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Reviewed by Elizabeth Peterson

1 A much anticipated volume on the Finnish Roma

The *Culture of the Finnish Roma* is an anthology on the topic of the Finnish Roma people. The six-chapter (plus preface and epilogue) collection presents an overview of Finnish Romani history, language, and culture. The book's description suggests that the intended audience is an international one, which is why the collection is the first of its kind in English. The impetus for the book, as relayed in the book's description, is to answer questions such as "Is there Roma research in Finland? What is it like? Which perspectives does it utilize?" This review presents the main ideas of the book, while at the same time addressing whether the book's aims have been met.

2 Overview

The volume was created by a collection of Finnish Roma researchers, who, judging from the book, appear to be a small but extremely dedicated cadre. The evidence for this assumption emerges not only from the short list of authors, but also from the fact that the authors describe and cite each other in their individual chapters. These observations are not presented as criticism, but rather as evidence of the reality of the situation: a relatively small and marginalized population has garnered a group of extremely committed academic researchers. As such, the authors are careful to present their own positionality; those who identify as Roma take care to explain how and why this is the case, and those who do not likewise explain their relation to the research topic and how they have gained access to their research communities.

Most of the book's chapters demonstrate the culmination of decades or even a lifetime of work. The preface to the volume, written by the volume's editors Airi Markkanen and Kai Åberg, states that "this anthology ... aims at reaching a wider and more authentic tone stretching towards different aspects of Romani people's societal and communal meanings" (p. 9). The methodologies espoused in the book derive mostly from the field of anthropology, including ethnography, autoethnography, ethnomethodology, thematic analysis, and interviews. The collection circles around the overall theme of "culture" by including separate sections on 1) History, 2) Language and linguistics, 3) Subjectivities and membership. Each section comprises two chapters.

3 Section 1: History

The chapter "A Roma Scholar's Journey into Roma Studies in Finland," by Marko Stenroos, is presented as an introduction to the volume. More than an overview of the Finnish Roma, the chapter raises issues on the research of the Finnish Roma from the perspective of the author. An autoethnography, the chapter begins with a confession, of sorts, about the author's conflicting ideologies about claiming the role of research

expert as a Romani individual. “The hard part of studying one’s own people derives from the academic divide of self and others” (p. 17), he writes. Stenroos discusses multiple significant issues, including the privilege and visibility inherent in his induction into a researcher’s career.

Stenroos eschews a historical perspective of Finnish Roma (although this is the section in which his chapter appears) because, as he states, he wishes to avoid essentialism when it comes to the Finnish Roma. For example, he is extremely critical of DNA-related interpretations of Roma authenticity. In his wide-ranging chapter, he addresses such themes as what Roma culture really is and why it should be problematized as a concept, political and assimilation practices, and issues with previous research. His chapter is the first of many in the volume to establish a link between Pentecostalism and Finnish Roma. Stenroos’s chapter can be considered a state-of-the-art overview of studies of Finnish Roma, from the perspective of a Roma individual who is an expert on his own community.

The second chapter, “From Rejection to Recognition? A Brief History of the Finnish Roma,” by Tuula Rekola and Miika Tervonen, offers a historical account of the Finnish Roma. This chapter offers the period-by-period overview that the first chapter did not. Starting in 1500, the commonly established date when Roma people gained visibility in Finland, Chapter 2 goes step by step through the centuries, ending with the current era. This is one of the few chapters in the book written by *gadje*, or ‘non-Roma’ authors (as the authors themselves report). The authors convincingly present the challenges of developing a reliable history of a group that has been marginalized and, therefore, has either gone undocumented or been recorded by people who were inherently biased. Many of the existing documents, the authors note, were created in response to complaints or crime, offering an unrealistic perception that Roma are problematic people while ignoring everyday, ‘unproblematic’ Roma people. In addition, the historical records show evidence of scapegoating against Roma people.

The chapter establishes links between Finnish and Scandinavian Roma people to other Roma populations, for example those in the UK, and the authors in the volume seem to unambiguously agree that such people have been part of the social fabric of the Nordic countries for at least 500 years. At the same time, there is no accurate way of determining if *tattare* or *zigenare* meant Roma people or something else, rendering historical accounts somewhat unreliable.

This chapter is the first in the volume to make links between Roma vagrancy and several social consequences. One example is the lack of access to the Lutheran Church during the 16th and 17th centuries. A second is disproportionate representation in (forced) military work, for example the construction of the Sveaborg sea fortress. This strong military association later led to a natural passageway into police work, which is still evident today. A third example is the relationship to horses and horsemanship, which in turn relates to peddling, especially the peddling of glassware.

