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Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Oprea, A. (2005). The Arranged Marriage of Ana Maria Cioaba, Intra-Community Oppression and Romani Feminist Ideals. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12(2), 133-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506805051234>

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# The Arranged Marriage of Ana Maria Cioaba, Intra-Community Oppression and Romani Feminist Ideals

## Transcending the 'Primitive Culture' Argument

Alexandra Oprea

ROMA WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

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**ABSTRACT** This article discusses the politics behind the recently publicized arranged marriage of a 12-year-old Romani girl, Ana Maria Cioaba. It speaks to the anti-Romani racism in Romania and abroad inherent in the media portrayal of the marriage and criticizes the racist politics behind the involvement of the different political figures in an effort to 'save' Ms Cioaba. It also discusses the implications of the media's obsession with the 'exotic' oppression of Third World women in the context of Ms Cioaba's arranged marriage. Ultimately the article also attempts to illuminate the precarious position of Romani feminism in racist countries.

**KEY WORDS** arranged marriage ♦ feminism ♦ intra-community oppression ♦ media bias ♦ patriarchy ♦ racism ♦ Roma ♦ Romania

We discussed attending Cristina's wedding but decided against it. Lucy said it was better that way – it would be painful to watch her 12-year-old niece be taken 'from the dolls to the bedroom'. We tried forgetting about it by immersing ourselves in our work; after all, we're the 'lucky ones' who live in New York. Monday morning we received a rude awakening when Cristina's wedding made the headlines of every major newspaper in Romania, Western Europe, and North America.<sup>1</sup>

The Romanian Romani<sup>2</sup> girl referred to as Cristina by friends and family became known to the public in September 2003 as Ana Maria Cioaba, a minor whose marriage had been arranged at the age of 12. My article analyses the widespread media coverage received by Ms Cioaba's wedding and the inherent obsession with the 'exotic' oppression of Third World<sup>3</sup> women it reflects. Ultimately, I argue that the coverage was severely problematic in that Romani culture was positioned against Romanian (*gadji*kane<sup>4</sup>) laws in a 'primitive' vs 'progressive' binary construction where feminist ideals are portrayed as foreign to Romani women. I also take a cursory look at the possibilities for addressing the vulnerability of Romani women in hope that it will spark further enquiry.

Media coverage of Ms Cioaba's wedding briefly brought the issue of Romani arranged marriages to the forefront of European politics and placed it at the centre of the debate regarding Romania's entry into the European Union (EU) (BBC News, 2003). Although one might be hopeful at the prospect that this could signify a new age of concern about the rights of Romani women, the debate generated by the arranged marriage, as well as its coverage by the European and North American media, reveals racist politics behind the 'concern' for Romani females in arranged marriages.

Before continuing, it is imperative to briefly note that in placing Romani women's concerns at the centre of a discourse, we are deviating from the norm of Romani studies, whose approach can best be characterized as the 'anthropological perspective' (Narayan, 1997: 125). The objective of the 'anthropological perspective' is to take an interest in Third World people/cultures while abstaining from any critique thereof. This approach has generally failed to take into account gender concerns within Third World communities. In regard to Roma, it has traditionally meant their being discussed as a homogeneous group and ignoring intersectional identities and multiplied discrimination within Romani communities.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of placing the coverage and discourse surrounding the arranged marriage into the context of Romania's treatment of Roma, it is important to note that Romani history in Romania has been marked by slavery, pogroms and systemic discrimination. Roma were sold like chattel in Romania from 1385 to 1864 (Hancock, 1987). In 1942, along with Jews, Romanian Roma were packed into trains and shipped to camps by the Bug River, where they were executed or left to starve and freeze to death in the little-known genocide in Transnistria (Ioanid, 2000). Currently, Roma in Romania face systemic discrimination in education, housing, healthcare, employment and in the criminal justice system. Roma in Romania are also subjected to police brutality (HRW, 1991) and media bias (ECRI, 1998).

