

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

---

Finland

Blomster, Risto

Brill Schöningh

2022

---

Blomster , R & Roman , R B 2022 , Finland . in E Marushiakova & V Popov (eds) , Roma  
Portraits in History : Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern  
Europe from the 19th Century until the Second World War . Brill Schöningh , pp. 359-397 . <https://doi.org/10.30965/9>

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/352109>

[https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657705191\\_012](https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657705191_012)

---

cc\_by\_nc\_nd

publishedVersion

---

*Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.*

*This is an electronic reprint of the original article.*

*This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.*

*Please cite the original version.*

# Finland

## Introduction

*Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

The process of Roma civic emancipation in Finland at the start of the 20th century offers an important means by which the broader processes of Roma emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe during and before the interwar period can be understood. It is, once again, as across the region, a process which is undeniably embedded within the broader social and historical environment in which Roma have lived for centuries, and it cannot be understood outside of the political context of individual countries, as well as their connection to the broader geopolitical arena. In Finland, this process can be most clearly connected to the ways in which the country's political, social and historical context was being shaped in the early 1900s. The shifts from the early years of the 1900s were heavily influenced by the Fennoman movement of the late 19th century in the Grand Duchy of Finland, a movement which aimed to raise both Finnish language and Finnish culture to the status of national language and national culture (Barton, 2005). It was during this time that Finland itself was being transformed, as a country and as a society, and its relation to other nations (most specifically, Russia) was pivotal.

In this context, the portraits presented in this chapter reflect not only the ways in which Roma emancipation was being manifested among the Kaale (i.e. the Roma community in Finland, sometimes referred to as Finnish Gypsies in official documents of the time) but the ways in which the transformation of the 'nation' itself was reflected in the types of visions for the future imagined among key protagonists of the Roma movement in the country (i.e. the focus on sedentarisation, education and work). As such, the process of Roma civic emancipation in Finland unsurprisingly became connected, on the one hand, with the construction of 'Finnish' identity, in the context of a longer nation-building process. On the other hand, it would also seem that most of the actions for Roma mobilisation, inclusion and emancipation in Finland, as well as the key Roma individuals that were active in these processes (including, but not restricted to, those presented here), emerged and developed within the midst of a religious evangelical organisation, whose main goal was that of including the Roma in the country within the majority society, as part of one 'nation', while, at the same time, maintaining some of the cultural specificity of the Kaale community (such as dress, language, etc.). This reflects, to some extent, the fact that Kaale, much like other Roma/Gypsy communities elsewhere, lived their lives (and continue to do so) on at least two dimensions: as members of their own community and as an intrinsic part of the majority society they inhabit

(Marushiakova & Popov, 2016e, p. 15). For this reason, in order to better understand the connection between the portraits presented in this chapter, and the ways in which the Roma emancipation process in the country took its shape primarily within the midst of a religious (evangelical) organisation, some words are needed about Finland's socio-historical context at the start of the 20th century, as well as the rationale of bringing these particular individuals together.

First and foremost, Finland's politico-cultural climate in the early stages of the Finnish Roma Civil Rights movement were marked by the relationship between Finland and Russia: prior to Finland's independence on the December 6, 1917, the country was part of the Russian Empire, as a Grand Duchy. After gaining its independence, however, Finland would become a more clearly Western-oriented young republic of its own. The last decades of the Grand Duchy (and far beyond) were, therefore, coloured by shades of Finnish cultural nationalism, in the light of which the Kaale community – who had lived in Finland from the 1500s (at the time, estimated to be a couple thousand), were also seen as Finns.

In the Grand Duchy of Finland, especially in Karelia, contacts across the border to the East were close. As the documents of the Roma oral history collected in the 1930s and 1950s clearly show, Kaale market trips extended beyond St Petersburg to the other areas of Ingria, an area which today is located in the Leningrad Oblast surrounding Saint Petersburg in north-western Russia (SKSA, Matti Simolan kokoelma). Ingria had been inhabited by Finno-Ugric Vatics and Izhorians as well as by Finns. At the same time, St Petersburg appeared to be, according to oral history documents, a key magnet for interactions and connections between peoples. There, new contacts were made not only with Russians but with representatives of various other Roma/Gypsy groups (Ibid.). As a result of the First World War, and Finland's independence, the closure of borders to the East was, therefore, undeniably influential for the Kaale of Finland. After this period, the relationships and connections to St Petersburg diminished, and the focus of these connections moved to the West (more specifically, West of Finland) (for more see Leskinen, 1995, pp. 163–173; Blomster & Mikkola, 2018, pp. 37–64).

