Finland

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7.1 Introduction

While Finland would not traditionally be considered as being part of the Central, South Eastern or Eastern European region, it directly connects to the developments occurring elsewhere in the region, not only through its historical connection to Russia (i.e. until 1917, Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia) but, most importantly, through the ways in which Roma civic emancipation occurred in the aftermath of the First World War. Furthermore, while little is known or written about Roma works of literature from Finland, several key authors and pieces by and for Roma appeared during the interwar period, offering important and crucial perspectives in the shaping of Roma emancipation in the country. This chapter explores the context of these developments, with a focus on key works and key protagonists that have contributed to what we can now call Romani literature in Finland. The aim is both to introduce the pre-cursors to literary pieces authored by Roma, while also highlighting the role of specific organisations, authors and figures in the development of Romani literature.

In fact, early twentieth century was the period in which Roma religious mobilisation seems to have been a strong feature in the country, primarily through the role played in this regard by the Finnish Gypsy Mission (*Suomen Mustalaislähetys*), an Evangelical religious organisation which began a large work of Christianisation of Roma in the country (more on this organisation in Section 4). The latter played an active and important part not only in promoting particular policies concerning Kaale/Roma in the country (such as sedentarisation and education), but, most importantly for the purpose of this chapter, in influencing key Roma writers and writers of Romani literature in the country. While the interwar period, and especially the 1930s, has often been presented as being one of the organisation's most 'quiet' periods (Viita 1967:117) and, connectedly, one of the quieter periods in the production of Romani literature more broadly, this situation is undoubtedly grounded in the broader social-historical context of Finland between 1918–1938: a country battling with an economic recession, country-wide starvation and a struggle to create a new sense of unity in the follow up of its civil war. Some words about these processes and the earlier historical events that shaped them are, therefore, needed, in order to contextualise the process of Roma mobilisation and the development of Romani literature in the country.

First of all, after the Russian Revolution in 1917, the role of Finland as being part of Russia became a stronger source of tension and, on December 6, 1917, Finland declared its independence from Russia. This led to different internal, national struggles for consolidating and strengthening a Finnish national identity. What followed was also the ensuing of a Finnish Civil War in 1918 and the beginning of the First World War (Alapuro 1988). The interwar period, therefore, would see the continuation for a struggle for national identity, and a rebuilding of society in the aftermath of several national and international conflicts, which saw fewer activities being promoted by and for the Roma in the country.

In terms of Finland's Roma population (i.e. Kaale, the name of the community under question and the name members of the community often use for themselves), and the specific national policies concerning them, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the debate on the so-called "Gypsy issue" (*mustalaiskysymys*) – namely how to address the lack of permanent settlement, the lower education and employment of so-called Gypsies in the country (*mustalaiset*, in Finnish) – had become a focal point within the Senate of the Grand Duchy of Finland. In support of the debate, the Senate held a broad clergy-led survey in the 1860s (KA, KD 561/51, 1863). As the survey showed, the Western Ostrobothnia district and the South-Eastern Karelian and Ingrian districts near St. Petersburg emerged as the central areas for about 700 Gypsies in Finland (Komiteamietintö 1900:42).

Karelian parishes also emerge as special regions for the story told in this chapter: the Finnish Gypsy Mission, founded in 1905, whose publication, *Kiertolainen* (Vagrant), later became a key element in the early stages of Romani literature in the country (see sub-section 4), had moved its headquarters (between 1911–1917) from Tampere (a city in Western Finland) to the Karelian city of Viipuri (Russian *Вийборг*, *Vyborg*, Swedish *Viborg*, German *Wiborg/Wiburg*), only to start again, in 1920, in the capital of Finland, Helsinki.

The process of discussing the 'Gypsy issue' culminated in the 1890s when the Senate set up a committee which conducted an extensive survey of the Gypsies through the Central Statistical Office (TK, K 9, 1895). In addition to that, the renowned Gypsylogist Arthur Thesleff (1871–1920) was hired as secretary of the Committee, and he conducted extensive expeditions compiling information on Gypsies in Finland (and elsewhere). While preparing a comprehensive contribution of the Committee's report (Komiteamietintö 1900), he also wrote a separate article on the colonisation (i.e. settlement) of Gypsies in Finland (Thesleff 1898), which he referenced in the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society when acting as its president (Thesleff 1911a). Thesleff's collection is available on-line in the Finnish National Library's Zingarica-database (www.kansalliskirjasto.fi).

The report itself contained accurate statistical data. According to the survey, 90 percent of total 1551 Gypsies living in the area of Finland were without a permanent settlement. In terms of education, 50 people were reported as attending schools, 17 were attending ambulatory schools, 21 were in elementary schools, 3 were attending prison schools and 9 other schools. There were 73 people who reported to have both good reading and writing

skills, 513 people with only reading skills and the number of illiterate ones was 396 people. For instance, a survey by the Central Statistical Office estimated that the number of adult Gypsies with both reading and writing skills was 10 percent (the total in Finland at the time being circa 50 percent). It is likely that similar data would be valid for the inter-war period of time (Komiteamietintö 1900:49, 59, 88).

As mentioned above, the post-1918 context was also characterised by a process of uniting and consolidating the Finnish nation as a whole. This was grounded in the long history of Finland which, between 1809 and 1917, was a Grand Duchy of Russia. Interestingly, it was during this time that the country's national epic, the *Kalevala*, was published (in 1835) and when a Finnish nationalistic movement (also known as *Fennomania*) developed, from the 1860s. The important point is to note that the *Fennomans*, in their nation-building process, emphasised Finnishness, especially as a linguistic, cultural and nation-based quality. This led to scholars being primarily interested, for linguistic and cultural reasons, in the study of folklore defined as Finnish or Finno-Ugrian, and to other groups being excluded from their collection work. Even though Roma's nationality at the time was identified as Finnish, their own language (Finnish Romani) and their own folklore and oral history were excluded from the national programs of Finnish folklorists and linguists.

Nevertheless, it sometimes happened that folklore items – told by Roma – were included in the archives and publications as examples of “Finnish folklore” (Blomster and Mikkola 2014:21–24). For example, some of the folklore material told by Karelian Rom August Herman Berg – collections which included magic traditions, fairy tales, proverbs and songs – ended up in the most significant publication of Finnish folklore, “the ancient poems of the Finnish people” – i.e. the Finnish runic *kalevalametric* poems (Blomster and Mikkola 2017). Furthermore, although the official folklore collecting process broadly ignored Roma, there were, alongside Arthur Thesleff, others who were active in the field of Roma folklore in Finland: such as prison school teacher and Lutheran minister Adam Lindh (a non-Roma, born 1843), Karelian Rom Herman Hagert, as well as the founder of Gypsy Mission, Oskari Jalkio (1882–1952, first Anders Oskar Storbacka, later on Oskar Johnsson and, since 1922, Oskari Jalkio).

Not much is known about Herman Hagert's songbook, which compiled songs sung by Roma living in Karelia (again, a region of clear importance for the purpose of this chapter). The manuscript and the cover letter, which contains the oldest known sentences written in Romani language by a Finnish Kaale, nevertheless highlights that Roma may also have aspired to participate in the literacy process in the country. For example, Hagert presents a wish that the recipient, allegedly Arthur Thesleff, would edit and deliver to him “the book,” in accordance with his promises. Presumably, Hagert is here offering his collection of songs for Thesleff to publish (Blomster 2012b:326–327). Hagert's cover letter is written both in Finnish Romani and in Finnish, the first sentence is in Romani: “*Ata louvo me panna na liijom te laakavau, me laakavaa varikonge,*” and the text continues in Finnish:

That five marks I didn't get to put yet, but yes I will still put it ...
 but what have you promised about my destiny, please edit and send me a book
 Goodbye, take care and stay in the grace of God
 this hopes your cheap friend Herman Hagert Sortavala.

