Creating solidarity: Intimate partner violence (IPV) and politics of emotions in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Romania

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Abstract
This article tackles ethical and political dimensions of emotions while exploring forms of solidarity among women exposed to gender violence. Taking the case of a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in the border city of Giurgiu, Romania, the author investigates the role of shame, guilt and security in decisions about managing the experience of abuse in intimate partner violence. In the local community, institutional and personal interactions are shaped by state and private agents who intervene (or not) in the lives of women who are victims of gender-related violence. Institutional dynamics, street-level bureaucracy and community self-regulation employ emotive-political concepts and contribute to norms that justify and maintain violence against women. Building on scholarship of emotions and feminist ethical theories, the article shows the formative relation between the notions of shame, guilt and security, and points to the political subjectivities they create in a multi-ethnic community.

Keywords
Emotions, gender violence, intimate partner violence, security, shame

Introduction
Debates on intimate partner violence (IPV) and more generally violence against women (VAW) in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods have recently tackled emotions and their socio-political exploitation (Augoustinos et al., 2011). Prompted by the ‘affective turn’ (Anderson, 2014; Athanasiou et al., 2008; Martin, 2013), scholars try to qualify and...
address personal or collective feelings (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014), political engagement with affects (Berlant, 2004; Hoggett, 2015) and socially constructed emotions (Bendelow and Williams, 1998; Hochschild, 1979, 2012). Following the latter approach, this article is most concerned with socially mediated emotions. It aims to give an account of the political subjectivities and manifestations of solidarity generated in response to acts of gender violence and their subsequent emotions of shame, guilt and security.

To do so, I rely on two complementary bodies of scholarship: one that centres on feminist methodologies in studying gender-based violence (Harding and Norberg, 2005; Jaggar, 2015; Skinner et al., 2013) and specifically IPV (Kelly, 2011), and the other on the scholarship of emotions (Leavitt, 1996; Lutz and White, 1986). Emotions have been theorized in works on the state (Laszczkowski and Reeves, 2017; Stoler, 2004), emphasizing their instrumentalization in politics and society and the ways in which they shape and form political communities. Additionally, an important part of theoretical discussions on emotions has been developed in feminist theory (Ahmed, 2013) and in race and ethnicity debates (Santa Ana, 2015), the latter of which focus on the role of community in shaping IPV. While Ursula Kelly (2011) states that it is not enough to focus ‘exclusively on individual and couple dynamics’ to understand why women experience IPV, Kaya and Cook explain how ‘community and society-level factors beyond individual-level factors also influence women’s risk of exposure to all forms of intimate partner violence’ (2010: 424). Moreover, Kelly (2011) offers a cartography of critical theories revealing the essential role of intersectionality in understanding the IPV phenomenon, which is defined as a public health concern and an issue of social injustice and human rights.

In this article I focus on IPV as a social injustice issue (Ortiz-Barreda, 2011; Yodanis, 2004). I build on scholarship of gender-based violence in Eastern Europe (Roman, 2001; Serbanescu and Goodwin, 2005) to question why health providers and women’s rights defenders support the idea that Roma women1 suffer more gender-based violence than non-Roma women (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2018; Krizsán and Roggeband, 2017; Oprea, 2004). Ingroup emotions, Iyer et al. (2003: 118) explain, help us to ‘interpret [ingroups], and thus make sense of their relationships to particular outgroups’, thereby determining the ways in which ingroups react to political decisions and actions. Particularly, I bring to the fore the role of education (see Henke and Hsu, 2018) and institutional racism to interrogate how women from different ethnic groups relate to public institutions and the reflect values of society.

In Romania, studies of domestic violence and specifically IPV (Adorjani, 2012; CBS-AXA, 2014; CPE, 2003; Irimescu, 2005; Rada, 2014) discuss its traumatic medical outcomes (Hostiuc et al., 2011) and socio-legal consequences (Bogeanu, 2012; Liiceanu et al., 2004). However, qualitative studies of IPV are scarce, and little attention has been paid to the narratives of the women victims of domestic violence. Importantly, in terms of legal frameworks, family violence laws2 do not specifically address gender-based violence but rather refer indiscriminately to any form of violence between relatives (parents–children, siblings, in-laws, etc.). As a result, understandings of IPV remain the terrain of cultural patterns and social affects created through interpretations, justifications and negotiations.