It was also in this context that the Gypsy Mission (*Mustalaislähetys*, from *mustalainen* – literally translated as 'black-skinned' from Finnish, but meaning 'Gypsy'; and *lähetys* – meaning 'mission' in Finnish), which had moved its activities from its original location in Tampere to the city of Vyborg (also known as Viipuri, in Finnish, during the interwar period of time), 150 km from St Petersburg, was operating in the 1910s. The obvious reason for the organisation's move was that, based on a survey by the Finnish Senate of the Gypsy population in the 1890s, a third of roughly 1,500 Roma in Finland lived in the parishes of Karelia. The Gypsy Mission was set up in 1906 (officially registered in 1907), at a Tampere meeting, and led by Oskari Jalkio (full name, Anders Oskari Jalkio, initially Storbacka and, until 1922, Johnsson), an evangelical pastor who would become the driving force behind its initial expansion and success. We do not have the space to go into

detail about the history of this organisation (more expansive accounts can be found in Viita, 1967; Pulma, 2006; Tervonen, 2010; 2012; Grönfors, 2012; Hedman, 2012; Thurfjell, 2013; Roman, 2016; 2020). However, what is crucial here is that, especially during its Vyborg period, not only a spiritual awakening, but an awakening to Roma civil rights, manifested itself among the Kaale members of the Gypsy Mission.

All the portraits selected for this chapter were involved in the 1910s activities of the Gypsy Mission: as a teacher at the Roma School, a working home manager, as preachers, and as performers at meetings and fundraising evenings. Their actions were commented on in a positive light in the newspapers of the time, sometimes even presented as the first time in history when 'Gypsies themselves have taken to driving their own cause' (Etelä-Suomi, 1912, p. 2). However, by 1914, dispersion began to occur among the Roma. The Gypsy Mission was in financial crisis and even its operating director, Oskari Jalkio, was working without financial compensation. In addition to this, the ideas of christianisation, assimilation and 'Finnishisation' of the Roma, promoted within the Gypsy Mission by Oskari Jalkio, together with the idea that the Roma culture, if it was even to be identified, did not offer appropriate conditions for living and were difficult for some Roma activists to accept. Some of the key Roma figures of the time thus moved away from and/or rejected the Gypsy Mission (as a whole, or temporarily), pursuing a different line for their community mobilisation, often by emphasising the cultural specificity of the Roma. In this context, the key element that ties the individuals portrayed in this chapter is, first and foremost, the central role played by the Gypsy Mission in influencing the beginning of the Roma emancipation movement in Finland. In other words, despite being (initially) a non-Roma led organisation, its influence on the overall shape of the broader Roma mobilisation movement in the country is not to be understated.

An additional element which connects the Finnish Roma portraits introduced in this book is also that all these individuals had originally come from small localities, especially Eastern Finland and Karelia, from where they often moved, after their studies or work, to larger cities. Ida Blomerus, Antti Palm and Aleksander Åkerlund, for example, had all been born in Karelia. Sofia Schwartz, although born in the parish of Kuivaniemi (located in Northern Ostrobothnia), had attended a teacher seminar in Sortavala, Karelia. Ferdinand Nikkinen was a native of Heinävesi, Southern Savonia. Among them, Ida Blomerus, Ferdinand Nikkinen and Aleksander Åkerlund moved to Helsinki, trained in music, and sought to promote Roma civil rights by combining it with their work as artists.

In terms of launching the civil rights movement, Helsinki was certainly a favourable option for networking in liberal artist circles. However, in terms of mobilising other Roma, it offered an obvious challenge: Helsinki, and the county of Uusimaa, was quite a poor area in terms of Roma settlement (i.e. the Kaale population there was relatively meagre, compared to Karelia, for example). As of now, there is no information on how the relatively large Roma population of other areas of Finland, such as Ostrobothnia,

Häme and Savonia, viewed the activities occurring within a small circle of Roma activists and artists in Helsinki.

The selection of these individual portraits is, thus, not arbitrary. While many of them have never become well-known figures in the written history of the Roma movement in the country (or, as is the case of Ida Blomerus and Aleksander Åkerlund, had been forgotten in the process), their work was always intrinsically connected to the issues of Roma social emancipation and social mobilisation. Furthermore, while some never even occupied a central role in either the Gypsy Mission or any other public sphere, they nevertheless constitute unique voices in the history of the movement in the country. Sofia Schwartz, for example, was one of the first female teachers at the start of the 20th century, and her advocacy of education and sedentarisation among the Finnish Kaale not only aligned with the aims and visions of the Gypsy Mission, but with those of other key Kaale figures of the time, such as Ferdinand Nikkinen and Antti Palm.