Racist media portrayals, such as occurred in the coverage of Ana Maria Cioaba's marriage, serve to silence critiques of certain practices within

oppressed communities and to deflect attention from institutionalized marginalization in Romania. The racism inherent in the Romanian and North American newspapers' coverage of the wedding of Ana Maria Cioaba is evidenced in their relentless emphasis that Ana Maria is the daughter of the self-proclaimed 'King of the Gypsies', the use of the word *tigan* (the pejorative term for Roma in Romanian), as well as their focus on the lavishness of the occasion. The use of 'king', 'princess', 'Gypsy nobility' and 'his majesty' are only some of the examples that illustrate the Romanian newspapers'<sup>6</sup> focus on exoticizing this particular Romani family and the arranged marriage. This exoticization is also coupled with ridicule in a country where 'Gypsy nobility' is considered an oxymoron by most.

Along with the media's fixation with the 'royalty' aspect, the lavishness of the wedding also received much superfluous attention. Included are descriptions such as: '4 tons of meat', 'a \$4000 wedding dress', 'Mercedes limousines', 'a \$3000 diamond necklace' and 'king dons an Armani suit and gold scepter' (Popa, 2003). *Ziua* (2003) mentions there being 300 bottles of wine and 150 bottles of whisky consumed, while *Libertatea* (2003) claims there were 2600 bottles of wine and 600 bottles of whisky served at the wedding. No better, *The New York Times* (2003)<sup>7</sup> also reports that 'the bride's Italian wedding gown cost \$4000' and that there was 'a dowry worth tens of thousands of dollars' (though there was no 'dowry' in the sense of a price paid to the bride's family<sup>8</sup>). Aside from portraying it as a spectacle, the emphasis on the lavishness and royalty aspect serves to incite feelings of apathy towards Ms Cioaba's predicament in that she is seen as relatively privileged.

The suspect nature of the media attention given to this arranged marriage is confirmed when placed in the context of the media's systemic disregard towards other examples of the abuses faced by Roma in general<sup>9</sup> and Romani women in particular. The violence and lack of access to decent housing, employment and education that the majority of Roma and Romani women in particular face (Asylum Aid, 2002) never generate such international media attention.

This is illustrated through the story of Olga David, a 42-year-old Romani woman from Petrosani, Romania who was beaten to death for taking coal from a local mine. On 3 November 2003, while Ms David and her niece were gathering coal, a security guard and two other men approached them and, after determining that they were stealing coal, beat Ms David to unconsciousness. Her niece escaped but Ms David died as a result of her injuries. It was only reported in the local Petrosani paper on 25 November, nine days after Tumende, a local Romani NGO, released a statement condemning the incident and pointing out that non-Roma also take coal from the mine to heat their homes but are never murdered for it (ERRC, 2003). It did not appear in any of Romania's national newspapers and needless to say, it did not make international headlines.<sup>10</sup> This sheds

light on the motivation behind the media attention received by Ms Cioaba's wedding.

This phenomenon is not unique to Roma and is explained within the context of other Third World people: 'Only certain problems receive coverage or generate concern, namely those used to illustrate the alien and bizarre oppression of women of color; for example sati, dowry death, veiling . . . arranged marriages' (Volpp, 2001: 8). In this scenario, the culture of Third World people becomes 'the site of the raw material that is "monstrosity" [and] is produced for the surplus value of spectacle, entertainment, and spiritual enrichment for the "First World" ' (Volpp, 2001: 3). The media's exclusive focus on the arranged marriage of Ana Maria Cioaba illustrates their perverse obsession with portraying Romani culture as primitive and presenting it as a spectacle for the consumption of European and North American audiences.

An analysis of the reactions of different Romani and non-Romani political figures to this event is essential in assessing how media portrayal structures discourses. After the initial frenzy caused by the exaggerated descriptions of the wedding, politicians began to speak out against it by stating that marriages involving minors were prohibited under Romanian law. Newspapers claimed that although the legal marrying age for women in Romania is 16, 'the state tolerates the Gypsy tradition of marrying much earlier' (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 2003a). This juxtaposes the supposedly homogeneous Romani tradition as primitive against the allegedly non-sexist/progressive Romanian law. The Romanian organization Salvati Copii (Save the Children) also protested the entrenchment upon the minor's rights relying on the article in the Romanian constitution specifying the legal age for marriage (Chelemen, 2003). An editorial in *Evenimentul Zilei* poses the question of how to resolve the conflict between their (Romani) traditions and the law ('traditile lor si lege') (Tapalaga, 2003), reflecting the oppositions drawn between wrong/primitive (Roma) and right/progressive (*gadje*).