Following feminist scholars including Berlant (2004) and Thompson and Hoggett (2012), I focus on ‘shame’, ‘guilt’ and ‘security’, combining a trans-disciplinary approach and intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2012) with ethnographic data
to highlight the intersectional dimensions of gender and ethnicity as related to IPV. Feminist critics suggest that intersectionality may be used as a method of analysing social relationships in order to capture multiple intertwining power relationships (Davis and Zarkov, 2017; McCall, 2005). This study aims to advance understanding of IPV through investigating the cases of women who never relied on any type of formal assistance; women who were still in an abusive situation or had silently broken free from their abusers. I follow a feminist methodology that gives an account of the subjectivity of the researcher, the experience that the researcher herself/himself has been exposed to, and their perceived multidimensional identity in a given context.

After presenting a note on the praxiological dimension of feminist methodologies, through ethnographic vignettes I will unravel the social and political dimension of shame, guilt and security. Then I will discuss the internalized affect of ‘guilt’ and ‘shame’ and their effect on community ties.

Notes on methodology

During June–August 2015, I spent 24 days conducting interviews and having discussions and informal meetings in Giurgiu. I carried out two planned discussion groups with Roma and non-Roma women who live in the same neighbourhood, a discussion group with social workers, 12 interviews with Roma women and 12 interviews with non-Roma women, all victims of IPV, and six interviews with public social workers. I used semi-structured interviews to stimulate detailed narratives and stories. I recorded the interviews and I encouraged my interviewees to discuss other forms of violence such as marital rape and street or sexual harassment. The questionnaire focused on IPV, manifested as physical, emotional, psychological or economic violence. The interviews took place in Giurgiu town at convenient locations chosen by my respondents (e.g. a cafeteria, a bench in a park).

The selection of participants started with the community and school mediator,3 who is also a teacher in a mixed ethnicity area in Giurgiu town. She agreed to participate in the project and supported my initial contact with participants by organizing a group discussion with Roma and non-Roma women, many of whom had suffered IPV. Subsequently, using exploratory techniques and by word of mouth I reached out to a considerable number of women from the neighbourhood with whom I eventually conducted interviews. When I briefly described my research on IPV in the group discussion, the women who agreed to be interviewed were aware of different perceptions of IPV as a socially disputable and legally unclear issue. They indirectly suggested they wanted to talk to me in private: they gave me a small sign and handed on their phone number, telling me to call them and set a date to meet. Consequently, I reassured them that their discussions with me would be confidential and their anonymity would be preserved. In my attempt to decipher their need for privacy I detected that the women felt shame about their trauma (long gone or still alive), often blaming themselves for their partners’ violence.

I prioritized two dimensions of analysis with respect to women victims of IPV: their ethnicity (Roma women and non-Roma women) and the formal or informal status of the partnership (whether the woman was separated from her violent partner). First, the ethnic distinction refers to Roma identity, which can be ambiguous as it blends distinctions
between the various Roma groups and can mask the racist stigma that can arise in the case of the ‘Gypsy’ denomination. I opted for the categorization ‘Roma women’ vs ‘non-Roma women’ because the term ‘Romanian women’ would hold racist connotations in this context as it suggests that Roma women are not Romanians. Similarly, the term ‘majority women’ is problematic as it excludes another possible ethnicity besides Roma, and might imply that any non-Roma woman is inevitably part of the ethnic majority or perceives herself as such. Second, I examine the status of the women’s relationship with their male partners, for example if the woman is separated or still involved in the relationship. I seek to identify whether women tend to reveal their situation to third parties during the violent relationship, if they talk about IPV when the relationship ends, and in which way women who experienced IPV reflect on it when confronted with other women living in abusive relationships. For anonymity reasons, I use pseudonyms throughout the text, using ‘X’ to indicate non-Roma women and ‘Q’ for Roma women in keeping with their self-identification. I also note the age of each respondent.

The other group of respondents were street-level bureaucrats who, according to their job description and their own statements, come in direct contact with victims of domestic violence. I drew upon local and regional institutions of social services, police, healthcare, the city hall and NGOs offering services to victims of domestic violence. Throughout the research I questioned the way in which norms and regulations are implemented and influence the practices of civil servants. For example, social workers must, and do, call for the police to accompany them in gender-related violent situations, but they do not necessarily receive an immediate response.