(Blomster 2012b:326–27)

Another early example of independent activism to develop Romani literature in the country was the work of minister and prison schoolteacher Adam Lindh, a non-Rom (Blomster 2012a:288–289). Lindh, while doing prison-work in the eastern cities of Vyborg and Lappeenranta, had compiled his manuscript *Aapisliin romaned sibbah ranijas A. Lindh sigijibosgero-are-fõras* (ABC-book in Romani), with the help of Roma prisoners. Besides including the translations of religious texts, songs and chapters of the Bible into Finnish Romani, the manuscript consists of Finnish Romani vocabulary, mathematics, geography and also some reading texts possibly written directly from the dictation of Roma narrators. Here is an example:

Gräi (Finnish Romani)

Miero i grasni hin tsihko gräi, douva frastela tshikkas hast, less hin hou a orhos khuuro, kata me buud rikkavaha; hahava leske khas da djou, että veelas vela thuudehe da hou sarjage. Da ka vela baaride, draade me less aro fooras.

Horse (translation from Finnish made by Anette Åkerlund)

My horse is a good horse, it runs very fast, it has a fine stallion foal, which I like a lot; I feed it hays and oats, that it would come to good meat and it would have a fine brush. And when it gets bigger, I drive it into town.

(SE/RA/730781/1; see also in Zingarica-database in www.kansalliskirjasto.fi)

At the official level, the apparent silences in publishing Roma folklore and oral history in Finland continued during the interwar period. Only Estonian academician and linguist Paul Ariste (1905–1990), who also published the book *Romenge paramiši: Mustlaste muinasjutte* (Estonian Gypsy Fairy Tales) (Ariste 1938), published the biography of Ina Roth from the city of Jyväskylä, recorded in 1938, in Romani language (Ariste 2008:208–11, Ariste 1940; for originals see Zingarica, Paul Ariste, Fond 330, M 194:2). Nevertheless, both Arthur Thesleff and Oskari Jalkio, published broadsheet ethnographic reviews of Roma life in English, in Swedish and in German, in separate books, scientific seasonal journals and newspapers (Johnsson 1912c; Thesleff 1904). Texts on Roma/Gypsies written by Thesleff and Jalkio in Finnish are only available in the Gypsy Mission's journal *Kiertolainen* (Johnsson 1912a; Thesleff 1911b).

Interestingly, in the hopes of some Roma activists at the time, the gathering and publishing of Roma songs, personal life stories and language was most obviously seen as a good thing in terms of expressing their identity. It is referred to, for example, by

an anonymous Roma reader's letter published in *Kiertolainen* (1913a:21), where he/she presents his/her wishes that Roma songs be published as sheet music. However, the number of Roma songs published in *Kiertolainen* remained low: only two Roma songs ended up being released. For example, *Gudujensa, kamajensa/Riding bells are ringing* is a song sung by youngsters riding with their horses and tells about the marriage customs of Finnish Roma (Kiertolainen 1912). The other published song is named *Romano/Roma* (Kiertolainen 1914a). The song is about a group of Roma visiting neighbourhoods unknown to them and encountering other Roma people there:

Romano (in Finnish Romani)

Ğas, ğas te dikkas ta ğas, ğas te hörökavas, sar hin aro boldo boliba nii!
Doori laha ħunnas ta doori laha ğaanas, sar hin are vare stedi ta thaane.

Oi, oi ka ğeejom ta oi, oi ka avjom daari, aro dauva hiistigo thaana ta stedos.
Fedde sas ka jommas ta fedde sas ka sommas, ar mo kamlo, eigo pingimen stedos.

Ma aahen ħojimen, ma čuuvun bengilboske, me ka jommas are dala stedi!
Avjom te dikkaa ta avjom te ħunnaa, sar hin daari mare kokare naarti.

Roma: (from Finnish original)

Let us go see, let's go hear what this baptized world is like!
That's where we get to hear and that's where we get to know how the world is elsewhere.

Oh, when I went and oh, when I came here, here in a terrible, dreary place!
Better to live and better for me to be in my well-known localities.

Don't you hate me, don't feel sorry for me coming here!
I just came to see and hear how my miserable tribe lives here.

(Kiertolainen 1914a:3)

It was only in 1939 (i.e. already the interwar period) that some poems and songs published in *Kiertolainen* were collated by Oskari Jalkio in a separate bilingual publication, titled *Romanenge ğiülja: Romaanilauluja* (Roma Songs) (Jalkio 1939). This publication is an important example of the development of Romani literature, in the context of the Gypsy Mission's activities in Finland. The publication contains eleven spiritual song texts, including translations of songs frequently sung within the Finnish Free Church and Roma-themed texts written by Jalkio to familiar melodies: such as a translation of the song *Kajide tuut, mo Raij, kajide tuut* (Nearer, My God, to Thee) – the so-called “Titanic hymn”, allegedly the last song the band on RMS Titanic played before the ship sank, Jalkio's text *Saaro Jesuseske* to a Finnish school song (I give everything to Jesus, the horse tradings and the lies, all my ferocious actions on the market, playing cards and fraud), and *Kaalo* to Elemér Szentirmay's melody *Csak egy kislány van a világon*

(*Oo, som feddem me kaaleske at biçeereskiiro staava me!*). In particular, three spiritual texts written by so-called “Gypsy Girl” were included in the collection. The foreword of the book was written by Eeli Jokinen, who served at the time as the executive director of the Gypsy Mission and as an editor in the Finnish Free Church’s Youth Association, the publisher of the book.

Worth mentioning is also that, in the interwar period, there was an interesting one-man project, which had a large role in shaping the Roma and literature in Finland: the collection of “Roma Folklore” (*Romaaniperinne*, in 1957) was formed in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society from the Roma folklore and oral history collected by Matti Simola (1926–2004), a non-Roma self-taught collector of folklore. Simola compiled his extensive collection in the 1930s and 1960s in collaboration with more than 40 named Roma individuals. It should be noted that Simola’s materials contain many autobiographical narratives written down after dictation from his informants. Simola later wrote the script for a folklore manuscript, which he sent straight to Sylvi Kekkonen, ‘the mother of the nation’ and the wife of Finnish president Urho Kekkonen. The manuscript titled *Romaani Tarinoita. Kirjoitettu valkolaisille jotta he voisivat paremmin ymmärtää keskuudessaan eläviä romaaneja* (Roma Stories. Written for the White People in Order to Better Understand Roma Living among Them) also remained unpublished (Blomster and Mikkola 2018).

Thus, while Simola’s contributions of notebooks to Finnish folklore were contested – as they included the narratives of Roma from outside of Finland (i.e. not Finnish Kaale) and as some Roma questioned later on about the materials could not recognise their own folklore within it – this is not necessarily the most important aspect. These were the first materials in Finland to be labelled under the title of “Roma Folklore” within the Finnish archives. In other words, while the materials remain informal, they are nevertheless a note-worthy entry, as they reveal the contribution of Roma informants with songs and materials which shaped the development of Roma folklore in the country.

7.2 Precursors to Finnish Roma Literature. Kalle Tähtelä: the Socialist Revolutionary

As can be seen from the above, the specific case of the development and shaping of Romani literature in Finland needs to be understood within its particular social and historical frames. In this sense, the lower number of publications and materials from the interwar period is interesting also given the context in which the ‘Gypsy issue’ had been designated as a focal point within the country and, as we shall see below, within the sphere of religious evangelism, from the start of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, an important aspect to highlight is that Roma writers and intellectuals appeared on the scene much earlier than this period. One example of a prominent Roma writer in this respect was Kalle Tähtelä.