The focus on the 'exotic' oppression of Romani women and the essentialist portrayal of Romani culture as primitively oppressive, placed in contrast to a supposedly progressive Romanian society, ignores the existence of sexism within the latter's culture while embellishing it in the former. It constructs a dichotomous discourse that serves to glorify Romania as a state upholding feminist ideals while ignoring the existence of Romanian patriarchy.<sup>11</sup>

This binary discourse portrays the arranged marriage as the crux of an imaginary, unchanging, homogeneous Romani culture. However, not all Romani groups practise arranged marriages and the amount of choice given to the participants varies from group to group.<sup>12</sup> The religiousness of the group in question also plays a role in the marriage – Ana Maria's father is a Pentecostal pastor.

Romani culture 'is not constructed under "hermetically sealed" boxes' (Volpp, 2001: 7–8). One example reflective of changing times is seen in the many teenage Romani girls – Calderash<sup>13</sup> and others – who now are able to at least occasionally wear trousers as opposed to long skirts. Many (myself included) only put on long skirts for community events such as weddings or baptisms or when visiting other traditional Roma. Yet another example of the fluidity of culture is the fact that about 50 years ago many of the community members in the said Sibiu community lived in tents. The males also wore moustaches and hats. Today, due to the initiatives of community leaders such as those of the late Ion Cioaba, the moustaches and hats are no longer donned, and most live in houses as opposed to tents.

Furthermore, 'culture is constantly negotiated and is multiple and contradictory' (Volpp, 2001: 4). I recall my former mother-in-law, a strong, well-respected, 48-year-old single Romani woman, who had borne five sons and was the head of her household, dominating over her sons and daughters-in-law alike, illustrating how age can also affect your status within the family and community. Another example is Lucia Cioaba, Ana Maria's aunt, who also grew up in the traditional Calderash Romani community in Sibiu but was able to obtain higher education and avoid an arranged marriage. Luminita Cioaba, Ana Maria's other aunt, is also educated and a renowned poet and activist. My point is not to deny that Romani women are profoundly oppressed but to challenge the monofocal conceptualization of 'Romani culture' as being the sole factor affecting the experiences of Romani women.

Nicoleta Bitu, a prominent Romanian Romani feminist, also points to the media's exclusive focus on the 'sensationalist' aspects of the wedding in an effort to portray it as solely the product of Romani culture:

One such detail . . . is the rivalry between 'King' Cioaba, who belongs to the Pentecostal Church, and another self-proclaimed king, who is supported by the Orthodox Church. In this context, the wedding became a public relations campaign for 'King' Cioaba. (Bitu, 2003)

This aspect, along with others that would have shown the multifaceted nature of the issues behind the marriage, was left out of the discourse.

Efforts to portray the arranged marriage of Ana Maria as purely a result of Romani culture are not limited to newspapers, as is noted in Jeff Timmerman's (2004) 'When Her Feet Touch the Ground: Conflict between the Roma Familistic Custom of Arranged Juvenile Marriage and Enforcement of International Human Rights Treaties'. One of the major flaws in Timmerman's argument is the relentless reliance on essentialist notions of 'Romani culture', based on information he derives primarily from non-Romani sources – most notably from Isabel Fonseca's (1996) *Bury Me Standing*, a work that has been criticized for bias and inaccuracy in

Romani activist circles.<sup>14</sup> This leads him to such essentialist conclusions as 'the Roma community itself openly embraces juvenile arranged marriage' (Timmerman, 2004: 479) and 'the ultimate goal of a Roma family unit is maximized reproduction' (Timmerman, 2004: 483).