‘I was wrong! …’: Blaming the victim and internalized guilt

Blaming the victim has the purpose of constraining the victim and neutralizing any possible contestation of the violent act that was exercised against her. Guilt is internalized by women through the mechanism of self-blaming. While the women I interviewed had experienced sexual violence in different forms, many of them did not identify certain types of violence, such as rape, marital rape or sexual harassment as transgressions. For example, when the aggressor becomes the ‘official’ partner of the victim (through legal marriage or not), the initial rape is not even questioned. Many women recalled moments when their partner ‘does his man thing’ without any consent or ignoring the woman’s condition (e.g. sexual displeasure, health problems, a lack of emotional engagement). All interviewees said they never considered that non-consensual intercourse with their partner could be denounced as rape. Sandra tells her story of a 10-year relationship of recurrent violence, recalling the first date she had with the man who would become her official partner and father of her children:

Two weeks before high school graduation I ran away with him. He had been courting me for a while, but I used to make fun of him. [That day] he took me to his mother’s house and slept with me. Right there. That was his plan. I started to cry because of how I felt, because of the pain. Then he started to hit me and said ‘I’ll beat you so hard that you won’t forget it all your life.’ And he was right, see! [she was starting to cry], he beat me so hard that I cannot forget it even now. (Sandra Q., 38)
Both Roma and non-Roma women stated that there were no instances when they had initiated sexual intercourse, these encounters being entirely at the man’s will. Women were at best able to refuse contact. But rape as explicit sexual aggression is dismissed if the girl is considered to have an ‘official’ relationship. Even when 12- or 13-year-old girls have abortions or end up in social care, they are not recorded by police or social workers as rape victims. Usually, rape is acknowledged only when women are forced by more than one man and have visible marks on their bodies. It is overlooked by society and minimized by the authorities, who state that very often the victims change their statements so they should not be taken seriously ‘on the first try’. In conclusion, this overarching victim blaming maintains and deepens the internalization of guilt.

Family play a significant role in regulating, supporting or condemning a violent relationship between partners. The extended family acts as the oppressor – encouraging the woman to accept and tolerate IPV – or as a saviour – providing emergency support for the victim, and negotiating with or coercing the aggressive partner. Most women not only fight their aggressor, they also fight with their family, and with their learned and internalized values. For example, on my question about the separation, how it happened and why at that time and not another, one of the respondents answered: ‘I wanted to get away from him but my parents wouldn’t let me. [I did not know] how to run away from him, and not shame my family’ (Sandra Q., 38). Another woman said she felt ashamed in front of her children to ‘abandon’ her aggressive husband even if she would have had the possibility to live on her own: ‘I tell you as God is my witness that I would leave him, but I am not [doing it] for fear of shaming my children’ (Salomoea Q., 60).

Women victims of IPV who seek mediation question their group identity (social class, ethnic community) and challenge social norms. Hence, Roma and non-Roma women talk differently among themselves, within the extended family or in the public space about their abusive experience. In an attempt to protect the reputation of the ingroup (family, community), Roma women limit the sharing of their experiences within that group. Because they lack confidence towards institutions and have no strong ingroup support, non-Roma women become isolated and have the tendency not to share their abusive experience at all.

Often, what determines women’s decision to separate from the violent partner is the financial and housing situation. When women run away or are kicked out of the house by their partner, they mostly take refuge in parents’ or relatives’ houses, or spend a short period in a refuge centre. Usually, women run away from home when a crisis occurs, only to return afterwards. Jobless or not, their personal income is not sufficient for subsistence or meeting their children’s needs. Nonetheless, some women saw their situation as being more complex – beyond the fear of what people would say or ‘housing’ needs. One of the respondents, having experienced a great trauma at the hands of her partner, said:

For fear … for fear of the unknown. All my marriage I stood behind him, like now. Yes, I asked myself, how much more will I be suffering like this, what was I going to do. Maybe I would have a breakdown and I would go crazy. Who would help me? What would my children do realizing they can do nothing? … And yes, I wanted to take the next step and escape the terror. … No. I kept coming back thinking that he would come to his senses. (Magda X., 54)
The fear of shame and guilt is an essential element of IPV (Nathanson et al., 2012; Shorey et al., 2011). On the one hand, the abuse experienced by women reflects various types of suffering and mental illness: chronic dependence on the violent partner, self-flagellation or self-harming, depression, and so on. Based on psychological, cultural and personal factors, women victims of IPV internalize guilt as participants in the act of violence (Beck et al., 2011; Lawrence and Taft, 2013; Ramon, 2015). On the other hand, scholars explain IPV as the expression of power relations not only between partners, but also as embedded in the social environment: that is, within the family, in the neighbourhood, in the workplace and in society at large (Connell, 2014; Whiting et al., 2012). By internalizing guilt and the toleration of violence exerted upon them, women contribute to the way in which society debates and regulates gender violence. Both symbolically and politically, the community adjusts, condemns or confirms the power relations. In the following section I reflect on the ways that women victims of IPV define their identity and label others.

**Group identity, socially negotiated emotions and IPV**

Questions of group identity arise in response to multifarious factors that describe the ways women become and are identified as victims of domestic violence or IPV. Gender scholars have critiqued the defamatory attitudes that society holds towards women who are victims of gender-based violence (Overstreet and Quinn, 2013; Pennington-Zoellner, 2009; Pinchevsky and Wright, 2012). Intersectionality, as shown by Crenshaw (1991), captures the interaction between racism and sexism in the lives of black women who are victims of domestic violence, and investigates practices of group identity to uncover a whole system of intertwining hierarchies. One of Crenshaw’s observations refers to the fact that poor or black women victims of domestic violence are more reluctant to reveal issues related to ethnic identity, even to the researchers, ‘since it would reinforce the stereotypes on the minority men as being violent’ (1991: 1253).

My respondents defined their belonging within the family, community and society by offering descriptions of perceived categories of membership (e.g. income, housing, family heritage, level of formal education, religion). A multi-layered identity is revealed when Roma and non-Roma women discuss ethnicity in relation to IPV.

Crucially, the women allowed me to enter their private lives on the understanding that I am a researcher and a middle-class Romanian woman from Bucharest, the capital and the largest city in Romania, who is not part of their community and would not be coming back to the place where their social relationships are built. Reacting to what I represent – wanting to find out more about their intimate and allegedly humiliating experiences – the women tried to minimize the importance or gravity of violence. After my briefly presenting the research purpose during the first group discussion with the Roma and non-Roma women, one of the participants declared eloquently (with others supporting her point of view):

> We do not have issues like that … look, myself in 20 years I don’t recall him [my husband] having hit me say, three times. No more. We get along very well. (Magdalena X., 40)

The women were evasive, wanting to avoid answering my questions about IPV or trying to minimize its importance. Simona, referring to her husband with whom she had
three children and had lived for 19 years, said: ‘Maybe he lifted his hand on me once or twice, I am not saying he is a saint, but he never beat me until he bruised me’ (Simona Q., 39). This type of answer was given primarily by women who were still in a relationship with a violent man. Women who have ended their relationship with the violent partner have another perspective and verbalize the experience of domestic violence differently. Despite their internalized guilt, they do not want to revert to a similar situation.

Many women said they did not know how to talk about IPV and ethnicity without feeling ‘judged’. A few Roma women expressed their ethnicity clearly, emphasizing the subcategory, the community, social class or religion they belonged to. More rarely, they mentioned their linguistic identity, for example, the Romani language as their mother tongue. The ethnic identity of non-Roma women was expressed in opposition to ‘other’ members of an ethnic group that is different from the Romanian one, referring mostly to the Romani ethnics. By contrast, the non-Roma women did not refer directly to their own ethnic identity. The non-Roma women – in this research, Romanian women – had an implicit, strongly internalized identity of being part of the majority, which does not problematize the ethnic aspect.

In general, Roma and non-Roma women victims of IPV were more concerned about their financial and social status rather than their membership in a certain ethnic group: ‘Gypsies beat their wives, but Romanians even kill them. There is no difference between Romanians and Gypsies’. However, in the discussion group Roma women would state that ‘Romanian women’ are stronger and that they ‘know when to draw the line’, while non-Roma women would look condescendingly at Roma women, assuming that they are more exposed to violence. In general, all women tend to believe that IPV occurs regardless of ethnicity, yet there are other factors such as social class, financial status and education that are correlated with the experience of violence. In addition, all the women declared that other men do not intervene in any IPV incident. No fathers, brothers, cousins, or even the abused women’s sons took direct action against the aggressor as a mediator or by turning to the public authorities.