Kalle Tähtelä (also known as Franzen) was born on the 26th May, 1891, in Leppävirta, in the Northern Savonia region of Finland, to Aleksanteri Franzen (formerly Hagert) and Retriikka Jaakontytär Junno. He was a poet, journalist, gardener, herbal healer, socialist, and fighter pilot on the Bolshevik side in the Russian Civil War. Throughout his life, he was an active journalist and writer. Among the things he published were, for example, pamphlets, translations of other works and plays, and original plays. Being a devout socialist, and later part of the “Reds” army (i.e. the socialist army aiming to create a socialist republic in Finland, after its independence from Russia) under the conditions of the Finnish Civil War, he often published many of his works in the publishing house of the Labour Movement (for more details, see Tervonen 2012:130–131).

He came from a mixed family: his father Roma and his mother Finnish. Among other things, Kalle Tähtelä was a fairly unique case. Unlike the majority of Roma in the country, at the time, his family was quite wealthy, and the children were educated. His family-owned, for instance, their own home, grounded in his forefather’s participation within the army. Tähtelä attended primary school in Leppävirta, Kuopio and Porvoo and, after a couple of years in Russia, he moved to Helsinki (ibid.). His upper secondary school education (lyseo) was interrupted when Kalle entered the newspaper industry, working first for the dailies *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* (Southern Finland News) and then for *Aamulehti* (Morning Paper) (ibid.). Among many of his work activities, he would eventually go on to become a prolific and productive writer.

Initially, he began working in different cities across Finland, as a journalist. Most of his work was a journalistic style (i.e. pieces of local news). Moreover, much of his writing focused on social revolutionary ideals, a theme most prominent towards the end of his life. In 1909, when he was just 18 years old, Tähtelä published the only piece of writing to hint towards his own family and community background, the *Mustalaisen kosto* (Gypsy Revenge), a three-act play in five short parts (written in Finnish), which was later republished several times (Tähtelä 1909). The play is inspired by the story *Liv* written by Norwegian theologian and writer Kristofer Janson (published for the first time in the book *Fraa Bygdom/From the Country*, 1866). That is also why the main character’s name was Aslak, which is a very common name among the Sámi people in the North. *Liv* was translated into Finnish in 1879 (Janson 1879).

The *Gypsy Revenge* play is, in essence, a romantic revenge story about a Gypsy young man named Aslak, whose father was killed by a man called Gunnar Haugen many years before. Encouraged by his mother, Guro, Aslak seeks to revenge his father’s death. Making his plans for revenge, Aslak ends up working in Gunnar’s secluded cottage, where he plans to seduce Gunnar’s only daughter, Liw. He also begins spreading rumours about Gunnar’s violent past. Nevertheless, Aslak eventually falls in love with Liw, and, despite his mother’s demands, he cannot take his final and planned revenge. Instead, he reconciles with Gunnar and ends up living permanently in their house, with Liw (Tähtelä 1909).

As one can see, the story partly tackled issues of blood-feuding and family revenge. Nevertheless, the feuding ends with reconciliation, as love is seen to conquer hate

(Tähtelä 1909). This play is also the only one in which the theme of ‘Gypsiness’ even features in Kalle Tähtelä’s work. It is nevertheless interesting to point out this particular theme of the play, and the struggle of its protagonist to make good the revenge of his father’s death and his love for his enemy’s daughter.

In effect, one can see traces of his biography within it, even if not specifically mentioned. As Miika Tervonen has previously argued (2012:130–31), if one looks at his own family’s history, Kalle Tähtelä had long-lived somewhat both within the world of the macro society (i.e. Finnish society) and that of his Roma family, which is also reflected in the narrative of the *Gypsy Revenge*. Being born into a Roma family, but a settled and relatively wealthy one (and, at that, a type of life somewhat detached from other Roma families in the country), Kalle Tähtelä’s biography was undoubtedly shaped by this position. Educated, and thriving for a literary career throughout his life (be it journalism, plays or translations), he also constitutes a unique and distinctive point in the history of Romani literature in the country. His written contributions are undoubtedly contributions to both the broader genre of Finnish literature of the time and to Romani literature more specifically, a potential sign of his belonging to both the Roma community and the Finnish nation.

His career as a writer continued after the publication of this play, but also moved away from Finland itself. In 1910, for instance, Tähtelä went on to study in Germany and, later, in 1911, he moved to the United States, where he worked in different capacities: as a servant, gardener, natural healer etc. (ibid.). While in the United States he also turned his attention back to journalism, having worked and published in several American magazines.

Tähtelä also interestingly adopted a socialist worldview during his travelling years abroad. Thus, he applied for jobs specifically in Finnish-language labour socialist magazines, which were widely published in the United States at that time. In addition to his work as a journalist, he wrote two other plays and published poems and short stories. Kalle Tähtelä also studied in New York at the Rand School of Social Science and at Columbia University in the Department of Journalism, also taking lectures on dramaturgy (J. J. 1921:3).

Not much else is known about his time in the United States or Germany, except for the fact that one of his short story books reflects the experience of immigrants in the country (*Siirtolaiset/ Immigrants*). Additionally, among his most notable works, Tähtelä published the following plays and short stories: *Ihmisiä: seitsemän novellia/ People: Seven Short Stories* (Tähtelä 1913a); *Ihmisiä: siirtolaisnovelleja/ People: Short Stories of Immigrants* (Tähtelä 1913b); *Lowellin lakko, kolminäytöksinen näytelmä/ Lowell’s Strike: a Three-Act Play* (Tähtelä 1913c), all in 1913, in Finnish. In addition to this, he had translated the following pieces: *Ihmisteurastamo: kuvauksia yleiseuropalaisesta sodasta/ A Human Slaughterhouse: Descriptions of a Pan-European War* (Tähtelä 1915) and *Natsaretin kirvesmies/ Nazarenian Carpenter* (Tähtelä 1916).

When Tähtelä returned to Finland, in 1917, he had already become a convinced socialist. His socialist ideals seem to have been sparked (or, perhaps, developed) while living

in the United States. In fact, shortly after return to Finland, and just before the start of the Finnish Civil War, Tähtelä became the editor of a socialist newspaper in Turku (*Länsisuomen Työmies*/Western Finland Working Man, later *Sosialisti*/Socialist) and active among the socialist revolutionaries of the time (Tervonen 2012:130–31).

He was also part of the 'Reds', within the Finnish Civil War and, after the failed revolt of the 'Reds', Tähtelä escaped to Russia. While in Russia, he joined the Red Naval Forces of the Baltic Sea, as a fighter pilot. General Nikolai Judenitš' (a commander of the Russian Imperial Army during First World War and the leader of the anti-communist White movement in Northwestern Russia during the Civil War) troops shot down Tähtelä's plane near Petrograd on the October 22, 1919. While he survived the crash and managed to escape overnight, seeking shelter with his fellow pilot, he was captured and was executed two days later, on October 24, 1919 (Geus 2004:189), at the age of 28. His body was found after the retreat of the Whites. Tähtelä was buried on the November 11, 1919, in the Common Tomb of the Revolutionary Heroes of Oranienbaum, present-day Lomonosov, part of St Petersburg (Tervonen 2012:131).

Through his life story and his work, Kalle Tähtelä is undoubtedly an interesting example of a prolific writer, producing literature that may, in some respects, be considered some of the earliest written works authored by Roma writers. At the same time, his contribution as a writer of mainstream literature is equally crucial and important in showcasing the active role of authors of Roma/Gypsy background in shaping the literature of their respective nations as well as Roma writers intrinsically two-fold position: as members of their own ethnic community and a part and parcel of the larger society they inhabit.

7.3 The Finnish Gypsy Mission and the Rise of Roma-authored Publications

Officially founded in 1906 (though having been established a year before this, in 1905, at a Tampere meeting), by Oskari Johnsson (since 1922, Oskari Jalkio), the Gypsy Mission began its work as an Evangelical organisation aiming to 'bring God' to the Roma people in the country. In fact, the Gypsy Mission has left its mark in the lives of several future Roma activists, including, as we shall see, Aleksander Åkerlund and Ferdinand Nikkinen. The former's work will be explored in more detail in a section of this chapter.