He goes on to say that 'Roma tradition still relies heavily on archaic marital bartering mechanisms like bride prices and dowries' (Timmerman, 2004: 480) and goes on to describe the *pliashka*, a ceremony he claims takes place after an agreement has been reached as to the dowry. It might interest him to know that both of these rituals – the dowry and *pliashka* – are foreign to the Sibiu Calderash Romani community Ana Maria is from. He never bothers to make any reference to which Romani community these rituals are allegedly practised by, and because he initiates his discourse by referring to Ana Maria Cioaba's marriage, one would assume the rituals are practised by Ana Maria's community. It makes little sense to discuss an arranged marriage in a certain community and then give as 'cultural background' rituals practised by other Romani communities. There is a need to examine the myriad of ways in which policies affect Romani communities by taking into account their diversity and proceeding with careful research and analysis on a case-by-case (community-by-community) basis. His heavy reliance on problematic notions of a homogeneous Romani culture is also coupled with a disregard for how larger institutional practices in Romania shape culture and affect the vulnerability of Romani women in arranged marriages.

Furthermore, Timmerman also makes blanket statements about Romani women that deny the existence of resistance on their part and ultimately challenges their agency. He says (quoting Fonseca),

Roma women see nothing unfair about mandatory spousal roles – 'quite the opposite: they had the comfort of having a clear role in the world of unemployment without end . . . [T]he men, jobless and bored . . . looked the worse off.' (Timmerman, 2004: 488)

His basic assertion is that Romani women are so brainwashed, they do not even know what is in their best interests. By his account, where Romani women willingly and happily submit to oppressive authority, there is no insider resistance and needless to say no Romani feminist aspirations. Any impetus for change, according to him, is a result of international bodies essentially intervening to inform Romani women that they are oppressed (the consequences of which are discussed later).

A more blatant example of 'primitive' Romani culture pitted against supposedly feminist white Romanian values, where such values are constructed as something *gadjikane*, is noted in the reactions generated by the media attention received by Ana Maria's marriage. Media focus on the

disapproval of the marriage by non-Romani politicians and activists created an image of Romani women needing to be saved from their oppressive cultures as opposed to being actual agents. One example of a *gadjikani* saviour is Emma Nicholson, EU envoy to Romania, whose condemnation of the marriage cast (short-lived) doubts upon Romania's entrance into the EU. This erratic protest on behalf of Romani women must be examined in the context of Ms Nicholson's lack of a forceful stand against the systemic discrimination Romani women face in healthcare, education and employment in Romania. At the other end of the spectrum is Romani CRISS, a Romani NGO, which defended the arranged marriage by invoking the rhetoric of 'Romani tradition' (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 2003b), reinforcing the discourse of the 'authentic'<sup>15</sup> Roma as non-supportive of women's rights.

While white society's feminist ideals were posited against the Cioaba family and Romani CRISS represented 'authentic' Roma, Madalin Voicu, a Romani representative in the Romanian parliament, is the only Rom mentioned in the newspapers as being against the marriage. Within Romani circles, Voicu is remembered for his statement in 2002: 'Our Gypsies are stupid, primitive, and irritate everyone' (*Divers*, 2002). The one Rom who appears to stand up for women's rights is the one who is considered a traitor by most Romani activists and non-activists alike. Voicu is seen as 'inauthentic' and his support of women's rights is dismissed and is assumed to stem from the same place as his racist comments – brainwashing by *gadje*.

No feminist Romani woman activist was interviewed regarding her reaction to the marriage. The voice of Nicoleta Bitu, who opined that it was a matter of 'the right of the woman to choose against more traditional roles defined by patriarchy' (Bitu, 2003), was never heard – thereby facilitating the erasure of Romani resistance to patriarchal practices and the *gadje*'s monopoly on feminist ideals.

With the media reinforcing the image of Romani tradition as inferior and erasing any indication of Romani women's resistance, Ana Maria's aunt, author and activist Luminita Cioaba, although initially against the marriage, eventually defended it saying, 'You've made us look like barbarians, criminals, rapists. . . . We have our unwritten laws . . . that no one is allowed to challenge' (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 2003b). However, weeks before the event, Luminita was extremely upset with her brother for trying to 'marry Cristina off'.<sup>16</sup> Yet, when her feminist values and race were pitted against one another, she chose to defend her family and race in a country where Roma are treated as second-class citizens.