Street-level bureaucrats confronted with IPV: Affects and institutional racism

To what extent are social values defined by institutions, laws and regulations, and when do socially negotiated emotions influence the behaviour of women and civil servants? On the one hand, civil servants claim they treat women victims of IPV equally, regardless of their ethnicity. On the other hand, by means of affirmative action policies, people get hired into the state system by declaring themselves of Roma ethnicity, and subsequently are expected to work as professional mediators in ‘Roma neighbourhoods’, that is, areas where mainly Roma people live. This bureaucratic paradox determines civil servants’ confusion in managing ethnic categories and gender-based problems, or in addressing these issues with equity. The alleged neutrality is in fact subordinated to discretionary power, which allows civil servants to decide when to identify a woman as
belonging to an ethnic group or living in poor neighbourhood. Lacking the training to distinguish between identifying people in disadvantaged situations and racial profiling, civil servants contribute to institutional racism against Roma (Vrăbiescu, 2014).

During the discussion group with social workers, an emergency was announced – a 13-year-old girl had arrived at the hospital in a critical condition after having had an abortion. Related to the context I asked the social workers their opinion about how society accommodates or condemns the sexual and reproductive life of young women. They offered two answers: ‘Roma follow the tradition; it is in their culture to marry girls very young’, and ‘for the others [non-Roma] their mentality matters, it’s the way girls want to have it nowadays’. Confronted daily with cases of violence against women and young girls, social workers tend to protect the institution by blaming women’s ‘culture’ and ‘mentality’ rather than denouncing the structural oppression women suffer.

Scholars have shown how IPV is socially circumvented, as both the aggressor and the civil servants argue in favour of external or trivial causes that diminish the responsibility of the aggressor, such as alcohol, jealousy or money (Devries et al., 2014). This leads to the normalization of IPV and a lack of intervention from civil servants who resort to stereotypes and prejudices: ‘Roma are in a way … wilder’ (Lica X., 55).

Education, as an embodiment of mainstream values, is insufficient in counteracting discrimination. Men’s formal education is seen both as a factor for personal behaviour and for social ascendence. Often, women relate levels of formal education to the abusive behaviour of men, and they evaluate the effects that informal education (especially as handed down from parents) has had on men’s behaviour: ‘It is education that matters, not the studies. His mother did not have a say in front of her husband. This was his model’ (Iana X., 62). The women in my study unanimously believed formal education would provide an advantage, a possibility of succeeding in life, but also is powerless against social injustice. One of the women briefly expressed the issue: ‘no matter how educated you are, you are still a Gypsy’ (Ana Q., 35). If institutional racism is generally perceived but relatively little questioned, it is more strongly felt in the educational system because of the expectation that education should be an avenue for addressing social injustice. Non-Roma women in particular assume a direct connection between the lower education of the Roma women and the violence they suffer, but they see no difference in the ways of suffering from IPV.

By contrast, civil servants argue that a lack of education is a cause of IPV, blaming both the aggressor and the victim: ‘Everything begins with education … and with what you see in your home. … those who end up in the Centre do not really have an education’ (Ștevia X., 40).

Summing up the aforementioned arguments, when it comes to the relationship between education and IPV, perceptions are not as clear. Although non-Roma women do not tend to view the education of men as a factor reducing violence, they do tend to view a lack of education among Roma women as a determining factor in their victimization. On the other hand, Roma women admit that education does not prevent Roma or non-Roma men from being violent against women, although they internalize the majority racist and elitist model, which claims that in Roma communities gender violence is more frequent and tolerated.
Micro-politics of emotions

The emotions involved in the social management of IPV tend to be underrated and de-politicized. The implementation deficit of the legislation regulating and punishing violence against women and the lack of gender politics lead to negative personal emotions, social frictions and gender-based conflicts. Several examples illustrate the ways in which women victims of IPV replicate the patriarchal patterns of tolerating and rationalizing VAW.

