaries were gathered through group interviews I organised within the NGO premises, daily participant observation, and informal conversations we had socialising outside the NGO space.

As far as interviewees were concerned, besides a few exceptions among NGO leaders or mediators, all were gadje. Because of my perceived gadjo complicity,^[4] interviewees tended to speak freely about Kalé and what they thought was problematic about their “culture.” The accomplice role I was assigned spontaneously may be a powerful way to subvert racism by making explicit the conversations dominant groups hold behind closed doors, although it can also lead me to fall into racist stereotypes or reproduce colonial research patterns. For some, identifying me as a feminist or a Gender Studies researcher curiously reinforced their assumption that I would agree on their culturalist reading of patriarchy and IPV.

2. Towards a Critical Race Critique of “Gadjo Feminism”

Over the past decade, the work of Romani feminist scholars has started to gain traction in academia and beyond. Drawing from postcolonial and black feminist streams and from specific and diverse experiences of Romani women across the world (e.g., Kóczé 2009; Bițu and Vincze 2012; Brooks 2012), they expose culturalist representations of Romani women “as sexually available objects of fantasy, [...] as old witches [...], as passive victims of patriarchy who need saving and as thieves and beggars getting rich off of the welfare state” that prevail in many societies (Brooks 2012, 3). They describe different manifestations of state violence that such representations can lead to, such as the neglect and lack of intervention on the part of state authorities when Romani women reach out for support (Oprea 2004), or paternalistic programmes that reify them as a “vulnerable group,” construct certain forms of violence as “Romani problems” (Jovanovic 2015), and do not take their real needs into consideration (Kóczé 2009). In December 2015, a group of Romani feminists translated these analyses into a political statement they issued in Brussels, notably demanding that European Union institutions and members states address “the intersectional discrimination affecting Romani women in relation to their access to social services, such as women’s shelters” (Caro Maya et al. 2015).

In Spain, the body of literature that focuses on antigypsyist attitudes towards Romani women in state institutions remains scarce. Briones-Vozmediano, La Parra-Casado, and Vives-Cases recently conducted an analysis of the discourses of health professionals throughout Spain with regard to Romani women experiencing IPV (Briones-Vozmediano et al. 2018). Their research shows that a few professionals’ narratives depart from the “dominant” ones but a vast majority rely on culturalist discourses that portray Romani women as either the perpetual victims of a patriarchal violent culture or unaffected by IPV. These “dominant narratives” support the view that Romani women experiencing violence do not access support from state authorities because their families prevent them from doing so or because they do not need it (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, an increasing but timid tendency to look into institutional obstacles – including discursive ones – that Romani women, Spanish Kalis and migrant Romnia alike, confront in Spain, often fails to consider “counter-hegemonic feminisms” (e.g., Santa Cruz et al. 2017) and their critique of normative assumptions underlying feminist agendas. Among

4 “Gadjo complicity” here refers to the tendency for members of the dominant group – gadje – to systematically support each other, discredit Kalé people’s experiences, and fail to take responsibility for the ways in which we benefit from racism. For further reading on the notion of “complicity,” see the work of Barbara Applebaum, for example from 2010: *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility and Social Justice Pedagogy*. New York: Lexington Books.

them, some Kalé feminist researchers are offering an important counternarrative that points at the feminist values that are specific to Kalé culture and that feminists from majority society only started to defend later, sometimes in a commodified form, such as child-minder support networks (Agüero 2019; Caro Maya 2019). In February 2019, Silvia Agüero went so far as to launch a Twitter campaign called “#MentorAGadji” (*#AmadrinaAUnaPaya*), to mock the paternalistic attitude that many gadje women adopt towards Kalé women and to demonstrate that the former have a lot to learn from the latter in terms of feminist practices (Agüero 2019).

One of counter-hegemonic feminist discourses’ great contributions is the fact that they encourage majority society to engage in profound self-reflexivity instead of superficially addressing whether or not certain groups of women can access its rules and institutions. The sole focus on institutional obstacles to accessing services has certain shortcomings. Although Kalé women are not alone in being affected by poor treatment and secondary victimisation by state administrations, they are Spanish citizens, who not only identify as Spaniards but also enjoy the same rights as any other Spanish citizen on paper. Therefore, issues that European feminists tend to investigate when researching access to justice and services for minority women, such as legal status or language barriers, bear little relevance here. Without turning a blind eye to the various forms in which institutional violence manifests itself, calls for self-reflexivity show that it is a larger and more systemic phenomenon. Addressing race as an institutional and social order, which is traditionally ignored in Spanish politics, is crucial to grasp what is at stake, and this is what I endeavour to do in my analysis of “gadjo feminism.”