Most importantly for the purpose of our discussion on Romani literature in the country, and in conjunction with its social and religious work, the Gypsy Mission also began publishing its own journal, from 1906. The first was a Christmas special issue *Mailman kiertäjä* (World Traveller), published in 1906, which continued, from 1907, as the journal *Kiertolainen* (Vagrant). Much like the organisation itself, the publishing of its own journal continued, under changing titles, until the present-day. *Kiertolainen*, whose editor was Oskari Jalkio, was published in Tampere (before the organisation's move to Helsinki), from 1907–1929. It was later re-named *Vaeltajakansa* (The Travelling People) in the aftermath of the Second World War. Presently, Romano Missio (the current name of

the former Gypsy Mission), publishes the journal under the title *Romano Boodos* (Roma news).

Broadly put, the journal's most active period was at its inception. In 1907, 13 issues were published, in 1908: 9 issues; 1909: 9 issues; 1910: 9 issues; 1911: 9 issues; 1912: 5 issues; 1913: 4 issues; 1914: 5 issues; 1915: 1 issue. Interestingly, the interwar period was its least active one: between 1920 and 1929, only five issues in total (1920, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929). Once again, the silence of this publication activity during the interwar period needs to be understood in the contexts of the country's history (the aftermath of the Finnish Civil War) as well as in the context of the organisation's leadership history. For instance, in 1931, Oskari Jalkio had moved to Haiti to conduct missionary work and only returned in 1938. Given that Jalkio, the founder of the organisation, had also been one of the most active writers in *Kiertolainen*, it is thus not surprising that the number of publications had diminished.

In conjunction with this, during this time, the other activities of the Gypsy Mission also declined and the person leading the mission became Eeli Jokinen. While some Roma celebration Days (i.e. *Romanipäivät*, or tent events which featured both evangelism and other activities for Roma) continued to be held, the most well-known being the Keuruu festival at Midsummer, the number of publications of the Mission and the number of activities vastly decreased until after the Second World War.

In terms of its content and authorship, the majority of the journal's articles were written by Oskari Jalkio (sometimes under the Romani language pseudonym, Andreo Phaal, meaning "Inner Brother"), his wife Helmi, and the main affiliates of the Gypsy Mission. Their inputs aimed to highlight the Mission's work for the salvation of the Roma people, at times also presenting information on Evangelical work conducted among Roma in other countries (such as the work of the English Evangelist, Gypsy Smith). It also presented the events of the organisation, stories and published testimonies of Roma experiencing the process of salvation and some collections of personal stories and travels of Roma themselves (such as the experiences of schoolteacher Sofia Schwartz and long-time collaborator of the Mission, Karl Fr. Lindström).

In addition to this, the journal often seemed to feature poems, songs and stories written in Romani language as well as songs written in Finnish which focused on the experiences of Roma living in Finland. Some of these were written by Roma or written based on the experiences of Roma and published in *Kiertolainen* as well as in separate books: such as the example of *Vakavaa ja leikkiä mustalaiselämästä: kertomuksia* (Seriously and Playfully on Gypsy life) (Johnsson and Johnsson 1912). It is important to note, however, that the perspective in the stories written by Oskari and Helmi Jalkio were somehow top-down, sentimental and compassionate. The Roma were sometimes seen in these stories as morally weak, emotional, childish, ignorant of society and superstitious (Jalkio 1922; Johnsson 1913b).

It is also interesting to note that *Kiertolainen* was, on the one hand, a primarily Evangelical newspaper (initially led by non-Roma), having a missionary outlook and

aimed at bridging the divide between the majority population and the 'Gypsy' population in the country. On the other hand, it also comprised news items and articles concerning the state of other Roma communities elsewhere in Europe, therefore making a connecting point between Roma across different national contexts. These aspects reveal the impact of specific Evangelical missions in shaping particular understandings of the 'Roma/Gypsy vision' and the future of Roma communities across Europe, most notably in their emphasis on sedentarisation and their focus on children's education.

Moreover, issues of 'nationality' (i.e. Roma as a separate community versus Roma as part and parcel of the Finnish nation) also came to light in *Kiertolainen*, especially noticeable in some articles written by Jalkio (Jalkio 1923b; Johnsson 1908, 1909). For instance, in one rhetorical question posed in *Kiertolainen*, in 1908, "Will the Roma in our country merge with the people of Finland?", the answer that came was that this would inevitably be the case: "as civilized Christians, it is impossible for Roma to maintain their own national identity in Finland" (Johnsson 1908:2).

Jalkio's conception here, as presented on the pages of the journal, was based on the idea that Roma in Finland did not have "the conditions necessary to preserve their own nationality" (ibid.). They, according to this article, had "no traditions of their own, no history of their own, no fatherland, no literature, no religion" and, ultimately, "did not even have their own native language in the same sense as other peoples do" (ibid.). The former's statement led directly to the conclusion stressed later in *Kiertolainen* that Roma should be raised as Finnish citizens in need and not as Roma (Jalkio 1923b:4). The most impressive concrete objectives would be Christianisation, settlement, education and the employment of Roma following the models of the rest of Finnish society (Johnsson 1908:1–2).

Interesting discussions on the pages of *Kiertolainen* also occurred in the debate between Oskari Jalkio and the German missionary worker and publisher Reinhold Urban, primarily concerning the culture, the nationality, and the future of the Roma (Johnsson 1912b; Urban 1912). Urban had a strong opposition to some of the ideas of Jalkio: for example, about the future of Romani language and culture. Most important, however, especially in connection to the issue of emancipation, was Jalkio's reply to Urban, which, among other things, posits the idea that even if the merger of Roma with the Finns is inexorable, the international unification of the Roma would also be expected in the future:

They are going to rise more as individuals than as a folk. They remain, in a way, foreign to each other, remain broken up without ever becoming together as a nation. But I guess the Roma will once come together in a much more noble way into one big entity. It occurs through great universal ideals. I do not believe that any other bond should ever unite or assemble this disbanded people, nor do I consider it necessary, because the fulfilment of such a place in human history is, in my opinion, as lofty and high as any other nations. (Johnsson 1912b:22)

Nevertheless, in anticipation of the future, *Kiertolainen* continued on the path set by Jalkio by bringing out glimpses of Finnish national rhetoric. This can be considered, for example, in the use of prints by prominent painters of Finnish National Romanticism as illustrations (von Wright: *Taistelevat metsot* (Fighting Capercaillies) (von Wright 1914); *Raatajat rahanalaiset* (Drudges) (Järnefelt 1909), Romani translations of the story *Kurko rattesko kente* (Children of the Holy Night) written by famous Finnish author Zachris Topelius, most likely translated into Finnish Romani by Oskari Jalkio (Topelius 1909) and publishing an extensive kalevalametric poem *Heimolleni* (For My Tribe) written by Lieska (a.k.a. Oskari Jalkio) (Lieska 1907). For example, in the poem “For My Tribe”, the narrator looks at Roma from the outside and calls them employing old Finnish kalevalametric of poems (alliteration, parallelism, the lavish use of parables) into Christian life:

For my Tribe (from Finnish original)

Traveler, poor one,
 wanderer, vagrant,
 like a chip on the waves,
 rampaged by an angry stream,
 you travel around the world,
 my dear tribe.
 Retailled, persecuted,
 trampled, mocked,
 discarded, sallied,
 overviewed,
 my unhappy family,
 my slandered tribe,
 walker in the village alley,
 always taking steps,
 passing without home,
 wandering with paltry
 dependent on the mercy of other people,
 always begging for alms.
 (---)
 Rise out of the swamp, my family,
 step up from your subordinate position,
 lift up your head, you youngster,
 raise up your gaze, you maiden,
 towards the highest light,
 the most ageist sun,
 the beloved Father
 in the house of heaven,
 from where the directing threads reach out,
 the reins of justice!