Women suffering IPV react differently to gender violence experienced by other women, sometimes showing empathy, especially when it comes to physical violence, but they tend to defend men involved in sexual violence acts. Women tend to deny or to diminish men’s abuse and violence, especially in mother–son relationships, in families with unequal revenue of partners, and when social status or other community interests are involved. One of my interviewees, who had been assaulted by her partner on several occasions, disapproved of the legal consequences of him having had sexual relations with a minor and proceeded to incriminate the girl: ‘He didn’t want to do it! She had an interest. She accused him of having raped her to push him into a corner … [and he] went to jail for no reason, for two years. You see, she was 13 and he was accused for raping a minor’ (Iustina X., 30). Another woman explained her son’s situation, who escaped a conviction for the rape and corruption of minors:

She was always with her tits out, and kept following him. And his friends said to him: look at her, she’s so sexy, look at her legs. Don’t be a sucker. … And it is so normal, he is a man after all. What, do you think he is blind? No! … It is just that her mother made her file a complaint for rape. Because she was a minor. But the girl afterwards withdrew her complaint. (Ileana Q., 60)

The influence of group dynamics on experiences and negotiations of IPV in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood shows the way in which violence against women dissolves into socially negotiated emotions instead of creating politically shared values, such as solidarity. Shame acts as a community organizing principle and a shared social emotion to discourage women’s solidarity. Ingroup negotiation (within the family, social class or ethnic group) instrumentalizes shame in order to guarantee the group’s security with respect to outgroups.

My data show how guilt, shame and security are entangled in the social fabric of a community. They are negotiated within ingroups and become constitutive of relationships with outgroups. Women actively participate in redefining collective affects, both as victims of IPV and as part of the community. State inaction towards women victims of IPV endorses the group’s authority in negotiating and regulating ingroup dynamics. In contrast to state-alleged neutrality, my data reveal affective interactions and value-based actions between street-level bureaucrats and women victims of IPV. The lack of public policies and a legal framework to address gender-based violence, and particularly IPV, encourages civil servants to resort to expressing informal emotions and values. These attitudes are never trivial, but indicate the affective dimension of state contributions in shaping political communities.

In a state that does not legislate, design or implement policies against gender-based violence, the politics of emotions legitimizes guilt and shame as socially constructed instruments to control ingroup relations, and dynamics between ingroups and outgroups. This diminishes the possibility of solidarity among women. Guilt takes the shape of personal negative emotions that deter women from reaching out to members of their
ingroups, and even less to outgroups. For example, non-Roma women who internalize the identity of the majority group do not expose feelings of shame, and the existent ingroup dynamics obstruct them from discussing IPV outside the group, either with other women or with state representatives.

Shame proves to be one of the most powerful emotive-political tools of the patriarchal system. It is socially shaped with the purpose of organizing and controlling the reproductive and sexual life of women in a community. In my analysis of the relationships between women from different ethnic groups living in the same residential area, shame stands out as controlling and regulating both the private lives of women and the social life of the entire community. It acts by deterring all members of the community from addressing issues of gender-based violence, first to secure the group’s identity against the outgroup, and second to keep state intervention to a minimum in order to maintain the authority of informal structures of power. This response brings into question the concept and experience of security – an affective borderline between a safe life and living in fear. For a woman victim of IPV, security is negotiated between the ingroup interest and personal well-being. However, personal security in a gender-based, violent environment often fades in comparison to security considerations and the interests of the group (see Kelly, 2011). Security embedded in belonging prevails over the emotional or physical insecurity which comes with IPV. Regulatory mechanisms deploying shame translate into women who suffer from IPV being constantly rejected by the larger society and political environment, and punished within their own community and family network.

The effects of guilt, shame and security point to, with some exceptions, a weak solidarity among women victims of IPV, who have to negotiate their multi-layered identity within the community, their ingroup and outgroup relations, and during their encounters with state structures and representatives. Nevertheless, in some cases, suffering multiple vulnerabilities may help to strengthen feelings of solidarity and political tactics among women. Roma women are most likely to share their experiences within the community and try to negotiate a better situation when they are victims of IPV. By contrast, non-Roma women tend not to reveal their IPV experiences within their community, and nor do they publicly seek assistance from state structures. Solidarity between women victims of IPV from the same neighbourhood, but from different groups, is frail, and generally women rarely challenge state (non) intervention. The social function of solidarity in confrontation with oppressive structures reveals the ways in which the micro-politics of emotions function as a deterrent to reaching out and actively participating in addressing IPV publicly.