As Angéla Kóczé and Margareta Matache argue, the tendency to disregard race and instead focus on ethnicity and the study of Romani people as a marginal ethnic group and “culture” is symptomatic of the colonial traditions underlying Romani Studies and continues to obscure racial hierarchies (Kóczé 2018; Matache 2016). In line with Critical Race theorists who unveil the whiteness at the foundation of legal language in the United States (Wing 2000), Matache refers to epistemological “gadjo-ness” in scholarly work on Roma: “Categorizing Roma as an inferior, subordinate race fixed white cultural norms as the standard against which Roma were described” (*ibid.*). Moreover, in her critique of traditional Romani studies, Kóczé draws from Etienne Balibar’s account of “neo-racism” or “racism without races,” which shifts its focus from biological to cultural hierarchies and does not recognise itself as a form of racism (Balibar 1991, as cited in Kóczé, *op. cit.*). As demonstrated by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva who revisits Balibar’s expression as “racism without racists,” claiming the inexistence (or disappearance) of racism and analysing inequality as exclusively caused by nonracial factors is a strategy deployed by whites to support white hegemony while imputing responsibility on racialised minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Similarly, in what she calls the “culturalization of racism” and the “culturalization of gender” in educational and legal practices, Sherene Razack points at the less overt forms of racism which, under the guise of benevolent treatment and often in pluralist contexts, essentialise minority groups as intrinsically inferior and patriarchal (Razack 1998, 60). Razack’s work shows that this phenomenon is profoundly gendered and marginalising for racialised women – also illustrated in Philomena Essed’s groundbreaking analysis of “micro,” cumulative experiences of “everyday racism” among black women in the United States and Netherlands, and the discourses which are deployed by “White-dominated society” to deny their accounts of racism and contain their resistance (Essed 1991, 10).

Based on these theoretical considerations, I refute the claims according to which the use of *gadje/gadjo/gadji*⁵ to refer to non-Romani people, including myself, would be reverse racism and therefore should be avoided. Once again, claims of reverse racism disregard the inherence of whiteness within social structures and focus on individualistic and psychologising definitions, whereby racist speech acts would be taken out of their social context and could target white people just as much as racialised and minoritized groups. On the contrary, I see the use of *gadje*, or *payos/jambos* in Spanish, as an attempt on the part of Romani people to make oppression explicit and resist it. Likewise, referring to *gadje* people as “non-Romani” exacerbates the tacitly racist assumption that whiteness (and *gadjo*-ness) is the norm and thus does not need to be named.

Particularly when celebratory politics are attempting to keep structural racism invisible, it is urgent to adopt a Critical Race approach to Romani Studies and name the *gadjo*-ness of institutions that are permeated by the state – even though they self-promote as advocates for Kalé communities. My analysis of “*gadjo* feminism” thus goes beyond a critique of liberal feminism and its blind spots with respect to race and other axes of social domination: it points at the strategic reframing of feminist discourses on women’s emancipation from patriarchal violence in policies targeted at Romani women, in order to mask antigypsyism and its gendered manifestations.

3. The Culturalisation of *Violencia Machista* in Spain

Although the Spanish state and regional authorities had developed gender equality machineries since the 1980s, and gender equality policymaking in general peaked during the 2004-2011 mandate of the Socialist Party (Lombardo 2017), it is largely through the adoption of the 2004 law on IPV⁶ that the institutionalisation of feminist discourses came about. This “pioneering law” (Casas Vila, *op. cit.*) was the result of a partnership between civil society and the Socialist Party, and is, alongside the abortion law, the only piece of legislation that truly originated in feminist mobilisations (Lombardo, *op. cit.*). Internationally known as an example of feminist jurisprudence, this text aims to address comprehensively the gendered dynamics at the roots of IPV, notably through the creation of specialised institutions, a series of protective measures, as well as gender training for professionals working in the field. State feminist discourses progressively crystallised around the concepts of *violencia hacia la mujer*, *violencia de género*, and *violencia machista* (literally, “violence against the woman,” “gendered violence,” and “sexist violence”). This feminist-inspired wording is used widely among bureaucrats, legal professionals, and across most political parties – albeit with various interpretations of what it means and entails. It has

5 *Gadje* is masculine plural; *gadjo* is masculine singular; and *gadji* is feminine singular. Despite its gendered form, I use *gadje* to refer to people in plural, and *gadjo* for singular abstract nouns. Not only is this more faithful to Romani language, as Matache explains (*op. cit.*, 2016), but also, Patricia Caro Maya, who coined the term “*gadjo*-centrism” to refer to the *gadjo* bias of institutional frameworks, argues that using the masculine form more adequately reflects the patriarchal nature of social institutions (Caro Maya, e.g., 2017).