(Lieska 1907:9)

In other words, the themes of Roma ethnic identity and Finnish national identity are fascinatingly intertwined in *Kiertolainen*. This is evident also in the emphasis placed on

connecting the Finnish national instrument, the kantele, with Roma. The connection between Roma and kantele (which, according to Roma oral history and folklore, was not known, at least not by Roma themselves), manifests itself in many different forms in the journal: in a song *Kulkuri* (Vagabond) written by Helmi Jalkio (Johnsson 1913a) and *Yksin maailmassa* (Alone in the World) written by Mustalaistytö (Mustalaistytö 1910) and in the drawings (for example, Kiertolainen 1914b and 1914c; Kiertolainen 1913b) and stories like *Kanteleensoittaja* (Kantele Player) (Johnsson-Jalkio 1934).

One may also try to understand the connection between kantele and Roma from another point of view: namely, the issue of Christianisation and the association of kantele with the spiritual realm. Kantele's status, alongside that of a national symbol, as a celestial musical instrument, was cemented in Finland in the first translations of the sections of the Bible from the mid-1500s, whereby the harp was localised in Finland as kantele (Häkkinen 2010:328). Therefore, having Roma play the kantele in *Kiertolainen* had a twofold rhetorical message for the readers: Roma were at the same time a part of Finnish people *and* a Christian community. In other words, helping them would be an important task for everyone, both in terms of national/civic and spiritual duty. Through all of this, the intertwining of 'national' and 'ethnic' identity, and combined with the religious undertones of the Gypsy Mission, as presented and represented within the pages of *Kiertolainen* are interesting and important sources which, somehow, point to the entangled status of Roma the country: as members of the Finnish (Christian) nation and as members of their own ethnic community. As the next section will show, all these aspects are also clearly present in articles written by Roma authors themselves.

7.4 Examples of *Kiertolainen's* Roma-authored Pieces

While the previous section has sought to emphasise the social, political and ideological background within which the most popular journal in the country has functioned (and the key figures behind it), the authorship and Roma writers on the pages *Kiertolainen* are worth emphasising, alongside examples of the texts they have written. Most articles appear to have been written by either Oskari Jalkio, his wife Helmi, or non-Roma preachers and collaborators of the Gypsy Mission, but Roma were also present as authors within the pages of *Kiertolainen*. In fact, though not in a leadership position, one can find a myriad of life stories, poems, opinion pieces/essays, memoirs and contributions of Roma writers across the pages of the Gypsy Mission's journal.

As an example of this, a notable figure within the history of Roma involvement within the Mission is Sofia Schwartz (1887–1932). While she is not often attributed as a writer or contributor to the overarching theme of Romani Literature in Finland, she nevertheless had several interesting inputs to the organisation, through the letters and materials published under her name in the journal *Kiertolainen*.

Schwartz was a prominent female figure within the Gypsy Mission, a teacher in the first Gypsy school in Vyborg/Viipuri (where many Roma lived at the time), between 1906–1907 (Rekola 2010). She then attended Sortavala Seminary (i.e. a pedagogical institution in Sortavala, Karelia), from where she graduated in 1911. Most importantly, for the purpose of this chapter, is that she also wrote several letters and small entries in the 1907 issues of *Kiertolainen* (Schwartz 1907).

When the Viipuri Gypsy school closed on February 28, 1907 and Sofia Schwartz was relieved from her teaching duties, she travelled to Ingria (a historical region in the south of Karelia, and the North West of contemporary Russia), where she became familiar with the Ingrian Roma. She then wrote an interesting article for one of the first issues of *Kiertolainen*, titled “Story about Ingrian Roma”, in which she compares Finnish Roma with Ingrian Roma (Schwartz 1907:6–7). This article is especially important because it highlights two things: 1) the ways in which Sofia Schwartz’ perceptions of the Ingrian Roma (*Inkerin romanit*) encounters were shaped by comparison to her knowledge of the Finnish Roma community; 2) the emphasis placed on the importance of schooling and education as a means towards the social inclusion of the Roma in the societies they lived; 3) the ways in which Sofia Schwartz’ opinions connect with the actions and emphasis placed by the Gypsy Mission on the sedentarisation of Roma and the upbringing of children.

As the article reflects, according to Schwartz, the Ingrian Roma were much more ‘advanced’ than the Roma in Finland: they said they believed in God, went to church regularly, and were also happy to go to school. Unlike the Roma in Finland, Schwartz mentions that Ingrian Roma also had no suspicion of those doing missionary work. This was especially relevant in the context of the Gypsy Mission’s early activities, and their need for Roma mediators in order to reach Roma families and gain their trust. Schwartz thought the receptiveness of Ingrian Roma in comparison to Finnish Roma was due to the fact that in Russia the Roma did not disdain the non-Roma as was the case in Finland. She also highlighted that the state may have been more favourable to them. Furthermore, according to Sofia Schwartz, in Finland, it was more common that if one Roma stole, the whole Roma community would be accused of stealing. In Ingria, however, she argued that things were different. At the same time, Schwartz pointed out that this was understandable, because the Finnish people themselves were hard-working, so it was harder for them to tolerate those who did not abide by this moral ideal (Schwartz 1907:6–7).

Sofia Schwartz’s own life story is interesting also because of the support Schwartz seems to have had for the Gypsy Mission’s aim to sedentarise Roma in Finland. It is also clear that, when comparing the situation of the two Roma communities, Schwartz did not want to offend Finnish readers of the article. Instead, she pointed out to possible ‘reasons’ why the situation may have been worse off for Roma in Finland and, in some ways, justifying it.

Sofia Schwartz died in 1932, at 45 years of age (Rekola 2010). Throughout her short life, she had worked as a teacher and collaborated with the Gypsy Mission in her

various capacities. While she did not become what one would call a recurrent writer for *Kiertolainen* she nevertheless remained an important figure for the Gypsy Mission over the years. The article mentioned above, however, highlights the contribution and involvement of Roma themselves with the activities of the Mission which may or may not have been influenced by the position of Roma within it. Furthermore, the article constitutes an important piece of Roma writing within the newsletter *Kiertolainen*.

In addition to Sofia Schwartz, other Roma authors on the pages of *Kiertolainen*, would go on to become active in their later life, even if in different directions, to the Gypsy Mission's focus. At the same time, these articles are interesting in highlighting the gradual appropriation of the journal also by Roma writers, which would use it as a platform to share and proclaim their views, opinions and visions for their own community's future, sometimes in line with the Gypsy Mission's goals, at other times quite distinctive. This is important to highlight as it shows the ways in which Roma agency was manifested even in these early days of the Mission and the ways in which their views were being reflected in writing.

In this respect, Ferdinand Nikkinen's article from 1913, and his later life trajectory, are worth mentioning. Below are selected segments of this important article, which highlight both his vision at the time and the ways in which the latter connected with the role and activities of the Gypsy Mission:

To Roma young people 1913

Forgive me, that I dare to tell my opinion of how we could rise to the level of the civilised people.

I do not know why our forefathers had to wander along the village roads. Roma of our time have inherited wandering from their parents. In general, Roma are persistent to keep their traditions. Good followers of traditions! It sounds lovely, but we should not admire these traditions, because our fathers have left many bad traditions to us. There are, naturally, also many good things – for instance, our own language and nationality. If we retain our parents' modes of life, our children will suffer from a similar misery and be despised by other people. Because of our bad habits, other nations despise us. This curse is a big burden on our shoulders.

To remove this curse, we must leave aside our forefathers' inheritance – give up wandering, deceiving people in the selling of horses and in future-telling also. Let us ask for God's power that we could leave our bad habits and learn good habits instead. We ought to leave wandering and live in one place. We ought to leave begging and start to work, to leave deceiving and to be honest. We ought to leave superstition and believe in God. As we believe in God, we'll win everything good. (Nikkinen 1913:15)

This article interestingly starts off with a direct criticism of some cultural 'traits' among the Finnish Roma and puts particular focus on the issue of travelling or nomadism, which is seen as hindering the social inclusion of the community in the country. Nikkinen thus addresses his 'letter' to Roma youth, whom he encourages to give up their forefathers' traditions for the benefit and future of their children and their future generations.