Conclusion

This article refers to the political subjectivities constructed in a specific context where women subjected to IPV have little to no formal assistance and have sought no help outside their social network. I engaged with the critical theories of IPV and socially negotiated emotions using the theory of intersectionality as a lens for examining and theorizing data on a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Romania. The article showed when and where the various forms of self- and hetero-labelling of women occur, and revealed women’s multi-layered identities and positions when negotiating social emotions within ingroups, with outgroups and in encounters with state structures. Crucially, by emphasizing
state–community relations, the article shows how (lack of) policies, laws and institutional practices shape our understanding of the IPV phenomenon.

I have argued that state investment in political community formation, as well as outgroups’ social dynamics, informs attitudes towards IPV. I have shown how shame, guilt and security are mobilized to comprehend the intricacies of social and institutional affective dynamics, precisely because women who were victims of IPV relate to these feelings. The community-regulated emotions, such as ‘shame’, have a role in silencing women victims of IPV in ways which do not guarantee their personal security and, at the same time, shame inhibits public debates on gender-related violence so that the integrity of communities will not be endangered. The empirical findings have shown how shame (defined specifically within the patriarchal structure and functioning at the community level) is a multidimensional factor for social, emotional and political abandonment (whether or not followed by acts of resilience or solidarity).

I have analysed guilt, shame and security as factors that determine specific ingroup and outgroup dynamics. Ingroup tactics to negotiate women’s status and behaviour through emotions are augmented by tensions between groups and enhanced by state interventions. While guilt and shame maintain ingroup codes and rules, women’s concerns about security in a social sense deter them from asking for help from outgroups, particularly state representatives. As the data demonstrate, both Roma and non-Roma women have the tendency to avoid interaction with institutions that do not challenge the IPV phenomenon. The disclosure of IPV experiences is perceived by the community as a threat to group security, and this discourages Roma and non-Roman women from interacting with state representatives.

Women suffer or witness gender-based violence, and this type of knowledge informs the overall support they give to each other when suffering IPV. This support is neither structural nor constant but based on a network of relationships built in the neighbourhood, thus often trespassing barriers of ethnicity, class or age. As a matter of fact, living in the same neighbourhood enhances social ties and solidarity within multiple vulnerable sub-groups. For this reason, Roma women are those who present acts of solidarity more often than non-Roma women. They learn how multiple structures of oppression work against them and thus come to appreciate the value of a women’s support network.

My purpose has been to advance debates on the social and political dimension of shame, guilt and security in relation to IPV. I have argued that state non-intervention is crucial in deterring women from seeking formal assistance and instead abandoning them to community patriarchal structures and the personal turmoil of their experience. IPV is not only an effect of patriarchy, but also entails the acceptance of violence, labelling it as a social norm rather than as social injustice. Social injustice can be challenged only by moving beyond social values and norms and by understanding the potential for solidarity to create political communities. By bringing the issue of IPV to the realm of social justice, solidarity may thrive not only among women – who rely on survival strategies and acts of solidarity within their community – but more broadly within the society at large.

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Notes
1. Roma ethnics in Romania comprise between 5 and 8% of the population. They live in segregated areas as well as in mixed areas, both in rural and urban environments. In Giurgiu the ratio follows the national pattern.
2. Law 217/2003 for preventing and combating domestic violence; Government Decision 686/2005 for the approval of the national strategy to prevent and fight domestic violence; Law 396/2006 on the approval of financial support when starting a family; Law 25/2012 on preventing and combating domestic violence.
3. The school mediator policy is part of the national programme for Roma integration and enables a person from the Roma community to reach out to families to encourage children to go (back) to school.
4. Roma is an endonym that appears in Romani language and which reflects a name chosen by those who self-identify as belonging to the Romani ethnicity. Gypsy is an exonym, a denomination imposed and there is no equivalent in Romani language.
5. Initially, the law criminalizing rape included marital rape, but the law was amended and it also does not address the aggravating situation of IPV.
6. A sociological study conducted in the Republic of Moldova by CBS-AXA (2014) shows that divorced people consider that ‘[couple] violence is a major problem in a percentage of approximately 70%’ (p. 12).

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