The life history of some individuals in this chapter also denotes the different affiliations and relationships that individual Kaale activists have had with the Gypsy Mission itself: from those who have shown their support throughout (such as Sofia Schwartz), to those denoting initial support while later becoming critics (Ferdinand Nikkinen) or, at the very least, temporarily distancing themselves from it (Aleksander Åkerlund). There are also those whose position remains partially ambiguous: such as Antti Palm, who had been part of a Roma-led charter of the Gypsy Mission in Vyborg, in 1907, or Ida Blomerus who, alongside her work in the Mission, was the leader of the *Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura* (Finnish Roma Civilisation Society), established in 1917, perhaps the first ever Roma-led organisation in Finland, as well as being involved in the first Gypsy Theatre (*Mustalaisteatteri*) in the country, which performed in 1917 and 1919. It is unclear if these latter endeavours took shape in opposition or in connection to the Mission. Nevertheless, what is clear is that individuals connected to the Gypsy Mission would also become key figures in the broader Roma movement in the country.

It is also worth noting that the inclusion of the portraits of Sofia Schwartz and Ida Blomerus emphasises that Roma women, far from being passive subjects, were key parts of the Roma movement occurring both within and outside the Gypsy Mission. In their different roles, they also shaped ideas of the future of the Roma community in the country, be it as teachers, performers or leaders of Roma organisations. Their inclusion is thus at once central and necessary in order to provide a wider framework through which Roma women's influence in the Roma civic emancipation movement in Finland can be understood.

Finally, we should underline that, while crucially important, these are by no means the only individuals that showcase the beginning of Roma civic emancipation in Finland. Even when indirectly, others have made their mark as well. Such an example is, for instance, Kalle Tähtelä, a writer, pilot and socialist revolutionary, coming from a mixed marriage (his father was Roma, his mother was a majority Finn), who passed away in 1919 and whose literary work showcases his broad socialist ideals, connected to the

struggles of marginalised communities. His life and work, while not often connected to the Roma movement in the country, nevertheless offers new lenses through which we can understand the very meaning of the term ‘Roma emancipation’. His life and work will, therefore, be briefly discussed in the conclusion to this chapter, as it emphasises the multidimensional and multifaceted manifestation of the different ‘visions for the future’ found among Roma writers, activists, elite and representatives in Finland at the start of the 20th century, while adding new shades to understanding the manifestations of Roma emancipation in the country.

The individuals whose lives and work are presented below are, therefore, manifestations of the myriad roles that Kaale have played both within and outside key institutions and organisations in the country at the start of the 20th century. In the future, the portraits of many others could relay a broader picture of the movement itself, as well as, perhaps, the connection of the Roma movement in Finland to Roma movements occurring in other countries. And, while it would seem that these individuals have been most active in the first decades of the 20th century, their influence and work have spanned well into the post-Second World War context, thus showcasing the ways in which ideas and visions of the future, among Roma activists, expand and (sometimes) change over time.

## Ferdinand Nikkinen

*Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

Ferdinand Nikkinen (June 9, 1894–January 7, 1971) was one of the leading Roma activists of the 1950s–1960s and among the key activists that led to the creation of the first Roma-led civic organisation in Finland, *Romanengo Staggos* (established in 1953). By profession, he was a singer, music teacher and a violinist. Within the realm of activism and Roma emancipatory projects, he left a clear mark in the development of Roma organisations in the country, especially after the Second World War. His Roma-focused and activism work, however, had begun much earlier, before the interwar period, when he collaborated and worked closely with the Gypsy Mission (*Mustalaislähetys*), a Roma-focused Evangelical organisation founded by Oskari Jalkio in 1906. These beginnings are important as Nikkinen’s work as an activist and promoter of Roma civic emancipation ideas was crucial in shaping the larger social Roma movement that would develop in the country in the 1960s–1970s (for more on this, see Friman-Korpela, 2014; Stenroos, 2019).

Unlike most Kaale families, Nikkinen’s was a relatively wealthy one. He was born in 1894, in Heinävesi and was one of seven children. His father, Aleksanteri Nikkinen, was a majority Finn, and his mother, Heta Hagert, a Finnish Kaale. His family, also unlike most Kaale families at the time, did not travel but owned their own farm. The family’s wealth had most likely been gained through Nikkinen’s grandparents’ participation in the military service, records of which go back to the 18th century (a detailed account of this can

be found in Rekola, 2010a). Nikkinen had recollected that non-Roma (or members of the Finnish majority) had worked on their farm (Ibid.).