It nevertheless continues with a focus placed on the ways towards the “betterment” of Finnish Roma in the country. Among these, much like Sofia Schwartz, Nikkinen seems to place an emphasis on two things: again, sedentarisation (that is, the cessation of wandering) and, crucially, education (that is, the focus that they see needed to be placed on schooling and upbringing of children).

We, who are a part of Roma youth, let us look at life with greater hopes. Let us not be content with misery. Let us strive for a better life. Let us throw away that which bind us to misery. Homelessness is the greatest curse in the world. A home – even a small one, can protect us from the storms of the world. For what lives a person, who does not know, where to sleep the following night? A wanderer does not know how lovely it is to work for a good life.

The Roma do not care for livelihood. They do not educate their children to be chaste** in the modern way. They do not know their duty to educate their children. In my opinion, people who do not work to earn their existence could go away from the world. As young straight Roma boys and girls let us not be satisfied with our past. Let us seek that we all would have the same national rights and our own home. The fight is life. Life is dead without goals. Let us fight that also our opponents witness it. Let us ask God to be our leader. Through Him we'll get a good goal.

Tribesman Ferdinand Nikkinen (1913:15)

It is worth noting that the editors of *Kiertolainen* saw fit to make two editorial notes to Nikkinen's article, marked with * and **, respectively. The latter can be seen above, wherein the editorial note says:

**The morality nowadays is worse than that of Roma people. We do not advise Roma youth to admire it. Let us follow Christ's morality. (Nikkinen 1913:15)

While this editorial note may seem a small matter of disagreement, it is nevertheless interesting and gains more importance in the longer history of Nikkinen's activism and his departure from the Gypsy Mission. In fact, it is crucial to highlight that Ferdinand Nikkinen, in the aftermath of the Second World War, would become of the Mission's most fervent critics.

It is unclear when Ferdinand Nikkinen's affiliation with the Gypsy Mission stopped. Nor were the reasons ever clearly stated. Nevertheless, what we do know is that, in 1946, Nikkinen collected the signatures of 364 Roma men from across the country and sent a letter to the Ministry of the Interior, criticising the Mission's lack of Roma leadership and asking for a more direct involvement from the state to support the Roma in the country (Friman-Korpela 2014; Pulma 2006:166; Stenroos n.d.). Nikkinen also became a fervent atheist and had a direct influence to the founding, in 1953, of *Romanengo Staggos* (title in Finnish Romani, meaning the Roma Union), one of the first civic Roma organisation in the country. Furthermore, his son, Reima Nikkinen, would also be connected and involved with *Suomen Mustalaisyhdistys* (Finnish Gypsy Association), founded in 1967, which would become (under the renewed name of *Suomen Romaniyhdistys*, Finnish Roma Association), the most active civic Roma organisation in the country, whose

work continues until present-day. It is thus not only important to trace the relations and legacy of the Gypsy Mission with the writings and work of key Roma activists, but relevant in highlighting the ways in which the Mission paved the way for the foundations and development of Roma writings in the country (for more on the subject, see Roman 2020). Through this, Nikkinen's trajectory, much as the trajectory of Aleksander Åkerlund (discussed below), are crucial in showcasing these complex entanglements and developments.

Finally, there were other writers in *Kiertolainen*, whose Roma background was self-declared either through the stories told or through the name they choose to sign with (such as "a Roma," "Roma Girl," "A Roma Girl's Story," etc.). These often took the shape of personalised stories, memories from childhood or discussions of their own path to 'salvation' through the intercession of the Gypsy Mission (Hagert 1929; Lindström 1913; Romani 1927; Schwartz 1907). Nevertheless, even when anonymised, these are important examples in highlighting Roma authorship and presence within the organisation.

Below are, for instance, segments of an article titled "For the Roma Tribe," written in 1929, by Maria Hagert, a Roma woman (Hagert 1929:8):

For the Roma tribe

Gypsy Mission is one of the most difficult tasks than you can imagine. Among Roma, who call themselves Christian, you can see "dead faith" every day. They feel that there is nothing good in religion. However, the loving Saviour has redeemed also Roma, though they have not really got much love.

Gypsy Mission's work has been done for only 23 years. We have not seen as great results as we had wished for. You cannot expect great results during such a short time, taking into account the difficulties of the work and the small resources available. Gypsy mission has become loved only by a few people. I hope I could open this work in the right way.

[...]

I hope that Roma mission work would become livelier. You ought not to be depressed if you see little fruit. It also took a long time for Noah to build the ark. If you could take Roma children to take care of them, you could see better results. Let's do this work together. If you cannot do anything else, pray for this work. God will hear it. (Hagert 1929:8)

It is interesting to note here both the interchangeable nature of the terms Roma/Gypsy used above and the way in which the author pleads for the active involvement of the Mission and, again, specifically in terms of the education of children. More radically, this author argues for the taking away of Roma children for the purpose of education (see quote above, "if you could take Roma children to take care of them, you could see better results"). This drastic proposal would materialise later in the history of the Gypsy Mission; more specifically, the taking away of Roma children from their families, especially in the 1950s, would be connected with the state incentives of transforming Roma into 'better' citizens of the nation-state (hence, educating them away from their families). It would also, unsurprisingly, be one of the more controversial and contested moments in the organisation's history (Friman-Korpela 2014; Pulma 2006; Tervonen 2012).

Another similar article was written by an anonymised Roma author (signed simply as “A Roma”/*Romani*), which pleads for the spiritual revival of the Roma, as a means for social inclusion. A commonality between all these authors is a clear focus placed on the children’s upbringing and the role of the Gypsy Mission within this.

Suggestions

[...]

As far as I know, the change of the fate of the Roma tribe in Finland, for which the state has granted some funds, has so far been mainly to revive the spiritual life of a few mostly devotees. Alongside this, there has been work done in society, but due to the lack of funds and resources, results have not been as great as desirable and necessary.

[...]

As far as the Roma are concerned, we must recognize that, as important as reviving the spiritual life of individuals, just as important for temporal life is the improvement of their social condition and their position within society. The most important of these, in my opinion, is upbringing children to work and the reviving the spiritual life [of people] in the direction of starting a life of dignity.

Romani (1927:22)

Thus, through a look at only some of the content of *Kiertolainen*, and a closer analysis of some key articles and letters written by Roma authors on the pages of this journal, one can see that Roma voices were always present within the Gypsy Mission. In fact, in many ways, Roma played an active part also in shaping and promoting some of the goals and aims that are often associated with the Gypsy Mission (such as sedentarisation, spiritual revivalism and education of children). Furthermore, the Gypsy Mission, through its main written material, the journal *Kiertolainen*, has opened space for Roma authors to become just that – writers and authors of their own life stories. In effect, this also led to the shaping of future Roma activists in the country, such as Ferdinand Nikkinen. Nikkinen, however, was not a sole example of this. In that which follows, the discussion moves on to a particularly interesting figure within the Mission, whose work, both writing and activism, constitutes a crucial example of the myriad forms that *Romani* literature has taken in Finland, at the beginning of the twentieth century: Aleksander Åkerlund.