This is also the first chapter to mention a recurring theme in the book: the ideology that Roma people are not hardworking. Yet this and other chapters highlight that Roma people have had to be hardworking in order to survive. There is also an ideology that Roma people cannot be trusted, and that they are thieves. As noted in the chapter, however, Roma people could not risk stealing, because they had to maintain a sparkling clean reputation to be allowed to winter with Finnish families who lived in permanent dwellings.

The itinerant circumstances changed drastically in the period following World

War II, or even prior. About half of Finland's Roma population was among the forced evacuation of Karelia after Finland's Continuation War. At the same time, modernization and centralization of services (e.g., the welfare state) placed Roma people firmly at the margins for multiple reasons. In the 1980s, Roma people were disproportionately represented among those who moved from Finland to Sweden for economic opportunity.

4 Language and linguistics

In Chapter 3, "Romani Language in my Life," Henry Hedman treats his own relationship with Romani language, which was a heritage language (Polinsky 2018) in his childhood home (in particular, Karelian Romani). Hedman refers to Romani as his "second mother tongue" (p. 55). His chapter is a heartfelt love song to the Romani language, which, however, he never defines in terms of linguistic specifications. He writes about his own personal journey with the Romani language, including how he came to speak it, what it means to him, and offers highlights from his long career as a teacher of Romani language. Hedman's chapter is a seamless continuation of the previous chapter, as he is a living example of the historical facts presented in Chapter 2: he was born in 1952 in a Romani suburb of Helsinki, which sprang up after World War II. His grandmother, presumably, was one of the evacuees of Karelia. His family frequently hosted houseguests in his childhood home, and during the summer he travelled himself with his own family, peddling goods (he mentions glass in particular). His family was also one of the many who moved to Sweden for work.

Hedman uses his chapter as an opportunity to discuss cultural aspects, such as proverbs he learned from his grandmother. A new favorite expression gained from the chapter is *pherdo kissik na dela gooli* 'a full purse doesn't make noise.' Hedman also discusses issues such as "light" Roma people and being able to pass in the mainstream population, as well as language attitudes against Romani.

The latter portion of Hedman's chapter presents strides in the Finnish government and wider society to support Roma people, for example the establishment of the first Romani language church in Turku (in 1995). There has been a Roma language board since 1997, and the Institute for the Languages of Finland (KOTUS) has established orthographic and grammatical guidelines for Finnish Romani. At the same time, formal support has increased; however, the actual number of Romani speakers has drastically decreased, with an estimated 70 percent of the Finnish Romani people saying that they cannot speak Romani. Hedman finishes his chapter with a strong call to action, using the pronoun *we*: "We owe it to our grandparents to not let the language disappear." (pg. 64).

The following chapter on language and linguistics, "Themes and Methods in Finnish Romani Linguistics," by Kimmo Granqvist, offers a formalist counterpart to Hedman's more personal perspective. Granqvist records an exhaustive and generous overview of the linguistic study of Finnish Romani dating back to the 18th century. This lengthy and detailed chapter contains no fewer than six pages of references. The chapter's content is divided into treatments of wordlists/dictionaries, grammars, historical linguistics and dialectology, contact between Romani and Finnish, attrition among Finnish Romani speakers, and the mixed languages Fennoromani and Roma Finnish. An interesting assertion made near the end of that chapter is that Finnish Romani is now mixed to the point that it could be considered a variety of Finnish. Granqvist discusses how contemporary varieties of

Finnish Romani and Roma Finnish are intertwined, with no clear boundary between them.

In the latter portion of the chapter, Granqvist treats the “big” linguistics topics: corpora and computational linguistics, pragmatics properties of Finnish Romani, and language sociology and sociolinguistics, including language attitudes. He notes, for example, that pragmatic hierarchy in Finnish Romani hinges on age differences, with deference paid to individuals even 5-6 years older than the interlocutor. For his part, Granqvist approaches the survey findings reported in the previous chapter (a study carried out by Hedman) with caution: Granqvist notes that Finnish Romani speakers have a tendency to underreport their fluency and language use, making the actual number of speakers difficult to ascertain. In any case, it is evident that the amount of linguistic research on the Finnish Romani (a good portion of it carried out by Granqvist) rises at the same time the number of speakers decreases.

5 Section 3: Subjectivities and membership

The fifth chapter in the book, “Ambiguous Belongings and (Un)certain Paths: Pentecostal Kale Subjectivities in the Practice of Finnish Life,” by Raluca Bianca Roman, treats the relationship of Finnish Roma people with the Pentecostal Church of Finland. While not able to offer specific reasons for this association in Finland, the author notes an overall global growth of Roma Pentecostalism. Roman is the only author in the volume who does not reside in Finland, and whose academic career is elsewhere (she is based in the UK). This could be one reason why she is the first and only author in the volume to offer up basic background and statistics: in an extensive footnote on the first page of her chapter, she gives an estimated number of Finnish Roma, 10,000, contextualizes the population within the greater population of Finland, and describes how and when the Roma people arrived in Finland.