Again, unlike most other Roma children at the time, Nikkinen went through several levels of the educational system in the country. He, for instance, attended elementary school for four years. It was there that his musical talent was allegedly discovered, which led to him continuing his musical education. His interest in playing the violin was particularly important in this. As such, between 1915 and 1921, Nikkinen attended the Helsinki Music College, which would be a pivotal period in his formation as a musician (Dahlström, 1982, p. 453; Kotilainen, 2009, p. 74). For instance, alongside playing the violin, Nikkinen would also become an accomplished vocal singer (his vocal teacher was Axel von Kothern) and studied music composition (Rekola, 2010a).

Following his studies, after 1921, Nikkinen seems to have made most of his living from his music and performed with different artists from the country, in various venues and concert halls. According to Tuula Rekola (2010a), given that the so-called 'Gypsy music' was an extremely popular genre in Finland in the 1920s, especially in urban areas (see also Jalkanen, 1989, p. 204), Nikkinen became relatively successful by adopting this genre. He often sang in cafes, at events, and in a variety of venues across the country and made much of his living from his performances and his work as a music teacher. In many of his performances, he used the stage name 'Ferdinand Gaalo' (from the word *kaalo*, meaning 'black', in Finnish Romani) and it is stated that he played in almost all Finnish cities.

Ferdinand Nikkinen married Selma Salmiranta in 1915, but divorced in 1917 and remarried Fanni Laaksonen, with whom he had five children. In 1934, Nikkinen and Laaksonen separated, and in 1944, Ferdinand married Anna Laitinen, with whom he had two children (for more on this, see Rekola, 2010a). These events are important to note as, among Kaale, marriage (as an institution) is often not recognised or mentioned: that is, unlike among other Roma/Gypsy communities elsewhere, among Kaale, there presently is no public recognition of the union between a man and a woman within the institution of marriage (i.e. no celebration, wedding, etc.) (Viljanen, 1974; 1979; Mohamed-Salih, 1985). This connects to the so-called culture of 'modesty' among Kaale (which he sometimes criticised; see article below). Presently, this culture also includes the avoidance of any topics related to reproduction or sexuality, including marriage and birth. That is not to say that these events do not occur, but that they are not given any form of community recognition. These norms are often presented as 'traditions' of the Kaale community in Finland (Viljanen, 1974; 1979; 2011; 2012; Grönfors, 1977; 1986; 1997; Mohamed-Salih, 1985; Markkanen, 2003; Roman, 2016).

It is difficult to state with certainty when and how long these 'norms' have been in place and whether or not they manifested in the same way during the interwar period. Nevertheless, they are important here because Kaale 'modesty' and 'cultural norms' were also mentioned in an article Nikkinen wrote in 1913, for the Gypsy Mission's journal, *Kiertolainen* (Vagrant) (1913c, p. 15). Whether these refer to dress only (as an external manifestation of Kaale belonging) or to the ones pointed above, it is unclear. Nevertheless,

what both his trajectory and the arguments in his article point out is that Ferdinand Nikkinen's life course and life aspirations (or goals) were somewhat distinct to that of many other Kaale youth at the time and it also connects to his background of having been born in: 1) a mixed Kaale/Finnish family; 2) a family that did not fit the image of the majority of Finnish Kaale at the time (i.e. not travelling; owning their own farm; relatively wealthy in comparison to other families at the time).

As an adult, and especially during the interwar period, the Nikkinen family's earnings came primarily from Ferdinand Nikkinen's singing and musical career. The family also moved homes according to where the work would take them. It is important to note, however, that Nikkinen openly disagreed with 'travelling' as a lifestyle and thus these moves were based on the jobs that Ferdinand Nikkinen could get as a performer and not on the 'tradition' of wandering, which he had challenged in his first-known article (Kiertolainen, 1913c, p. 15). This position is discussed below, as it converged with the aims and goals of the Gypsy Mission, which saw sedentarisation as the pathway to social integration of the Roma in Finland.

Overall, the Nikkinen family life during the 1920s and the 1930s seemed to be relatively modest, given the lower income he was able to gain from singing and performing. In the 1920s–1930s especially, Finland was also going through a period of recession following the Finnish Civil War, which meant that people were less inclined to take up singing lessons (by then, Nikkinen had also become a music teacher). After the Second World War, however, Ferdinand Nikkinen continued both his musical career and gained further grounds in his work on Roma activism, which would make him into one of the pivotal figures of Roma mobilisation in the country.