6 The 1/2004 Law on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gendered Violence (*Ley orgánica 1/2004 de medidas de protección integral contra la violencia de género*) was adopted on December 29, 2004, and entered into force on January 28, 2005. Its current definition of “gendered violence” focuses on male intimate partner violence against women.

influenced the discourses of the professionals working within the justice system and support services for survivors of IPV whom I interviewed for the purpose of this research. However, I found that, regardless of their ideological orientations and professional backgrounds, they tended to use feminist terminology in order to support stereotypical representations of what they referred to as “Gypsy culture” (*la cultura gitana*) or “Gypsy ethnic group” (*la etnia gitana*).

The professionals I interviewed across various institutions do not all identify as feminists and can be divided into two groups: those who adopt the feminist reading of IPV as a reflection of systemic gendered hierarchies and an instrument of male domination over women; and those defending a rather gender-neutral, psychologising approach to the phenomenon. Contrasting problematisations of IPV are easily mobilised within one same institution. Yet these sometimes radically opposite interpretations as to how IPV should be understood and how the law should be implemented to respond to it tend to concern exclusively gadje. Although the victims’ (as well as perpetrators’) gadjo ethnicity is never named, the gadje vs. Kalé dichotomy easily stands out as soon as the discussion drifts towards violence perpetrated within Kalé communities. The structural and psychological complexities of IPV upon which they base their reflections and professional practices then largely fades away, and disproportionately concurs in a culturalist reading of the issue. Whether or not they subscribe to a systemic gendered framing of IPV, at the mention of Kalé women, interviewees almost automatically switch to discourses oscillating between victim-blaming to justify neglect on the part of authorities and rescuing endeavours to justify forced intervention.

This culturalist shift is particularly surprising on the part of professionals who usually defend a gender-sensitive approach to tackling IPV and are critical of secondary victimisation caused by gender biases in the justice system. While the dominant feminist understanding of violence lays emphasis on structures of masculine domination within the state and the need to deconstruct deep-rooted male bias within policy and legal frameworks, most of them pay little to no attention to structural racism. They instead construct the “Gypsy woman” as trapped in the patriarchal cultural traditions of her community and unwilling or unable to catch up with the emancipated way of life of “the (gadji) Spanish woman.” A professional working at a helpline for survivors, for instance, makes the following claims:

The truth is, women of Gypsy ethnicity, I think 90 percent of them experience violence. They don’t resort to any service, they settle it among their families, and often the remedy is worse than the disease [...] because there the one who decides on the norm and solution is the patriarch, who is like 100 years old! [...] and the girls, [...] well 30-year-old girls [with] seven children, you would think wow [...] they look like old ladies! [...] and in addition, they themselves transmit it to their daughters! Because they also don’t fight to get their girls into school, because they don’t think these things are important, what they think is important is [...] all those rites they have... [...] Because no one really works with them, they keep transmitting the same values!

In addition to stereotypes of Kalé women having too many children and failing to send them to school – which reflect racist family planning and assimilationist practices that are historically enshrined in Spanish society – the informant here essentialises Kalé culture as intrinsically patriarchal and violent

towards women. What is more, she claims that Kalé women are responsible for reproducing harmful norms and can only stop doing so if someone finally starts to “really work with them.”

Similarly, several professionals working at the IPV courts explicitly refer to Kalé “ethnicity” as a “factor of vulnerability,” thus presenting culture itself as problematic rather than institutional violence. One of them regrets that Kalé women “do not resort to gadjo law”:

Relationship problems of this type are resolved within the Gypsy collective. [...] So, it is an offence for the family [...] [if she] abandons Gypsy law and resorts to... gadjo law. And I think that those are women who can be very endangered.