The final chapters of the volume, this one included, bring to the forefront what has been referred to as the push-pull effect (or even “syndrome”) for marginalized minority groups such as African American people in the United States (see Smitherman 1977). This concept refers to the need for members of a minority group, especially a disenfranchised minority, to navigate between worlds: the in-group community which constitutes their personal life, and the broader public world which constitutes mainstream society.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork comprising Roman’s PhD thesis, Chapter 5 describes such cultural elements as the distinctive dress customs of the Finnish Romani, namely the long, dark skirts, white blouses and high-heeled shoes characteristic of some (not all) Finnish Romani women, and the dark suits and white shirts worn by some (not all) men. She discusses the overall ethical code characterizing the Finnish Romani lifestyle, and establishes links between this lifestyle and modern-day Pentecostalism in Finland. She likewise describes links between substance abuse in the community, experiences in prison, and faith in God as an aid to recovery. At only nine pages, this is the shortest chapter in the book, but one which sheds light and makes connections between a historically itinerant and marginalized people and the need to hold fast to something immovable – like religion. Of particular interest in this chapter was the description of friendships between Finnish Romani women, connected through their religious faith.

Chapter 6, “Finnish Romani Women’s Pathways to Work: Struggling for Full Societal Membership,” by Sirkka Mikkola, explores the connection between working

life and Finnish Romani people, especially women. This chapter brings certain characteristics to the forefront that previous chapters did not; for example, the tendency for Roma families to have more children relative to the overall Finnish population, and the expectations placed on Roma women to look a certain way, adhere to strict rules of domestic cleanliness, host houseguests, and care for multiple generations of family. The author highlights the tensions inherent between being a traditional Finnish Roma woman, entailing a distinctive form of femininity and womanhood, at odds in many ways with the expectations of mainstream Finnish working life. Mikkola characterizes several of the established challenges of being part of a marginalized minority, such as the burden of representation, the tendency for complicity in their own marginalization (through mirroring the denigrations of the larger society), and, importantly for this chapter, the necessity for minoritized women to work. The intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender is well established (see, for example, hooks 2000), creating distinctive forms of feminism among marginalized women due to the sheer necessity to be part of the work force for economic reasons (i.e., only privileged white women can afford to not work).

Both Chapter 6 and the following chapter, the volume's Epilogue, highlight the role of modesty for Finnish Roma women. It was surprising to learn (Chapter 6) that the characteristic style of dress of Finnish Roma women has been in use only since about the 1970s, although the style itself dates back to the fashion of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The chapter designated as the Epilogue, Chapter 7, further treats the special role of Finnish Roma women. The author, Airi Markkanen, bases her observations on no less than 30 years of ethnographic fieldwork. This chapter takes a sensitive but critical stance toward the treatment of Finnish Roma women within their own personal communities, without shying away from gender roles and the related downside of domestic violence and abuse. This chapter brought up many fascinating points, including the shame placed on (some) women within the community for breaking up families, even when the men are violent and abusive. For this reason, it is not uncommon to see shared households with foster children among Roma communities, as well as a disproportionate number of Roma youth who end up in the Finnish foster system. This was the only chapter to bring up sexuality and courting practices. The chapter ends with an overview of what it means for Roma people to be "genuine" and "proper" Roma, which includes such creeds as treating everyone equally with respect, honoring the elders, and helping others.

6 Discussion

I was eager to read and review this book because, apparently, I am a prime example of the target audience: an "international" English-speaker who is interested in the topic. As a linguist, my exposure to Romani research has primarily been through the work of other linguists (e.g., Matras 2010, 2015). Aside from this, my understanding of the Finnish Roma has been vague or incidental: I have certainly seen Finnish Roma people in public spaces during my twenty-plus years living in Finland, but I never understood much about what the special clothing symbolizes or how to account for the distinctive social practices (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). It was a surprise, for example, when in 2012 the American television host and celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain visited Finland, accompanied by the musician Sami Yaffa, and the subsequent television show featured visits to Finnish Roma bars and social settings. Prior to this, I did not know that Sami Yaffa was part

of a Finnish Roma community, nor that there were public establishments in the capital region that were frequented by Finnish Roma. This relates to the notion of “passing” as discussed in Chapter 3 of the book. During the years I have lived in Finland, I have heard older people, for example my mother-in-law, relate memories of Finnish Roma people wintering at their childhood home. The personal accounts I have heard focus on how clean and respectful the Roma families were, and how good the men were with horses. At the same time, however, as a migrant to Finland I have been perplexed by a term often used to refer to Roma people, which from an outside perspective is confounding: a word (which I purposely do not write here) meaning ‘black people.’