This dilemma is not unfamiliar to African-American feminists in the US, where 'people of color often must weigh their interests in avoiding issues that might reinforce distorted public perceptions against the need to acknowledge and address intra-community problems' (Crenshaw,



1995: 361). This illustrates one of the dilemmas of intersectionality: being forced to choose between your gender and your race in an environment where they are constructed as mutually exclusive. Essentializing Romani culture and Romani women's reactions to subordination leads to asserting that resistance/feminist ideals come from the outside. This establishes a false dichotomy between women's rights and Romani-ness where they become construed as mutually exclusive, ultimately forcing Romani women to choose between their race and gender.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of the arranged marriages of minors and other issues that entail critiquing intra-group practices, even activist Romani women are discouraged from protesting due to their fear of reinforcing dominant negative perceptions of Roma. However, the act of critiquing such practices is not problematic; what *is* problematic is mainstream society's exclusive focus on Romani women's 'bizarre' oppression and other events uncomplimentary to Roma in conjunction with 'the absence of other narratives and images' (Crenshaw, 1995: 362) reflecting a wide spectrum of Romani experiences. If the media were also to report the achievements of Roma (as opposed to the exclusive focus on crimes committed by Roma), a more balanced perception of Romani individuals would be promoted, which, in turn, would provide an atmosphere conducive to critiquing harmful intra-community practices.

The dynamics involved in critiquing intra-group oppression are obviously complicated when the group in question is a minority facing state-imposed domination, as is the case of non-territorial nations such as Roma. Often, practices that are harmful to women within such groups are either ignored in the name of preserving cultural autonomy or criticized in a way that portrays the entire culture as primitive. To deviate from these flawed approaches, it is necessary to apply feminist scrutiny to laws and practices affecting women in minority communities. Whites/westerners should not abstain from critiquing practices involving Third World subjects, mistakenly believing that they are respecting the 'other's' culture. Uma Narayan comments:

It is not clear to me that one can really learn about another culture while not subjecting it to any critical or normative evaluation, any more than one can really learn about another person without subjecting her to a variety of appraisals and evaluations, both positive and negative. Most often the commitment 'not to judge' other cultures seems in effect to be a commitment 'not to express one's judgments' – which only serves to insulate these unexpressed judgments from challenges, corrections, or interrogations they might profit from. (Narayan, 1997: 150)

However, Narayan also warns that critiques should be conducted in a manner that is racially sensitive and grounded in an understanding of the West's/whites' role in the oppression of the said group.

The tactic of placing the blame solely on a monolithic, impermeable 'Romani culture' is an explanation that ultimately renders invisible institutional structures that shape culture – a copout of sorts. The most obvious way in which Romanian racism promotes arranged marriages of Romani minors is by 'turning a blind eye' to them based on plain neglect or a flawed notion of cultural plurality. Yet another way in which racism contributes to the oppression of Romani women is through the rigidification of Romani practices: since Roma live within hostile societies that threaten their way of life, efforts to maintain their identity often result in inflexible interpretations of certain practices. Ayelet Shachar refers to this as 'reactive culturalism', a force which 'is not simply the expression of a pure unalloyed culture so much as a result of cross-cultural interaction that has already occurred, in which the state has also played its role' (Shachar, 2001: 36).

A more indirect way in which state-sponsored structural marginalization contributes to the vulnerability of under-age Romani women to arranged marriages is through the lack of access to education.<sup>18</sup> The educational level of Romani parents affects their decisions regarding when and whether or not to marry their daughters off. In addition, the lack of educational and employment opportunities for Romani women in Romania also contributes to many Romani parents' decisions – in other words saying 'she's not doing anything with her life anyway, might as well'.<sup>19</sup> In addition, better educational and employment opportunities act to empower Romani women within their relative communities by increasing their options and social mobility. The implementation of policies aimed at facilitating educational and employment access for Romani women is crucial to combating their vulnerability.

