

TRiALOGUE Books

# *ATTENTION!*

## Roma on the Road



Eds. Airi Markkanen, Heini Puurunen and Aino Saarinen

Attention!

Roma on the Road

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## ROMA TRILOGY: PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

“What, in the end, is our position on human rights and socio-cultural and political justice?” In 2012, this question concluded the preface of this book when it was published in Finnish. We continued our research and activism on Roma issues within the framework of a European Union project that began in 2013. In RAGE – Hate Speech and Populist Othering in Europe, our Helsinki team focused in its final phase on hate against Roma who arrived here by making use of the free movement directive of the European Union. The urgency of that hate lessened in the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015, which became the most prominent immigration-related issue; for example, after 2016 no new laws have been proposed to drive Roma from Finland. There are still Roma from Eastern and Central Europe on our streets, though at the moment fewer than before due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but they no longer are the primary targets of hate speech and hate acts.

RAGE provided our work with an interesting and productive context because its concluding section, *Militants from the Other Side: Antibodies to Hate Speech and Behaviour*, focused on pro-action. This perspective resulted in research publications both in Europe and here in Finland. *Citizens’ Activism and Solidarity Movements: Contending with Populism* (Eds. Birte Siim, Anna Krasteva and Aino Saarinen, Palgrave 2019) and *Mobilising for Mobile Roma: Solidarity Activism in Helsinki in the 2000s-2010s* (Eds. Aino Saarinen, Airi Markkanen and Anca Enache, Trialogue Books 2020) address the issues that have risen.

In our fieldwork, we were faced with both methodological and ethical challenges and, most importantly, the breadth of pro-Roma activism, which extended from sporadic, “small” but meaningful gestures and deeds by individual actors to the long-term institution-building of established actors. In addition to numerous “friendly neighbours” and their online groups, on the move were well-known civic institutions and politicians, public servants and journalists. Many of them also sought to engage in activism in the distant countries of departure, Romania and Bulgaria. Their motivations had

many sources, from shared Roma ethnicity to common (Pentecostal) religion and universal human rights. Methods of action spoke of their dedication, determination and civil courage.

Yet something was missing. Over the years, we had met and listened to mobile and migrant Roma, but we knew that in order to see human rights and economic, social and political justice realised, it was time for Roma themselves to speak.

Consequently, our publications have grown into a Roma Trilogy, which we wanted to make available to European activists and colleagues. The second volume, *Mobilising for Mobile Roma* (Trialogue Books 2020), was published in English, but the first, *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä* (Like 2012), was in Finnish. Thus, it was necessary for us to return to the 2012 volume and translate it into English as *Attention! Roma on the Road* (Trialogue Books 2021). In the final phase of the trilogy, we will position ourselves as cultural and political mediators. The working title of the third and final volume is *In Our Own Voices*, with Roma themselves as speakers and actors.

Kone Foundation has contributed to the funding of both *Attention!* and *Mobilising* as a “bold initiative”. Once more, our thanks! Among our many other supporters, we also thank the Aleksanteri Institute of the University of Helsinki, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute and its Hirundo drop-in centre, all solidarity actors we have met, all writers, publishers Like and Trialogue Books, and translator Alisa Manninen. And, most of all, the “new Roma” themselves.

In Helsinki, on International Romani Day, April 8, 2021,

The Roma Trilogy team: Anca Enache, Airi Markkanen, Heini Puurunen and Aino Saarinen

## PREFACE

The Roma of the eastern regions of Central and Southern Europe have caught off guard the well-organised and wealthy Nordic countries where we are proud of how local Roma were given apartments and social security during the creation of the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s. These newcomers, have-nots in numerous ways, force us to consider both our own system and our relationship to the “new Europe”, the European Union. How is the principle of free movement realised and how should it be realised? How do we respond to the building of walls in EU Europe in the midst of our own regions, cities and communities? Here in the very sheltered North – as the world’s social benefactors and political peacemakers – do we feel well if we declare ourselves to be bystanders? Do we define paperless people and Travellers as “other”, without participation even in fundamental human rights?