In terms of Ferdinand Nikkinen's work concerning processes of Roma civic emancipation in Finland, one of the earliest manifestations of his interest in this work could be seen in his involvement with the activities of the Gypsy Mission. The organisation's aims were those of conducting social work among and with the Roma community in the country, with a focus placed on the education of Roma children, the sedentarisation of the Roma community in Finland and the evangelisation work among the Kaale. When the Gypsy Mission was founded in Tampere, 1906, by Oskari Jalkio, Nikkinen often joined in the mission's different events, either as musical performer, or as supporter and collaborator of the mission's activities, and he continued to do so for the following years (especially between 1911–1913) (Viita, 1967, pp. 71, 84). He would, for instance, play the violin and sing in the evangelising tent meetings of the Mission. He also published in the Mission's journal, *Kiertolainen*, and his name was sometimes mentioned in the journal's events calendars (Ibid.).

A notable article he wrote, mentioned above, was published in 1913, and remains a key testament to Nikkinen's views of the processes of Roma civic emancipation and inclusion within majority society at the time. While his article was primarily written as connected to the Mission's activities, some aspects within it point to Nikkinen's later divergent views concerning the Mission's agenda. The article is important in at least two aspects:



1) the convergence of Nikkinen's views with the aims of the Mission in terms of the focus placed on sedentarisation and education; 2) the divergence of his views in respect to the role of tradition and the notion of 'morality' among the Roma.

Below is a reproduction of some segments of the article, which are crucial and revelatory of Nikkinen's positions on some key aspects, many of which would continue into his later work as an activist in the 1960s (for the full text, including translation, see Roman, 2021b, pp. 680–681).

[...] 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. [...]

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. [...] (Kiertolainen, 1913c, p. 15).

The article is evocative of Nikkinen's views and opinions at the time. It especially emphasises his position concerning Roma mobilisation and emancipation in the country, prior to the start of the First World War. The fact that the article directly addresses Roma youth, rather than Roma in general, is not surprising. In fact, he was nineteen years old when the article was published. What is interesting is his continued emphasis on the issue of 'sedentarisation' (i.e. stopping the 'wandering' life), which he sees as a key pathway to Roma social integration in the country. He underlines this aspect several times, wherein he sees travelling as hindering the younger generations' chances of improving their lives.

Likewise, a similar emphasis is placed in other parts of the article (not quoted above) on the topic of children's (and adults') education, which Nikkinen sees as central to the improvement of the future of the Roma community in Finland. Thirdly, unlike the popular usage of the term 'Gypsies' at the time, which was often found in official and public discourse concerning the Kaale in the country, Nikkinen consistently uses the term 'Roma', which seems to have first been promoted by Oskari Jalkio in an article published as early as 1907 (Kiertolainen, 1907a, p. 5; for a full translation of the text, including notes and commentary, see Roman, 2020, pp. 367–376; 2021b, pp. 674–678). There, Jalkio advised readers of *Kiertolainen* to stop using the term 'Gypsies' (*mustalaiset*, in Finnish) in favour of the term 'Roma' (*Romani*, in Finnish), or that of the term 'Kaalo' (from

Finnish Romani language, literally translated as 'black'). From then on, the journal only used the term 'Gypsy' in its organisational title (Gypsy Mission) or in the reproduction of folklore texts, songs, poems, etc. In all matters concerning the social actions of the organisation, the term 'Roma' was used: for example, 'Roma School', 'Roma children's homes', etc. Ferdinand Nikkinen (as well as other Roma writers on the pages of *Kiertolainen*) also used the term 'Roma' to refer to themselves and to their community, using 'Gypsy' primarily when pointing out to elements of 'tradition' which, in their opinion, needed to change in order for the Roma community to achieve equal status in their society.

In other words, in these three key aspects, Nikkinen's views seem to converge with those of the Gypsy Mission at the time. In fact, the Gypsy Mission was fundamentally concerned with the issue of sedentarisation and oftentimes emphasised this in their publications and actions. Furthermore, the Gypsy Mission had set up several education-focused projects which directly targeted the Roma in the country. For instance, the Mission founded several schools, orphanages, and Roma language courses across the country: such as the first Roma School, which was organised in Vyborg, between 1905–1907; the first Romani course, which was organised in Seinäjoki (Central-Western Finland) in 1906; and the first Roma children's home, which was organised in Sortavala between 1910–1918. In this, Nikkinen's visions seemed to, at least partially, connect with the aims of the Mission.