One such policy that would level the playing field for Romani women (as well as their parents) is affirmative action<sup>20</sup> – a policy that has been the site of much controversy in the US. Affirmative action programmes aim at increasing representation for excluded groups by taking into account how an individual's group membership has impeded their access in light of historical and present institutional barriers. Opponents of affirmative action refer to it as preferential treatment and reject it based on the alleged stigma imposed on beneficiaries (Fraser, 1997: 26) and the backlash it elicits from the dominant group (Fraser, 1997: 31). However, what is usually interpreted as 'preferential treatment' for traditionally excluded groups is really the denial of privileges to dominant groups.<sup>21</sup>

Nancy Fraser (1997: 30) rejects affirmative action based on her belief that its consequence is

... not only to underline racial differentiation; it is also to mark people of color as deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more. Thus, they too can be cast as privileged recipients of special treatment.

The rhetoric of preferential/special treatment or reverse discrimination would be valid if we lived in a meritocracy – a notion Iris Young (1990: 192–225) dismantles. However, despite her acknowledgement of institutionalized unequal treatment based on race and gender, like Fraser,<sup>22</sup> Young opposes affirmative action based on the notion that it does little to target institutional practices or aid the 'truly needy'. With regard to the former point, Harris and Narayan point out that, affirmative action was not meant to 'provide a magic bullet cure-all for a host of contemporary social problems' but rather

... to partially counter the ways in which factors such as class, race, and gender function in our society to impede equal access, equal opportunity and equal treatment; and to foster a greater degree of inclusion of diverse Americans in a range of institutions and occupations than would otherwise exist. (Harris and Narayan, 1994: 11)

Contrary to Young's assertion that affirmative action does little to increase access for the truly disadvantaged, Harris and Narayan (1994: 8) point out that affirmative action policies (and civil rights laws) are largely responsible for creating the black middle class.

Romania – a country where UNICEF polls reveal that 93.4 percent of whites would not want a Romani person as a member of their family (ERIO, 2004), a country where schools remain segregated (ERRC, 2004) and de facto discrimination pervades – is in desperate need of affirmative action. The EU must adopt a firm directive on and provide funds for the implementation of affirmative action programmes in EU member states as well as requiring the implementation of affirmative action programmes as a prerequisite for accession to the EU. Affirmative action programmes should be applied in an intersectional manner (considering a variety of disadvantages including race, gender, class, sexuality and so forth) on an institution-by-institution basis. A special body, one including Romani women, should be established to monitor the *results* of affirmative action initiatives with the goal of increasing the number of Romani women (and other excluded groups) in universities, the professions, government (and not to mention media).

It is imperative that the EU also explicitly deals with the vulnerability of women in minority communities by establishing a special body devoted to monitoring intra-community subjugation (i.e. arranged marriages of minors, virginity practices, female genital mutilation and so forth) both in EU member states and in candidate countries. This body would be responsible for navigating a middle ground between granting blanket accommodations to groups and completely disregarding differences. One mechanism that engages the challenge of recognizing a group's differences while protecting its vulnerable members is joint governance.

The system of joint governance elaborated by Shachar's transformative accommodation approach aims at resolving just such disputes between individuals and their identity group. Transformative accommodation is 'context-sensitive' joint governance whereby the group and state 'compete for the loyalty of their shared constituents in each different social arena' (Shachar, 2001: 122). This approach is based on the principle of the division of authority into 'sub-matters' over which neither the state nor the identity group has exclusive jurisdiction. Another key component allows the individual to appeal to the competing authority in cases where she is not satisfied with the remedy provided to her; she can opt for the predetermined remedy agreed to by all parties before deliberation began. Shachar indicates that the establishment of this 'opt-out' provision will encourage the parties to come to an agreement (Shachar, 2001: 125).