7.5 Aleksander Åkerlund and the “Features of the Gypsy Life”

Lecturer, violinist, actor and book editor Aleksander Åkerlund (1893–1944), born in a Roma family, simultaneously lived, much like Kalle Tähtelä and Ferdinand Nikkinen, in two intrinsically connected realms: the ethnic Roma community and the mainstream national society. While the same argument undoubtedly applies to all Roma, who are at once members of their community and members of the macro-society they inhabit, in the case of these three authors, this particular position led to their formation not only as visionaries but, in a sense, as actors to the shaping of Roma emancipation, in myriad

forms. As such, Åkerlund could, as a musician, skillfully capitalise on the popularity of 'Gypsy music' – a Roma-related music played in a characteristic 'Gypsy style' and composed by non-Roma composers. At the same time, during the interwar period in Finland, he contributed to shaping a new type of 'Gypsy image', by combining, in his art, an active position concerning Roma issues, which he would target specifically at a non-Roma audience.

Most clearly related to the purpose of this chapter was a book titled *Piirteitä mustalaisten elämästä* (The Features of Gypsy Life), edited by Aleksander Åkerlund, under the artist name Alex Aulo (Aulo 1934). Although the text itself was not written by Åkerlund, the edited book brings together the contents of his work as an activist as well as some aspects of his personal history. When the content of the book is compared to the hundreds of newspaper advertisements and writings about his presentations and concerts, the book appears not only as promotional material for his work but as a kind of personal and intellectual vision.

Aleksander Åkerlund's career as an activist-artist began within the Gypsy Mission in the 1910s after the focus of the Mission's activities had shifted to Viipuri, in 1911. Interestingly, in his obituary, published on December 6th, 1944 in *Helsingin Sanomat* (Helsinki Newspaper), Åkerlund is also said to have been "raised in the home of a Gypsy Mission's leader" (*Helsingin Sanomat* 1944:11). Something about Åkerlund's relationship with Jalkio is also found in the fact that Åkerlund's later artist name, Alex Aulo, brings to mind the name of Jalkio's son, Aulo Angar Johnsson (1912–1951).

When the Gypsy Mission began organising evenings with a program to support the actions of the Mission, Åkerlund signed up. Several other Roma were also involved: Mandi Isberg, Ferdinand Nikkinen and Antti Palm, to mention only a few (Johnsson 1913; Viita 1967:51–61). Much like Ferdinand Nikkinen, the reasons for Aleksander Åkerlund's withdrawal from the Gypsy Mission remain unclear and were never referred to directly in the printed sources of the organisation.

However, Åkerlund's independent career was, especially in its early stages from 1917, connected to leftist intellectual and Roma emancipatory circles of the short-lived Finnish Roma Cultural Society (*Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura*, spring 1917), The Finnish Gypsy Theatre (*Suomen Mustalaisteatteri*, 1917–1919) and artistic circles in Helsinki Music Institute (*Helsingin musiikkiopisto*, year 1919). It is obvious, that these more or less political reasons, alongside the previously mentioned negative attitude within the Gypsy Mission to the rising of Roma ethnic activism, contributed to Åkerlund's departure from the Mission. Another possible explanation, more connected to his personal religious life, is found in the true-to-life stories presented in *Piirteitä mustalaisten elämästä*.

Broadly, the topics of the book *Piirteitä mustalaisten elämästä* fall into three categories: informative, religious, and true-to-life contents. The book begins with two articles, which together draw a picture of the history and missionary work of the Roma in Europe and Finland. The first article, written by Swedish Free Church pastor Otto Sundberg – *Mustalaiset. Unohdettu lähetysala* (Gypsies. The Neglected Missionary Field) (Sundberg

1934) – was published in Swedish in the Ansgarius Calendar of the Swedish Pietist Mission and in *Kiertolainen* (Sundberg 1923). With the second article, written by Oskari Jalkio, *Mietteitä mustalaistemme aseman parantamisesta* (Thoughts on Improving the Status of Our Gypsies) (Jalkio 1923b, 1934b), the focus moves to the proposals for a solution to the ‘Gypsy issue’ in Finland (see the previous discussion on Jalkio’s writings).

The religious section consists of an extract from the Holy Bible *Tek ternicaija* (Ten Young Women) (orig. from the Gospel of Matthew 25: 1–13) and of one poem, *Kaalesko mangiba* (Kaale’s prayer), written by Oskari Jalkio both in Romani and Finnish languages (Jalkio 1923a, 1934a). The book also contains another poem, *Kaalo* (Kaale, another term used for Finnish Roma, literally translated as ‘Black’ from Finnish Romani), which is written by Andreo Phaal (i.e. Oskari Jalkio). The two poems are a good example of how Jalkio put himself in different positions in relation to Roma when writing under his own name or under the pseudonym Andreo Phaal, “Inner Brother” (translation from Finnish Romani). While ‘Oskari Jalkio’ writes as a missionary, ‘Andreo Phaal’ strives to some extent to understand aspects of Roma life, though strongly coloured by specific stereotypes and themes of Gypsy Romanticism. However, read in parallel, the poems open up as well Jalkio’s as Åkerlund’s ambivalent mindset. The following are a sample translated stanzas from the poems *Kaale’s prayer* and *Kaale*. *Kaale’s prayer* was written in Finnish Romani and Finnish while *Kaale* was written in Finnish:

Kaalesko mangiba (in Finnish Romani)

Hun maan, hun maan, baro Deevel! Cuoro kentos mangina:
me vaa duural grehhibosta, bolibosko drommesta.
Saaro manna doori geelo, nango daari sterdo som.
Sasto sommas, ka me geejom, kaan som cingro, geero rom.

Roodidom buut bolibosta, Saaro, saari frestadom.
Kaan me ciinjinte som gesta, sar jeek vildo cau me som.
Le maan neer to bringos, Deevel! Kammaa doi te hyylävaa.
De maan doori aahaa, giivaa, ar ti angal garuvaa!

Pherdo som me grehhibosta, oo, mo gij hin gungalo.
Thou maan aro navasiina, ar’ ti rat do purano!
Oo, me som bidaadeskiro, aah mo iego daad ta phaal,
aah mo koni fedde guosos ta mo kamlo gesko maal!

Kaale’s prayer (translation from the Finnish original)

Hear, hear, great Creator,
A request from a poor child!
I come from far away to the world,
I have walked along the roads of crimes.
I’ve lost everything,

I get to stand in front of you bare.
 Healthy I was when I started my journey,
 Now I'm a miserable wreck.

Much I found in the world,
 I've all been through.
 Now I am already tired from the heart,
 I will be exhausted like an orphan.
 Pull alongside you, Lord,
 to get a moment's rest!
 Let me be there and live,
 in your arms only.

I am full of the filth of sin,
 my heart is filled with evil.
 Wash me clean
 With your holy blood!
 I'm an orphan, an alien,
 Please, be my father,
 My brother, my best treasure,
 Orphan's soulmate.

(Jalkio 1923a:1; 1934a:22–23)

Kaalo/Kaale (translation from the Finnish original)

I'm a mystery for others
 as well as for myself.
 I'm wandering like a haunt,
 and I'm happy to do so.
 To stay in one place,
 it would be a death for me.
 I hurry forward,
 I give you a home.

I don't know why –
 I pass as long as I pass –
 and that's not what I ask,
 when I hide into my heart
 the one who tells me to pass,
 the strange need for wandering,
 all the glowers of the South,
 the sum of longings.

I cry out when I want,
 all my tears,
 until the grief fades
 as well as the leftovers of sorrow.

But when the joy rises,
I let the jubilation out,
so that the whole land will hear,
where Kaale passed.

O, how lovely is life,
when there is a mind to live,
and when you hear your heart-song
singing brightly.
It is a wide world
always in front of me.
Everything is ready there
and nothing forced to brace.

(Phaal 1925:10; 1934:32)

The edited book also included three true-to-life stories, all presumably written by Helmi or Oskari Jalkio. In two of them, *Särjetty viulu* (Smashed Violin) (*Särjetty viulu* 1934) and *Tumma soittaja* (Dark Caller) (Sävel 1915, 1934) a “dark violinist” travels along with the Gypsy Mission’s performance group. A third one, *Kanteleensoittaja* (The Kantele player), by Helmi Johnsson-Jalkio, is about Janne, a Roma playing the Finnish national instrument, kantele, at the Gypsy Mission’s events (Johnsson-Jalkio 1934).