At the same time, as previously discussed elsewhere (see Roman 2020; 2021a), the article also reveals some important contradictory elements, which could have potentially led to Nikkinen's move away from the Mission and, in fact, in his becoming one of the Mission's most vehement critics. For instance, in his discussion on traditions, Nikkinen seems to view some as hindering Roma's advancements towards social inclusion and upgrading in the country (he called this 'civilisation'). While he does emphasise the importance of 'nationality' and 'language', his views on other forms of 'tradition' (especially dress) were less positive. Yet, in two editorial notes to the article, the editors (quite possibly Oskari Jalkio himself) point out two elements of disagreement:

Editor says: We disagree as to dresses and colours. They are a nice variation in our stiff fashion. It is not necessary to follow the fashion madness of our time. [...] (*Kiertolainen*, 1913c, p. 15).

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. (*Ibid.*)

The first one clearly refers to the clothing of the Roma (women especially), which Nikkinen saw as being detrimental to the aim of becoming fully part of the majority. The editor, on the other hand, seems to value this distinction (perhaps even to the point of romanticising it), especially when comparing it to the fashion of the time. A similar point of view can be seen in the second editorial note, which points out a valuing of Kaale dress and norms; again, in contrast to that of the majority. While these two notes may appear

as mere contrasting opinions, they are especially interesting given Nikkinen's subsequent move away from the Mission.

Not much is known about Ferdinand Nikkinen's social activism work during the interwar period. In fact, after the above-mentioned article was published, there was little mention of his work on the pages of *Kiertolainen*. During this time, Nikkinen seems to have devoted most of his time on his musical career, a period in which he became a relatively successful singer, violinist, performer and teacher. Under the stage name of Ferdinand Gaalo, he sang with various other artists, including Finnish singer Mimmi Borg and immigrant musicians, such as Russian Nina Filimanskaja (in Russian, Filimanskaya) and Romanian Basil Bortenou (a well-known musician at the time, born in Iași, in 1878, and of Armenian descent) (Jalkanen, 1989, pp. 50–52). Ferdinand Gaalo was also a relatively common presence in café performances, which were particularly popular at the time (such as the Princess café in Helsinki). During the interwar period, his Roma-focused work prevailed in his professional field as he adopted the genre of 'Gypsy Music' in his performances (much like Aleksander Åkerlund, whose portrait can also be found in this chapter). Later, his work in the field of Roma activism widened further and seemed to come centre stage after the end of the Second World War.

Sometime in the 1920s, Nikkinen's criticism of the Mission began to unfold and solidify. The proof of this can be found in an article Nikkinen wrote in 1923, where he openly accuses Oskari Jalkio (named there as Mr. Oskari Johnsson) of using his social work on 'Gypsies' as a means to get more money from donors, even in the context in which, according to Nikkinen, Gypsies did not benefit much from this. He also criticises the multiple moves of the Mission's activities and headquarters (such as the move from Tampere, to Vyborg, and then to Helsinki), which Nikkinen saw not only confusing but detrimental to any type of 'social work'. Furthermore, he clearly believed that 'Gypsies' did not benefit much from this enterprise. Given the importance of this source material, below is a translation in full of Nikkinen's 1923 article, published in the newspaper *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* (Finnish Social Democrat) and titled *To Gypsies and to the Friends of the Gypsy Mission*.

To Gypsies and to the friends of the Gypsy mission.

It is well known to many through the envoys of the Gypsy Mission that have toured the country that such a "mission" exists. But that's where that knowledge runs out almost everyone.

The secretary for this mission is Mr. Oskari Johnsson and his assistant is the preacher Skuttnabb.

Mr. Johnsson has been an active man in this mission, he has travelled across the country and held plenty of evening events with the help of a few wild Gypsies. Such an evening usually began with spiritual singing and prayer. This was followed by a romantic tragic presentation of the stages of Gypsy life that opened the hearts and purses of the listeners. The opening of the latter was therefore important, as the presenters announced that work homes, homes for the homeless, etc. had been set up. Gypsies had been educated in both vocational and educational schools.

This all sounded beautiful and promising, the future of the Gypsies looming in the minds of the listeners like the beginning of a millennial kingdom.

But when we look at the other side of the issue, the picture on the board changes quite a bit. These work and homeless homes have been as mobile as the Gypsies themselves. One week you can have such a home in Tampere, but the next week you can go to Vyborg to get it. And when you get to Vyborg, you may find out after very long inquiries that your “home” has moved to Helsinki. The same thing has happened with the head office. That too has been plagued by Gypsy blood too much.