This model promotes 'change from within' (Shachar, 2001: 122) and builds on the internal resistance to oppressive practices to foster a dialogue between the state, group and individual. There are a couple of considerations in implementing such a model in a case such as Ana Maria Cioaba's. Because Ana Maria is a minor and would probably be intimidated from raising a formal complaint, a human rights NGO – preferably a Romani women's NGO such as the Romani Women's Association of Romania – would have to be responsible for negotiating on her behalf. Shachar suggests that with this joint governance model, the driving force behind reaching a consensus is the woman's wish to remain a part of her community and the community's<sup>23</sup> desire to maintain the allegiance of the group member. Whereas in situations where the individual has a clear interest in reaching a compromise with the group so as to not alienate herself from it, it is not clear how the negotiating stage would play out in cases where NGOs/activists step in on behalf of the wronged group member.

After a complaint is lodged by the activists representing Ana Maria, the 'case' would be referred to a *kris*,<sup>24</sup> or Romani court, comprised of community 'judges'. Since some judges – such as Ana Maria's father – might have a vested interest in this matter, other 'less partial' judges could be recruited from neighbouring towns. Before deliberating, the parties – in this case Ana Maria, the activists, the state and the group (all under the supervision of the EU body established to monitor such conflicts) – would have to agree on an 'opt-out' remedy which would be available to Ana Maria if she was displeased with the 'verdict'. Among my concerns is that the *kris* is usually comprised of males, who are not likely to be sensitive to Ana Maria's predicament. One option would be for the EU to provide incentives for the inclusion of women in the *kris* during such negotiations. Though in need of intense tweaking, this option is more promising than any measures taken so far (or lack thereof) and could very well lay the foundation for the respective EU body's strategy for dealing with intra-community oppression.

There is a need to address critically the many affronts to the dignity of Romani women in a way that is conscious of the multiplicity of factors shaping their experiences. Local and international attention to the problem of arranged marriages of minors in certain Romani communities should be a part of a whole-hearted dedication to improving the lives of Roma in general and of Romani women in particular. To transcend the obsession with 'exotic' oppression, which currently characterizes public attention to Romani women's woes, and foster a true commitment to empowering Romani women, we must interrogate the notion of a monolithic 'primitive' Romani culture by evaluating the role institutional 'isms' play in the shaping of cultures. Recognition of the intersectional nature of systems of oppression is necessary to facilitating internal condemnation of intra-community practices. This acknowledgement should also give rise to action aimed at equalizing opportunities for Romani women and other intersectional beings. The EU, having been made aware of the egregious entrenchment on Romani women's rights through Ana Maria's much publicized marriage, must now act firmly to attack the root as well as the ramifications of such oppression.

## NOTES

1. I start this article with a narrative to explain my connection to the arranged marriage of Cristina – the niece of my confidant/second-mother/sister – which led me to analyse the complex relationship between Romanian racism and the silencing of Romani feminist ideals. As I write I am conscious that I am participating in an act that fosters my otherization from the Romani community – in a sense that renders me 'inauthentic' according to *gadje* and Roma alike. However, I am also conscious that we must appropriate the act of writing (as opposed to being written about) in order to progress and take control of our identities. I occasionally include narratives in this article to illuminate a discourse with which I am deeply engaged and affected by in an effort to refute the efficacy or possibility of distancing oneself from the text.
2. Romani is the adjectival form of 'Roma', the proper term for the group pejoratively known as 'Gypsies'. Roma left India about 1000 years ago and now inhabit every continent and are primarily concentrated in Europe. For a detailed historical account see Hancock (1987).
3. I use the term 'Third World' to refer to people of colour, especially those living and racialized in western contexts.
4. This word is the adjectival form of *gadje*, which means non-Roma in Romanes, the Romani language. Other forms include *gadjikano*, *gadjikani* and *gadjikane*, which are the masculine singular, feminine singular and plural adjectives, respectively, used to describe things considered non-Romani.
5. For a more detailed account of how the anthropological perspective functions to impede the elaboration of a gendered Romani discourse, see Oprea (2004).
6. Including the major Romanian newspapers: *Adevarul*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Ziua* and *Libertatea*.

