

Laura Corradi. 2018. *Gypsy Feminism. Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism*. London: Routledge.

Book review by

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Gypsy Feminism. Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism by Laura Corradi makes a fundamental and innovative contribution to Romani studies, gender and feminist studies, as well as to critical race studies in Europe. The book provides an analysis of several feminist projects and trajectories within different Gypsy groups by asking for a decolonization of knowledge through a critical reflection on race, power, and privilege. The author adopts a feminist, intersectional, and decolonial approach, based on the relevance of “situated knowledge”, founded on acknowledgment of one’s own positionality in terms of the intersection of the main social categories, such as gender, race, class, and so on.

The text includes an analysis of a variety of forms of feminist, gender, and queer activism within different Roma, Sinti, Travellers, and other groups for whom the author uses the umbrella term “Gypsy”. In the terminological note, Corradi retraces the history of the term and explains why she opted in favor of it. She notes how the term has been reclaimed among researchers and activists both acknowledging internal differences and recognizing the common oppression among different groups labelled as “Gypsy.”¹¹ Most importantly, the author emphasizes how such a term – that has been utilized in a derogatory way – can be reappropriated to indicate its subversive potential, as experienced with the term “queer.” “The faculty of re-appropriating terms, even insults, enables discursive practices of re-signification – a crucial terrain of agency and symbolic warfare – meant to reduce the normative power of stereotypes. By deconstructing and disassembling despotic signifiers, oppressive and offensive words and images, the subalterns give birth to a process of neutralizing external domination and control over the language” (xviii).

The book examines the experiences of gender activism through a type of intersectional feminist research that aims to examine how social categories intersect, giving rise to forms of social inequalities, with a particular focus on the intersection between sexism and racism. Corradi’s text also examines the ways in which Gypsy feminists and gender activists have to simultaneously address issues related to the discrimination and marginalization of their communities: Similarly to other marginalized groups, the discrimination and racism that Gypsy people suffer make it more difficult to address questions of discrimination and violence against women. Indeed, denouncing forms of discrimination and violence against women could foster racism against Gypsy people while not addressing issues that could reinforce sexism suffered by Gypsy women and girls.

Another relevant characteristic of Corradi’s book is that it provides a number of interesting parallels with other women’s and social movements such as indigenous women’s groups in India and Australia and the Rojava Democratic Federation in Syria. It also highlights the potential for coalition and alliances of Gypsy feminist and gender activists from different geopolitical locations, moving to overcoming the present form of the nation-state.

1 “The term has been re-claimed among researchers and activists in different ethnic and non-ethnic groups, combining the understanding and valorisation of internal differences with the awareness of living under the same type of oppression. In fact, Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Kalé, Yanish, Gitans, Camminanti, Gens du Voyage, and Travellers have all been called Gypsies; all have dealt with anti-Gypsyism and persecution throughout history. And in the present, all face common difficulties as inferiorized minorities. This is one of the reasons why I elected to use the term Gypsy in this work.”(Corradi 2018, xv)

The analysis is preceded by a historical note explaining how being Gypsies in Western societies constitutes a radical Otherness and clarifies the historical and social reasons why Gypsy women in Europe today are at the intersection of racism, sexism, and often extreme poverty. Corradi retraces the most important stages in the history of the Gypsy population, from the first law against the Gypsy community – passed in 1538 by the state of Moravia as part of the Czech Kingdom – although some authors argue that laws targeting Roma can be dated to as far back as 1499 in Spain, for example – up to the Nazi *Barò Porrajmos* when half a million Gypsies were exterminated. Corradi also notes that Romani people, consisting of 12 million individuals, constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe and have to confront increasing Romaphobia and antigypsyism, as acknowledged by a number of international organizations.

The **first chapter** emphasizes the importance of feminist intersectional research. Intersectionality allows us to better understand how different axes of inequality are mutually constitutive. An intersectional approach is fundamental to addressing inequalities faced by Gypsy women, in order to avoid rigid identity politics which only considers ethnicity as relevant for Gypsy people. Intersectionality also involves overcoming the contrast between various identities, such as being a Gypsy and being a woman. Indeed, it is important to recognize that Gypsy women have only recently emerged from the invisibility to which they have been confined. Until relatively recently, for example, they have largely remained silent about domestic violence in order to protect their communities from discrimination. The author stresses that there are both advantages and disadvantages in the ethnicization and de-ethnicization of gender-based violence. The first leads to the old stereotype of Gypsy men as violent, whilst the second carries the risk of being unable to carry out a specific analysis of the situation. Corradi also emphasizes how international organizations have not been able to adopt an intersectional approach, leading to the invisibility of Gypsy women in their documents and reports.