Another colleague tells me about a victim who “opened her eyes” thanks to social services and other state support but was reluctant to testify for fears of retaliation from her in-laws – which she reads as an impossibility for Kalé women to resort to the conventional criminal system because of barriers imposed by their community rather than a usual pattern of IPV. I also am told that awareness-raising campaigns and other prevention measures “do not reach” Kalé women “because Gypsy communities are not integrated,” their “sociocultural environment [is] damaged,” and many of them remain “light years away from equality.”

These professionals disproportionately support state institutions and the criminal system as the only way out for Kalé women – including when intervention occurs against their will. Even “intersectionality” is understood as the inclusion of minority groups of women into the dominant, allegedly gender-equal system. Ironically, a concept developed by Critical Race scholar Kimberle Crenshaw to unravel the complex intersections of power dynamics at play within institutions, and notably to point at the whiteness of specialised support services for women experiencing violence (Crenshaw 1991), is now mobilised to promote uncritically this very framework and support white saviour endeavours. This “depoliticised” reframing of intersectionality (Roig 2018) is symptomatic of the “political racelessness” which characterises white feminist groups in Europe and their paternalistic attitude towards minority women (Emejulu and Bassel 2017). It is this reluctance to question white biases that leads some feminist actors to shift from structure to culture in their reading of violence against Kalé women.

4. Teaching Gender in a Racialised Setting

Gadjo feminism does not only strive within the colour-blind justice system. State and regional authorities increasingly fund NGO projects on gender equality and IPV designed for Kalé women that, despite the stress that is laid on community empowerment and Kalé culture, are framed in a paternalistic and equally culturalist mind-set, and contribute to safeguarding racial power relations within institutions and beyond. As was shown elsewhere, the implementation of “Roma inclusion” policies in Spain is delegated to NGOs which are identified by state and regional institutions as experts in the field (Cortés 2016; Magazzini and Piemontese 2016). Since the Spanish state officially does not collect ethnically disaggregated data, those NGOs are expected to define who their beneficiaries are going to be (Magazzini and Piemontese 2016). Although the state and regionally funded projects that they work with were designed originally for

Spanish Kalé, some have incorporated migrant Roma from Central and Eastern Europe into their target populations recently (*ibid.*).

In the Community of Madrid, one of the most important projects that NGOs have been running is the “basic income programme,” an outsourced welfare programme that requires all recipients of state benefits from Kalé communities, usually women, to register with an NGO based in their neighbourhood and participate in its activities on a weekly basis. Following the neoliberal turn taken by Spain in terms of welfare provision, and particularly the 2002 and 2003 reforms in its legislation (Aragón et al. 2007, 180–181), this programme conditions social benefits upon a demonstrated willingness to work and participation in mandatory training programmes – a new understanding of social services which is now widely known as “workfare” (Peck 2001). The workfare model not only intends to increase economic productivity by nudging welfare recipients into employment through a system of sanctions but also aims at the moral reformation of the poor and socially deviant through “therapeutic” programmes (Soss et al. 2011). As was shown by a stream of scholarship that originated in the United States and that still is under-addressed in Europe, this often leads to racialised people being constructed as welfare burdens in need of tougher surveillance and therapeutic intervention, which becomes a convenient way for state administrations to continue targeting them in a legal framework that in theory prohibits direct discrimination (*ibid.*). In Madrid, social workers regularly portray Kalé welfare recipients as living off social benefits and unwilling to work, whereas a majority of Kalé still exercise their traditional economic activity, street-trading, and must resort to social services to complement their income because of ever-stricter regulations and constant police repression. The implicit purpose of the training activities that NGO beneficiaries are required to attend is to promote other forms of labour considered more suitable to society and construct street-trading as “not real work.” Since the overwhelming majority of welfare applicants are women who provide for their families, the activities increasingly target women and become reframed from a gendered angle (Ayala Rubio 2014; Vrăbiescu and Kalir 2018). More ethnographic research conducted in Madrid shows that both migrant Romani women and Spanish Kalé women attending these programmes are subjected to paternalistic and arbitrary practices and then blamed for “failing to integrate” when the project does not seem successful (*ibid.*).