This volume, then, is a most welcome offering of facts, insights, and research on the topic of Finnish Roma. It offered up fascinating descriptions to create a holistic view of the Finnish Roma people, demonstrating a complex and vibrant community. The volume’s authors comprise an optimal range of seniority, from relative newcomers to those who have decades of experience in the field. Likewise, the voices in the volume constitute a balanced chorus of community insiders, who write from both personal and academic perspectives, and those whose relation to the community in question is largely as researchers.

The range of topics curated for the volume is complete enough in its breadth, offering a composite picture of a complex situation. One observation is that the editors of the volume could have contributed more to the overall understanding of the situation by offering some key facts and contextualization in the Preface, or to have written a more traditional introduction to the book. As is, the chapter designated as the “Introduction” does not read as a traditional introduction. As previously noted, it was not until Chapter 5 that fundamental facts were presented in an explicit fashion, including an estimated number of Finnish Roma, their relation to the larger Finnish population, and so on. Indeed, the critical questions about ethnicity and essentialism, brought up in Chapter 1, coupled with its personal, retrospective voice, would make it an ideal candidate to sum up the book – especially as these provocative questions were not really taken up in later chapters.

Likewise, the chapter designated as the Epilogue is not so much a traditional epilogue or conclusion as it is a retrospective of the work of the author. Rather than rounding out the volume, the chapter presents new information on a different but related topic: women in the Finnish Roma community. It is unclear whether the editors and authors wished to shy away from the contents and patterns of traditional edited volumes, or if the lack of traditional introduction and conclusion chapters was something they simply did not have time and resources to do. In addition, whether it was the decision of the editors or the publisher, it is unusual that the chapters are not numbered (although I have numbered them in this review for the sake of clarity), and there is no index. While the chapters fit together well as a complementary package, the reader is left to do a lot of piecing together to form a complete picture.

The impetus for the volume was to fill a gap in the literature for an international audience. The volume achieves this aim, but in some ways its application is inconsistent. There are many aspects of the volume that might not be completely comprehensible to a truly international, English-speaking audience. For example, some key notions in the book, such as Pentecostalism, Lutheranism, or even sauna, would need explication for a true “outsider” to make sense of them.

This is certainly true of the unproblematic use of the term *white* to contrast mainstream Finnish population with Finnish Roma in some of the chapters (for example Chapter 6 and the Epilogue). *Whiteness* and its relation to ethnicity have been discussed at length, even in the Finnish context (see Hoegaerts et al. 2022), and it is unclear but dubious if the use of this term in an international context would be met with understanding or indeed acceptance. Even for myself as a reader, someone who has lived in Finland for decades and who speaks Finnish, it is unclear if *white* is used in the book because it is a term that Finnish Roma use, if indeed Finnish Roma are viewed by the authors as being un-*white*, or if it relates to the Finnish derogatory term for Roma people (the word that directly translates as ‘black people’). Other, less problematic, language issues also come into play, such as *ice sticks* rather than ‘icles’ and *document* rather than ‘documentary.’ There was likewise inconsistent application of prepositions and articles throughout the volume, depending largely, it would appear, on the original English language use of the individual authors. I was able to make sense of these instances because I understand Finnish; it is not clear if a monolingual English speaker would successfully comprehend some of the English in the book. This is not a criticism, but an observation: I found the use of English appealing, but that’s because I could understand it.

Like any research treatment of an academic topic, this volume offers expert information on many issues, while at the same time opening up several questions. For example, while going to great lengths to describe the customary dress of Finnish Roma people, the book’s authors never specified how and why these exact clothing styles came to be cultural necessities, or, for example, why the styles became prevalent in the 1970s. Another question pertains to female modesty: it remains unclear why some Finnish Roma women adhere to rules of modesty to the extent that they cannot change their clothing even in front of other women, yet they go to public saunas in Finland (as mentioned in the final sentence of the book’s Epilogue). In future work on the Finnish Roma, it would be fascinating to read about contemporary Roma society, including young people and their language and identity, and an investigation of the historical Finnish Roma compared to itinerant, new Roma in Finland.

7 Final remarks

This volume offers a compelling insight, in English, into the world of the Finnish Roma. Fastidiously and sensitively discussed and researched, the volume is a testimony to the dedication of the scholars who have produced it. It is an important contribution that will serve as a tool for understanding the Roma population in Finland for a long time.

While the book is intended for an international audience, there are certain aspects of it that may require contextualization and self-directed research from readers who are not already familiar with Roma research in general and with Finnish Roma in particular. Indeed, the ideal reader of the volume is probably someone who already knows Roma research and wants to augment that knowledge with the fine-tuned observations of the authors.

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Contact information:

Elizabeth Peterson
University of Jyväskylä
Department of Language and Communication Studies
elizabeth.l.peterson@jyu.fi