The **second and third chapters** address the issue of Gypsy feminism and gender activism, starting from the question posed by Trinidad Muñoz, “Can we discover a way to live our ‘Gypsyhood’ as feminists?” The author analyzes the blossoming of a number of associations and networks of Gypsy women in different European countries, especially in Eastern Europe (e.g., Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hungary, North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia) and Spain. Corradi emphasizes the complexity of Gypsy gender activists, simultaneously fighting discrimination and racism in their communities and maintaining a feminist commitment. She investigates how they have had to confront the conflict between being loyal to their group and their aspiration for greater gender equality. Because of the Western tendency to disrespect and sensationalize those cultures that have been othered, it is not easy to address gender equality and gender-based violence within Gypsy groups. In relation to this, Corradi also analyses the contribution by Lidia Balogh, Angéla Kóczé, and Natasha Lamoreux who have addressed these themes in their work *Liberal Multiculturalism and Roma Feminism, Building Bridges between Roma and Non-Roma Feminists*. Corradi points out that white feminist theories and practices rarely take into account the experience of Gypsy feminism and poses the question of who has the power to legitimize knowledge, experience, and theories. This is a central point in decolonial studies that unveil how colonization was not only pursued via economic and military means but also via knowledge operation. This aimed at othering colonized populations, and those mechanisms are still active today.

Chapter 4 focuses on the necessity to decolonize feminist theory and practice, by also referring to scholars researching indigenous knowledge, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith. She unveils how the production of academic knowledge is still largely influenced by European values and priorities that originated during the Enlightenment. Such an approach and world-view privilege rationality to the detriment of experience and intuition. As explained by Anibal Quijano, the coloniality of power survives colonialism. Against this background, Corradi calls for an individual and collective disconnection from dominant academic theories and methodologies. Such an operation includes the recovery of forms of traditional teaching and the valorization of non-dichotomous approaches which are present in indigenous and aboriginal cultures. The author stresses that decolonized and intersectional knowledge is important, not only in the field of research but also for social workers and policymakers. This would help understand how phenomena, which are attributed to the cultural specificity of Gypsy people, are better explained through an intersectional analysis where, for instance, material and economic conditions are given due relevance. On the contrary, poverty is often ethnicized, and victims considered responsible for their condition.

Chapter 5 addresses the subject of the queer Gypsy, a topic which is seldom investigated, both through academic literature – such as the journal *LGBTQIA Feminism and Romani Studies* – and through personal stories. Corradi emphasizes the invisibility in the condition of the queer Gypsy, an identity which is twice obscured. This condition leads to the difficulty of perceiving oneself as a Gypsy in the non-Gypsy world and as gay in the Gypsy community. Corradi's text also has the merit of transmitting the immediacy of the situation experienced by young gay Gypsy people via narratives from *Barabaripen: Young Roma Speak About Multiple Discrimination*. These stories not only describe the harshness and discrimination suffered by these young people but also speak of their ability to fight for their rights and the recognition of their identity. Corradi concludes that what is at stake is both the growth of awareness of LGBT issues within the Gypsy population, as well as the necessity to address cultural diversity within queer groups.

Chapter 6 focuses on *academic invisibility, Gypsy epistemology, and the importance of "Halfies."* First of all, Corradi acknowledges the necessity to criticize traditional academic studies on Roma people because, for all indigenous people, being the object of research has led to their inferiorization and social oppression. The author declares the importance of involving Romani people in research from the outset, including in research design and the conceptualization of the methodology. She also emphasizes the relevance of participatory action research. At the same time, she calls for research to be carried out on whiteness to investigate the racism and xenophobia of white people.

By quoting Ethel Brooks, the author focuses on the role of "Halfies," namely those people whose national or cultural identity is mixed for various reasons. Interestingly, Romani scholars are defined as "halfies" *par excellence* because they move between the Romani and gadjo worlds through migration, education, and kinship processes. Brooks concludes that as feminists, as "halfies," and as committed scholars, they are able to produce studies which are both critical towards oneself and towards the Western kind of dominant knowledge. This is certainly one aspect which makes the literature produced by scholars with Romani and Gypsy origins particularly significant, both in the field of social studies and in feminist studies.

A further theme addressed by the book in **chapter 7**, is that of body politics and media activism. Here the author highlights both the pervasiveness of an Orientalist Western view in the prevailing media representations of Gypsy groups, and the opportunities for self-representation that the new media can provide Gypsy women. In the final **chapter 8**, the importance of Gypsy Springs is emphasized. The growth of a Gypsy feminism emerges as a particularly significant phenomenon both in relation to the increase in antigypsyism, and to counter forms of gender discrimination within Gypsy communities, as well as towards overcoming white cultural hegemony and its hetero-patriarchal heritage. Corradi also notes the relevance of Gypsy activism in terms of coalition building, given the transnationalism of Romani, Sinti, and Traveller women. She underlines how Gypsy feminism has the potential to transcend borders and challenge Eurocentric assumptions.

Corradi's work is based on analysis of a wealth of sources – including academic Romani literature, conference proceedings, projects reports, as well as media and blogs – all of which make her text particularly accurate and rich.

Finally, *Gypsy feminism. Intersectional Politics, Alliances, Gender and Queer Activism* represents a “must read” for all those who are interested in intersectional, queer, and decolonial feminism as well as in critical race studies, while also providing a precious resource for activists, social workers, and policymakers.

References

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