Rather than a mere gender bias, however, I argue that the growing emphasis on gender empowerment within social projects designed for Kalé beneficiaries is a consequence of the institutionalisation – and most probably misguided reception – of feminist politics. As one of the mediators once told me, “Gender is in fashion.” Despite the initial focus on “employability” in welfare policies, the NGO provides limited training on professional skills and prefers to emphasise activities in which gadje facilitators intervene to teach Kalé women how to become emancipated from their patriarchal families and customs. Sexuality, family planning, early marriage, and particularly IPV are topics around which workshops, lectures, public performances, and even protests – all of which are mandatory for beneficiaries – are held regularly. These programmes are more akin to school than work – palpable in staff’s scolding and infantilising tone and terminology used by the beneficiaries themselves: they are “students” coming to “class,” and social workers are their “teachers.” All activities, whatever form they may take, are formulated in culturalist terms. Kalé women are pressed to be role models for their daughters and exit their allegedly patriarchal culture, following the example of gadje women who, it is claimed, have “fought for their rights” and achieved equality.

The framing of these “empowerment workshops” and other gender-related activities echoes the discourse of professionals working with IPV survivors, with the exception here that Kalé women are obliged to attend on a weekly basis, as failing to do so would result in a suspension of their welfare benefits. Moreover, the gadjo feminist rescue endeavour is no longer acknowledged as external intervention into their lives, since it is presented as a community initiative to the wider public. Indeed, despite being an integral part of the state’s discipline apparatus, many of the NGOs entrusted to implement these projects are advertised as representatives of the communities in which they are working. This takes us back to the “they’re saying that to us” rhetoric and Sara Ahmed’s argument that those who “embody diversity” are expected to show complacency to the system that takes them in: the racialised punitive framework that Kalé women are subjected to, and institutional racism in general, are silenced on the grounds that the programmes are community-based and empowering.

5. Silencing and Resisting Racism

As I argued, adopting an intersectional approach to institutional practices is subverted regularly as the need to incorporate women from “cultures” that are deemed to be intrinsically patriarchal. One of the consequences of this reframing is that gender is once again, or still, carefully separated out from racism. Although the issue of IPV increasingly is gaining ground in the “pro-Gypsy” institutional framework, it only emerges in the form of lectures defending a gadjo perspective. Whether within the NGO premises or during public events, beneficiaries are not given the floor. If they do get to speak for themselves, however, they are expected to support the self-stigmatising discourse they hear in their empowerment workshops, regretting that Kalé women are “30 years late” compared to their gadje counterparts, or celebrating those who managed to assert their independence regardless. Pointing out gadjo domination and the gendered impact it has within their personal lives, families, and communities is not an option.

The most explicit example I observed was during a public event entitled “Gypsy Women: Reflecting Together to Combat Violence,” co-organised in November 2016 by the City of Madrid and the network of NGOs that implements regional programmes for Kalé women. Among the activities in which beneficiaries of the “basic income programme” are required to take part, are publicised events, held in collaboration with state, regional, or local authorities, to showcase the empowerment of the “Gypsy woman.” Typically, the women are informed that an “excursion” is coming up and that they should attend, often with the incentive that they will be allowed to “miss class” once or twice afterwards. They sometimes are asked to perform a song or read a poem on stage but otherwise are sitting in the audience and not involved in the panel discussions. This event was organised on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which has become institutionalised in Madrid and is now celebrated every year. Nuria Varela, a popular gadje feminist author, was invited to give an opening lecture and explain the mechanisms of IPV to an audience of NGO beneficiaries brought in by social workers. Kalé feminist activist María José Jiménez responded to Varela’s keynote by pointing at the importance for Kalé women to represent themselves in this kind of event, so they could put forward their own role models and openly speak about the racism they encounter within institutions and social movements. Her intervention was booed by professionals in the room, while Varela felt personally attacked and regretted that Jiménez wanted to “reject difference.” The NGO staff argued that they were being treated unfairly and not given

any credit for their benevolent work: “We help them, and we are criminalised for being gadje!” The grudge that social workers held against Jiménez still could be felt months later and even led to the boycott of an event she and her movement organised. Beneficiaries present that day, on the other hand, mostly remained quiet, as expected in the presence of media and political representatives.