In *Särjetty viulu* (Smashed Violin), Santeri, a violinist from the Gypsy Mission, wonders between a spiritual and worldly life. The story starts when the violinist has painfully but deliberately broken his violin. According to the confession of the violinist, the violin itself is the reason for his struggle. In Santeri’s own words:

Well, that is what the uncle said, idly, that is exactly what it (the violin) is for me. It was bewitched and always got me into crazy rapture. Sitting in solitude this evening felt so vividly that that wicked thing is what separates me from God. We have been praying together, you remember uncle, but God seems so far away and the voice said, “Break it” and I did, but it sucks, I don’t feel any better and I can’t live without a violin. It is, at the same time, my happiness and curse. The violin has a very peculiar spirit and it takes me up a high mountain and shows me all the ideals and charms of the world and, poor me, I kneel and serve but not God. Two powers are waging war on us. Who will win in the end? Do you understand, dear Uncle? (*Särjetty viulu* 1934:28)

The prayers of the “dear uncle” and the explanation of God’s purposes would eventually calm down Violinist Santeri. Yet, “dear uncle” concludes his story as follows: “The youngster calmed down for a period, but soon a “thousand-year habit of blood” took victory over him and Santeri again launched a new violin under his arm for the fairs of the world.” (ibid.)

In the story of *Tumma soittaja*, the protagonist, now an unnamed Roma violinist, is presented with respect and stereotypes as “the delicate child of a stray wandering Tribe” (Sävel 1915:17). The narrator tells his/her own interpretation on the future of the “dark tribe”, as follows:

The poor ones are wandering in the dark. Who would bring the torch to the night? Who would brighten the tone of the heart of a dark tribe? The echo of the dark caller's tunes in my soul whispers: "He was the Torch-bearer in the night." Long and desolate is probably his path, but there is a wonderful gift of tunes in his soul, comforting, illuminating and lighting when angry winds threaten to extinguish their torches. Listening to the sounds of his own soul, the dark caller continues his heavy pursuit and many bless the power of his tunes. Wherever he leaves the echo of his playing, from there a tearful look at his steps follows. Far away, the lonely heart remembers his tunes and prays for the light and peace of the day on the path of the dark caller. (Sävel 1915:17)

These stories are important in order to understand Aleksander Åkerlund's and Oskari Jalkio's personal interpretations of the relationship between the two. If we place Oskari Jalkio – the alleged writer behind the pseudonym "Sävel" – as "Uncle," "Troupe Leader" and the first-person narrator, and Aleksander Åkerlund as "Santeri," "Torch-bearer," "Dark Caller," "Youngster," some details of the life story of Aleksander Åkerlund are possibly explained through a perceived spiritual crisis. The denominations suggest that Jalkio either was an "uncle" adopted by Roma, or that he himself sought to be accepted among the Roma as an "uncle". The interpretation is directly dependent on the one who ultimately gave the aforementioned designations in the first place. It is, though, obvious that in re-publishing the stories, Aleksander Åkerlund wanted to show he had received the hidden but written apologies from Oskari Jalkio, and had accepted them. Åkerlund had also, at least to some extent, renewed his connection to the Gypsy Mission after Jalkio returned to Finland in 1938. As such, Åkerlund's name can even be found in the list of members of the Mission's board from 1939 (Viita 1967:121–22).

Interestingly, the story of activist-artist Aleksander Åkerlund, who worked mostly outside institutions, did not end in the canon of Finnish Roma activism and literature, which had long been maintained by the Gypsy Mission. However, according to Åkerlund's own assessment, he was "the only Gypsy enlightenment speaker in the Nordic countries from a Gypsy background" during the interwar period (Helsingin Sanomat 1941:9). The Tombstone in Malmi Cemetery is engraved with golden letters "Roma-Tribe Enlightenment-Lecturer Aleksander Åkerlund" (Malmi Cemetery in Helsinki: block 81, row 4, place 78).

7.6 Conclusion

As this chapter has highlighted, Finland represents an interesting and important case study when it comes to the shape and content of Roma writings before and during the interwar period and, especially, how these link to processes of Roma civic emancipation in the country during the same period. While the number of Roma publications was significantly lower than in its preceding years, these particular manifestations and the shape of the movement itself need to be understood within the historical, social and

political context of Finland at the start of the twentieth century: the upsurge of Finnish nationalism, the country's economic struggles and the desire to shape a clear Finnish identity in the aftermath of Finland's Civil War.

That said, the content and work that would shape the field of Romani literature in the country also (directly or indirectly) reflect these changes. One can see in the various texts presented above the ways in which Roma writers' understanding of the future of the Roma community in Finland was grounded in the overall aims and goals of the larger society: namely, a focus placed on education and sedentarisation and a focus on being part of the Finnish nation. While these issues were undoubtedly part of the aims and goals of the Finnish Gypsy Mission, a Christian Evangelical organisation aiming to 'bring God' to Finland's Roma population, they cannot be underestimated in the ways in which Roma activists and writers themselves promoted them. Examples of this are the texts written by Sofia Schwartz, Ferdinand Nikkinen, as well as the anonymous Roma authors present within the pages of *Kiertolainen*, The Gypsy Mission's flagship journal.

At the same time, the stories and pieces of writing shared by these Roma authors (including Schwartz, Nikkinen and Åkerlund) reflect another dimension of their social experience: namely, that of Roma visionaries, who are at once part of their respective community (i.e. the Kaale) and members of the macro-society, of which they were an intrinsic part of. In other words, what these texts also illuminate is the entangled position of Roma authors during (and before) the interwar period in Finland: as members of their own community, proud of their identity and heritage and as striving for national/civic identity, as members of the Finnish nation. Through this, these materials emphasise the myriad forms that ideas of the future of the Roma community may take, as well as the ways in which Roma civic emancipation was manifested and represented within literary works of the time.

Moreover, the role of the Finnish Gypsy Mission (and, especially, its journal, *Kiertolainen*) cannot be underestimated in contributing to the promotion and the shaping of Roma authors and activists during the interwar period. The journal featured numerous Roma writers within its content, who found within *Kiertolainen* a platform to share their own visions, ideas and perspectives. Some of these writers were, or would become, prolific Roma activists in the country, at times moving away from the Mission (and, at times even moving against it) or, at other times (such as the case of Sofia Schwartz has shown), continuing to be active members of the organisation. Regardless of which path they took, their input within the pages of *Kiertolainen* should not be disregarded. In other words, the apparent 'silence' or 'inactivity' of Roma writers in Finland during the period under focus is just that: an appearance. As this chapter has highlighted, writings by Roma and writings concerning Roma were not far in between.

Finally, the examples of seemingly 'outlier' authors, such as Kalle Tähtelä, who wrote just before the interwar period, and whose work connected to his socialist ideals, emphasise the ways in which issues of Roma civic emancipation need not necessarily mean a

focus on one's own community. It reflects an openness to the 'outside' world, in a quest for equality and interest of the problems of society as a whole (rather than just the issues concerning the Roma/Gypsy community). In fact, Kalle Tähtelä's life story (much as Aleksander Åkerlund's and Ferdinand Nikkinen's, later on) showcases the myriad shapes that the very process of 'emancipation' may take: among others, a preoccupation with the broader issues of the macro-society in which they lived, and not just the ones characterising their specific Roma/Gypsy community (in this case, the Kaale). This is crucially important as civic emancipation need not only be understood as an 'internal' focus; rather, it becomes an open-ended engagement with the world, involving both the Roma community and the majority society in which they lived. Through this, the examples presented in this chapter offer important perspectives and nuances to the very meaning of Roma civic emancipation during the interwar period, as well as the ways in which these perspectives were reflected and promoted in the development of Romani literature at the time.