The end of socialist regimes and the EU’s Eastern expansion appear to be particularly ambivalent paths of development when they are viewed from the perspective of the everyday life and culture of excluded groups. A lecture series and seminar named *Romaninaiset ja -perheet liikkeellä Suomessa ja EU-Euroopassa* [Roma women and families on the move in Finland and EU Europe] was held by the University of Helsinki in the autumn of 2010. The participants of the event came from many disciplines and professional fields, and many had already participated in some way in seminars and activity regarding the “Roma question” – which is no wonder, as for years the topic has been among the central disputes between officials, politicians and civic actors.

This book has brought together the thoughts of eleven writers who are active in different fields for the purposes of both wider publicity and to serve as teaching and research material. We have sought to make the chapters easy to read and accessible to all who are interested in the topic. It is also important that in this book problems and questions are looked at through the eyes of both Romanians and Finns, considering countries of both departure and arrival, and without forgetting the inclusion of local Finnish Roma.

The Kone Foundation has supported our book project with a grant – our warmest thanks for this. The Aleksanteri Institute of the University of

Helsinki, whose research and teaching also focus on the regions of Eastern and Southern Europe and the post-socialist transition period, has also been sympathetic. A special thanks to the head of the Institute's IKEBB programme, Jouni Järvinen, DSocSci. In addition to the authors, our thanks also go to the other speakers of the lecture series: the chair of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, MP Pekka Haavisto, Secretary General of the Finnish League for Human Rights, Kristiina Kouros, and Helsinki International Artist Programme (HIAP) curator Marita Muukkonen and researcher Ivor Stodolsky, who have approached Roma culture by means of art. We hope that the reception of the book will help and inspire us in our continuation project, an international publication by researchers.

Our book will be published on Europe Day, 9 May. What, in the end, is our position on human rights and socio-cultural and political justice?

Helsinki, in April 2012

Airi Markkanen, Heini Puurunen and Aino Saarinen







# **INTRODUCTION**

Airi Markkanen, Heini Puurunen and Aino Saarinen

## Everyday Life, Culture and Policies

When we were starting this book project, there was already a great deal of discussion and commentary about the “Roma question” in various media. For the majority of Finns, to whom the plight of the Roma minorities of former socialist countries has been an unknown phenomenon, the information that is available is, however, often such in nature that it must be approached critically.

Questions regarding the life and culture of Roma, who are national minorities in many countries, attract significant interest both in Europe and globally, especially in the UN. The problems of Roma are integrally related to the collapse of socialism and the EU’s expansion in Eastern Europe. In the coming years, the expansion will continue in the Balkans and at the same time the number of Roma from post-socialist countries will increase in EU countries. It is necessary to observe the issue from multiple angles: on the levels of the union, member states and local communities, and through the eyes of minority and majority populations. It is also necessary to use many kinds of materials: interviews based on relationships of trust, fieldwork, archival work, statistics, and texts from media and politics.

In particular, this book will describe the mobile way of life of Roma from Romania and Bulgaria, both in their homelands and on their travels across Europe. The separate case studies from Finland are united by their consideration of issues related to welfare and citizenship. In addition to economic-social and cultural civic rights and duties, a central issue will be the agency of Roma themselves in everyday life and in family and kin relationships. (The culture of Roma will be appraised critically.) Especially for women, gendered human rights violations are relevant. We will present the everyday lives of women who beg or apply for asylum, the meaning of home and the education of children. So-called cross-national motherhood leans on different views of work and income, and it cannot be isolated from the internal power relations of Roma culture.

The book is comprised of five main sections: the introduction, the everyday life of Roma, their history and present, policies and media, and the conclusion.