Nevertheless, many have shown resistance to this paternalistic set-up. Several social workers, to justify the fact that the time dedicated to literacy classes has been reinvested into “gender workshops,” claim that Kalé women who attend their programmes do not want to become literate or that they could not possibly learn in “such little time.” On the contrary, many beneficiaries report that they repeatedly voiced their endeavour to learn, “but they just won’t listen!” – or that they would rather get a job that pays enough to stop coming to the NGO’s “classes” where they hear “only nonsense.” In their words, they are forced to hear repeatedly about IPV – “We are sick of it, we already know what it is!” Despite the infantilising rapport that is established and beneficiaries’ necessary compliance with the rules in order to continue receiving their welfare benefits, they regularly challenge the staff or external speakers for attacking their culture and trying to impose a gadjo view upon them. Rather, they are eager to mention the violence perpetrated within majority society, including against them, and tell their experiences of everyday racism – to the disbelief of social workers.

Social workers regard the discussion of racism as a topic to be tolerated only when it refers to Kalé women’s stereotypes towards gadje or other groups within society. On several occasions, they tell me that the beneficiaries “are the ones who are racist,” and that some work on the issue is needed to teach them otherwise. Conversely, racial hierarchies underlying the welfare programme as well as the broader institutional framework largely are disregarded and, on the contrary, the staff see themselves as enlightened enough, since they chose to work within an organisation dealing with Kalé women. Referring to the stigma that prevails among some social workers, a Kalí mediator bitterly confides: “They too often forget that these women are their bread and butter.” The pattern does not deviate much: in the NGO’s communication, Kalé women are expected to show gratitude and make amends, not the gadje professionals employed within the “pro-Gypsy” system or state institutions. The reification of Kalé “culture” as an object of policy without acknowledging structural racism, as well as the comforting idea that Kalé women are being empowered through state-funded programmes, rule out genuine discussions on structural oppression that the latter seek. One cynically might argue that the eager emphasis on “the emancipated Gypsy woman” that increasingly is put forward during political ceremonies in Madrid not only contrasts with institutional practices disciplining Kalé women and constructing them as fierce opponents to gender equality but also exists as a conscious strategy to obscure institutional racism and its gendered forms.

Conclusion

This article went beyond challenging the common assumption that Spain constitutes a safe haven for Kalé women and is an example of “good practice” for other European states in that regard. As I showed, existing academic literature has begun to debunk this myth – and it is now especially hard to continue its support, considering the devastating effects of austerity measures that the Spanish government has

implemented since the late 2000s. Relying on semi-structured interviews and participant observation I conducted across various institutions in Madrid, I argued that claims of exemplarity – rather than a mere misconception of policy impacts – are strategies deployed to exempt institutions from taking responsibility for the social marginalisation of Kalé people.

Erasing race and self-advertising as a post-racial society discredits the negative everyday experiences that Kalé and other racialised minorities are trying to address. It turns their stories into fiction, a misunderstanding at best. To reflect to the scene with which I opened this paper, the NGO staff’s wish that Kalé women would “stop referring to themselves as victims” illustrates how their dissent is dismissed as anachronistic, misdirected, or bluntly ungrateful – “They’re saying that *to us*?” This lack of gratitude, in their view, justifies the shaming that Kalé women are put through regularly.

The blame is then redirected towards Kalé women in a “gadjo feminist” framing strategy that culturalises IPV within Kalé communities and constructs women, in particular, as trapped within the confines of patriarchal traditions, unable to move forward, dragging their children down with them. Within the colour-blind justice system, cultural racism transcends divisions between (structure-focused) gender-sensitive and (individual-focused) gender-neutral approaches to IPV, as professionals disproportionately concur that judicial neglect and secondary victimisation affecting Kalé women find their roots not in institutional racism but in the latter’s reluctance to “resort to gadjo law” and leave their patriarchal culture behind. Even in NGO programmes that are designed for them and expected to be culturally sensitive, Kalé women routinely are shamed for reproducing patriarchal norms, especially regarding their daughters’ upbringing, and encouraged to espouse the “emancipated” lifestyle of gadje women. This occurs as part of a disciplinary welfare scheme that financially sanctions women who fail to partake in the mandated activities or to abide by their rules. This discursive twist, in turn, portrays state institutions as emancipatory champions that are there, in the words of one of the interviewees, to “open [Kalé women’s] eyes.” It conveniently legitimises forced intervention, be it at the administrative or judiciary level, and shifts the attention away from racism.

It is worth noting, meanwhile, that these silencing strategies – denial of traumatic experiences, victim-blaming, financial control, display of a happy face – strongly resemble mechanisms of abusive relationships. In other words, gadjo feminism that developed in the Spanish institutional context, misusing feminist endeavours to help women out of IPV for racist purposes, is quite ironically, another manifestation of violence against women.

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