As for otherwise a work home like this, it doesn't deserve its name. The undersigned has got acquainted with the work home at Katariinankatu 2 in Vyborg, for example, and has come to realise that even the Gypsies could not live with the workings that were followed there but had to start begging at the end of the work. As a result, work systems like this have resulted in “work” homes being left empty.

The signatory does not believe that there would be even one Gypsy in Finland who would have been “awakened” to start a permanent job because of the upbringing of these homes. Neither on such evenings nor in “work homes” aids the cause of the Gypsies. It requires different measures.

We have the best proof of this in Romania, where 20% of the population is Roma. Since 1837, efforts have been made to promote the livelihoods of Gypsies by handing them over land for cultivation. This work has then been continued for decades and with good results. The Gypsies have become a resident farming population who have educated their talented children, who have become doctors, professors, judges, journalists, even ministers.

Similarly, Gypsies in Hungary have been raised to their human rights, so that no more than 2% of the 280,000 Gypsies in that country are wandering. It would be time for us in Finland, too, to take some measures with regard to the Gypsy population other than their general contempt and the waste of state and private funds on the original work of some “mission”.

And finally, a word on behalf of our Gypsies about Mr. O. Johnsson.

Mr. Johnsson talks to Finns about the good help and gifts of Gypsies when it comes to getting money for a Roma mission. But when we Gypsies turn to him and his offices, he barks at us like owls, that we continue to learn nothing but swap horses. This is almost a robbery of Gypsies from a person who claims to work to raise and uplift them. You Finns, who are still wasting money on the mission of the Gypsies, know that we Gypsies do not benefit much from them and that the way they have been used so far does not help our cause at all.

For my Gypsy brothers and sisters,

Ferdinand Gaalo, singer. (Suomen Sosialidemokraatti, 1923, p. 7).

The article above is particularly important as this could be the first written source showcasing Nikkinen's change in position concerning the work of the Gypsy Mission, with which he had previously been affiliated. Its content reflects not only a clear criticism of Johnsson and the Gypsy Mission's social work agenda among 'Gypsies' but also requests the readers (i.e. the Finnish readers of the newspaper) to stop giving donations to this organisation. Furthermore, his discussion of the 'evenings' organised by the Mission is particularly striking as, in fact, Ferdinand Nikkinen had previously also been involved in some of them, as a singer and performer. Nevertheless, here he underlines the so-called romanticised way in which the lives of 'Gypsies' were being described by the Mission's employees, in order to “open the hearts and the purses” of the listeners (Suomen

*Sosialidemokraatti*, 1923, p. 7). Most strikingly, Nikkinen (or Gaalo, his artist name, which he used to sign the article), accuses Johnsson and other members of the Mission of even robbing the Gypsies by using the funds gained through donations in matters that do not aid the Roma cause. Nevertheless, with his personal financial distress, during the 1930s and the 1940s, Nikkinen himself sought and received direct financial support from the Gypsy Mission (RMA, Protocols of the Executive Board Meetings, September 3, 1932; September 25, 1940).

It is worth noting that Nikkinen's discussion of Romanian and Hungarian states' work among Roma is undoubtedly idealised in order to underline his argument. For example, while there were indeed some educated Roma in Romania in the 1920s, including doctors, lawyers and journalists – such as the case of C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor illustrates (for more on the latter, see Chapter 4, in this book, and also Roman, 2021b) – these were not necessarily the rule. And while the Roma emancipation movement in Romania indeed pleaded for similar themes (i.e. education, sedentarisation, etc.), and underlined the work of the Romanian state in this respect, there were many other issues that were not as idealised as Nikkinen portrayed them. It is also unclear where Nikkinen obtained his statistical information from. What is important here, however, is the way in which these examples were used in aid of Nikkinen's criticism of the Gypsy Mission and its leadership.

What is striking in this respect is that, after the Second World War, Ferdinand Nikkinen not only detached himself from Gypsy Mission's activities, aims and goals, but became a vehement critic of the organisation. Alongside this, it is worth noting that Nikkinen seems to have become a determined atheist in the post-Second World War context, which contrasts with the earlier position he seems to have had as a young man, especially noticeable in the article published in 1913:

[...] 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 [...]. (Kiertolainen, 1913c, p. 15).