## ***A beginning***

The first to take the floor is a Finnish Roma, Kyösti Roth. In his chapter, *Roma Beggars in the Manhattan of Helsinki*, he describes his encounters with Romanian Roma and comments on the reporting about their arrival. Following the news created the impression that “Finland was at war with beggars” – as though these three hundred or so Roma were about to conquer the country. Roth recalls his own childhood in the 1950s when Finnish Roma also had to beg. He describes his journey from the son of an “asocial liquor-seller” to a Roma activist who delivered weekly donations of food and clothing to the Kalasatama camp until early autumn 2011 when the city finally, after a struggle that had lasted for some years, took down the camp. Roth also comments on how Finnish Roma relate to Roma from Romania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. It is apparent that local Roma who live in the midst of prosperity find it awkward to encounter an underprivileged beggar. Roth notes that one thing that Finnish Roma could learn from Romanian Roma is the sense of community and togetherness, support and care, that they show to each other.

## ***The everyday life of Roma***

In the study of society and culture, one fundamental issue is the relationship of everyday life and culture to structures and the tension between them. This issue is particularly relevant when it concerns majorities and the minorities pushed into marginalisation, “othered” in multiple ways, who have little or no economic, cultural or political power. Thus, it is important that Roma, a minority group that is Europe’s most numerous yet scattered across many nations, should themselves take part in conversations and struggles. The study of everyday life and culture, fieldwork and spending time with Roma offer an opportunity to make visible their own interpretations, ways of survival, goals and dreams.

In the first main section of the book, Anca Loredana Enache's chapter, *The Cycle of Poverty: The Recent Migration of Romanian Roma to Helsinki as a Survival Strategy*, draws on many years of fieldwork and participation. Enache, who moved to Finland from Romania a few years ago, has worked in the Helsinki Deaconess Institute's Rom po drom project since 2008. She has been active in the Hirundo day centre, which is supported by the Institute and helps various paperless migrants and EU Travellers. Enache lays out the phases of circular migration in which Roma travel from Romania to Finland or other Western European countries and back again in order to earn their daily bread and make money to be sent home to families and relatives left behind. This activity is supported by close-knit networks: they are means of relaying information, help and assistance without which it would be impossible for families to survive. Constant migration transforms the lives of both those who go and those who stay, their human relationships and the internal labour divisions of the family. Through migrations and returns, the concepts and practices of nurturing, care and parenthood are changed. It is interesting that Roma women also have the opportunity to assess and compare the life of women in Finland and their own community.

Airi Markkanen's chapter, *The Conditions of Living for Romanian Roma in Finland and Romania: Is There Room for Roma in EU Europe?*, seeks an answer to a more rarely asked question, "What kinds of people are Romanian Roma beggars?" The chapter is based on the interview materials of the Rom po drom project and Markkanen's own fieldwork in Helsinki and Romanian Roma villages. Markkanen describes the life of Roma women in particular and communicates their stories about life on the tough streets of Helsinki and in the Kalasatama camp. Poverty manifests itself in the most varied ways and material deprivation is often connected to cultural contempt. Markkanen's key point is that the classification of people has not disappeared and apparently never will. But from the margins, can one see something that those in the centre cannot? It is clear that the living conditions of these people are poor due to the marginalisation and stigmatisation aimed at them. At the same time, the majority must be wary of the exoticisation of those who live on the outside and in the shadows, as this can also be considered the production of "otherness".

Heini Puurunen's chapter, *Travelling in the Balkans: Bulgarian and*

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The book offers critical views of free movement and the realisation of human rights across the European Union. It includes ethnographic reflections on the life of Eastern European Roma in their home villages and on the streets of Helsinki, as well as analyses of policies both in countries of origin and in Finland.

### Contributors

Anca Enache, Ari Hirvonen, Airi Markkanen, Susanna Mehtonen, Kimmo Oksanen, Heini Puurunen, Cristina Raț, Kyösti Roth, Aino Saarinen, Miika Tervonen, and Erkki Tuomioja

### Roma Trilogy in the making, Triologue Books

This volume, *Attention! Roma on the Road* (Triologue Books 2021, first published as *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Like 2012), analyses the arrival of those labelled beggars from Eastern Europe. The second volume, *Mobilising for Mobile Roma: Solidarity Activism in Helsinki in the 2000s-2010s* (Triologue Books 2020), focuses on civil society and various actors that are promoting their inclusion and welfare. The third, *In Our Own Voices*, in progress, will give space to the migrants themselves.

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