7. Similar portrayals of the marriage prevail in the *Los Angeles Daily News* and the *New York Daily News*.
8. This particular Calderash Romani community no longer employs the dowry (understood as the groom's family paying a sum to the bride's family).
9. One example of the Romanian media's biased reporting and manipulation of public perception is seen in the coverage of the Hadareni pogrom, where non-Roma set fire to Romani houses after a Rom killed an ethnic Romanian. For more detailed information on how the Romanian media misrepresents abuses against Roma, see Hanganu (1999).
10. For more examples of violence against Romani women as perpetrated by whites, see WomenAction (2000).
11. One example of the dire situation of women in Romania is the lack of battered women's shelters (Mertus, 1998: 23).
12. One group of Roma in Romania, the one to which I belong, that does not practise arranged marriages are the Vatrash, often referred to as Cashtale.
13. The Calderash are a certain group of Roma who were originally copper-smiths. For more information, see Hancock (1987). The particular Calderash community that I discuss in this article has resided in Sibiu for centuries.
14. On one instance Fonseca (1996: 168–9) writes, 'I confess that I had run out of sympathy. The Gypsies were bound to be at least as bad as their accusers, I felt; chances are they deserved each other.'
15. For a more complete discussion of how the discourse of authenticity disempowers people of colour and women of colour in particular, see Narayan (1997: 142–50).
16. This information comes from the numerous conversations (my confidant/second-mother/sister) Lucia Cioaba and I have had on this issue since hearing of Cristina's planned wedding.
17. For a more complete discussion on intersectionality and women of colour being forced to choose between their race and gender in instances of intra-community problems, see Crenshaw (1995: 357–83).
18. I believe that in addition to the patriarchy within the community, the educational level of Ms Cioaba's father also affected his decision to arrange her marriage at such an early age. Furthermore, Ana Maria's poor school performance (in conjunction with patriarchy) also played a role in her being wed. Had the Romanian educational system made more of an effort to reach out to Romani students and to have multicultural curricula, perhaps Ana Maria would not have become alienated from school. This conclusion has recently been reinforced in light of another friend of mine (who was failing her classes) being married off at 17. I can recall her mother saying that if she didn't improve her grades, she would have no choice but to have her married.
19. This argument should not be construed to deny the fact that (in cases where Roma can afford to send their children to school) Romani girls are sometimes taken out of school in order to preserve their virginity or care for siblings; my point is rather to add another facet to the discourse.
20. Romania has already implemented some affirmative action programmes that have aided Roma (see Resource Centre for Roma Communities, 2002). They are not comprehensive enough but represent a step in the right direction.
21. For more on white privilege, see Wildman and Davis (1995).
22. I agree with Fraser's conclusion that socialism and deconstruction are ideal for eliminating injustice; however, because we are not yet even close to

implementing such radical changes, it does not make sense to oppose a policy that can act to counter some of the injustices members of neglected groups currently face. Furthermore, I do not find Fraser's redistribution-recognition approach useful for assessing the multidimensional challenges Romani women face, since Fraser analyses gender and race in isolation from one another. In this particular essay, Fraser (1997: 26) analyses injustice not from an intersectional domination standpoint but from the 'pure ideal-typical cases at the two extremes of the conceptual spectrum' (white women and men of colour) and in the end mentions that women of colour would experience the redistribution-recognition dilemma in a 'multilayered and acute form' (Fraser, 1997: 32). This might lead one to the false conclusion that the experience of women of colour can be deduced by perhaps adding together the relative experiences of white women and men of colour. I believe that such compartmentalized conceptualization leads to a simplified and incomplete view of remedies necessary for the emancipation of multiply burdened individuals such as Romani women. While Romani women would require distributive remedies as well as remedies that accommodate for differences such as language (ethnic differences) and remedies that aim at deconstructing stereotypes, they also require remedies that explicitly deal with the tension arising from the interaction between their gender, ethnicity and racialization – a problem Shachar's work engages.

23. I am assuming here that the group would have to be given initial jurisdiction over the matter because of how intrinsic this practice is considered by the respective community. Feeling that they have had a say in the remedy would provide it with legitimacy and staying power.
24. In the particular community Ana Maria is from, the *kris* is still active. To ensure a fair outcome in cases where one of the judges has a direct stake in the matter, other judges are brought in from neighbouring towns.

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