Much like Nikkinen's views during the interwar period, especially those concerning issues of Roma mobilisation, activism and civic emancipation, it is unclear when and how his views on religion had changed. It is also unclear whether his change in religious beliefs were connected or influential in his later complete detachment from the work of the Gypsy Mission. As his son, Reima Nikkinen remembered, Nikkinen had always been interested in philosophy and, though never achieving university-level education, read widely in a variety of topics: including those pertaining to religion and spirituality. His move away from a Christian-faith to atheism was said to be connected to these wider interests (SKSA, SKSÄ 69.2012, Reima Nikkisen haastattelu 22.08.2012). Nevertheless, whether connected or not, the move and his wider interest in philosophy, spirituality and social movements appear to have been crucial in Nikkinen's later actions and in his

becoming a critic of the Mission he once supported (or, at the very least, the Mission he once collaborated with).

Alongside the above mentioned 1923 article, the clearest 'official' example of his vehement criticism emerged in 1946, when Ferdinand Nikkinen wrote a letter to the Ministry of the Interior, in which he had collected the signatures of 364 Roma men, and where he highlighted that Roma should be more actively involved in the shaping of Roma policy in the country (Pulma, 2006, p. 166; Friman-Korpela 2014; Roman, 2020; 2021a). In it, he also directly criticised the work of the Gypsy Mission (an organisation led by non-Roma Evangelicals), and the lack of Roma leadership within it, as well as the assimilationist approach of the Mission's activities concerning Kaale in the country (see also Stenroos, 2019).

While the letter seems to have gone entirely unheard and did not lead to any actual actions (i.e. there was no policy change of any sort), Nikkinen continued his efforts in the field of the civic Roma movement throughout his life and career as an activist. An example of this is the ways in which, in 1953, his work contributed to the foundation of one of the first (official) Roma-led organisation in the country, *Romanengo Staggos* (Romanien liitto / Roma Association). Worth mentioning, however, is that despite previous assumptions that Nikkinen was the founder of *Romanengo Staggos* (Stenroos, 2019; Roman 2020; 2021a), recent finds may show otherwise, or at least complicate the picture further. For instance, in a document from 1953 listing the board of trustees of the Association, Nikkinen's name does not appear at all (SKSA, Karl von Schoultzin kokoelma). The organisation was also only registered in 1954. It is also worth noting that the first Roma-led organisation in Finland may have come much earlier, in 1917, under the name of *Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura* (Finnish Roma Civilisation Society) and led by a Kaale woman under the name of Ida Blomerus (also known as Cingardy-Ora). More on this can be found in the portraits of Antti Palm and Ida Blomerus below.

Going back to *Romanengo Staggos*, as discussed elsewhere (Roman 2020; Roman 2021a), the the organisation itself did not last for long in that format. What it did do, however, was set the groundwork for the establishment, in 1967, of the Finnish Gypsy Association (*Suomen Mustalaisyhdistys*), by a group of Roma and non-Roma activists who had adopted some of the strategies that lay at the basis of the founding of *Romanengo Staggos*. Both Ferdinand Nikkinen, at the time 73 years old, and Reima Nikkinen, his son, were said to have been present at the founding meeting of the Finnish Gypsy Association. In fact, Reima Nikkinen himself would become a leading Roma activist in the country, following in his father's footsteps. The Finnish Gypsy Society continues to have its influence on Roma policymaking in the country, until the present-day and, under the changed name of Finnish Roma Association (*Suomen Romaniyhdistys*), it constitutes one of the leading Roma civic organisations in the country. As a whole, it appears to parallel and connect its activities to those of Romano Missio, the present-day name of the former Gypsy Mission (see also Roman 2020).

Alongside his activism work, Ferdinand Nikkinen also wrote a monograph on Roma. The book seems to be a compiled source and it contains general information on Roma (history, religion, culture), from a very broad perspective, and with only scattered reference. The origins of the direct citations are mentioned in the manuscript, although there are no references or bibliography. The book seems to be a collection of materials and information that Nikkinen had gathered on 'Gypsies' throughout his life. The title of the monograph is *Mustalaiskansa kristinuskon ristivedossa ja rotusyrjinnässä* (The Gypsy People between Christianity and Racial Discrimination). Ferdinand Nikkinen allegedly tried to have the book published, without any success. It can presently be found, as an unpublished and undated monograph, within the archive of the Finnish Literature Society, donated to the Society by Ferdinand Nikkinen's son, Reima Nikkinen (SKSA, Ferdinand Nikkisen arkisto). Ferdinand Nikkinen passed away on January 7, 1971, at 76 years old, in Helsinki, where he is also buried.

### Aleksander Åkerlund

#### *Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

Aleksander Åkerlund (March 4, 1893–December 1, 1944), and also known as Saska Chaaro and Alex Aulo, was a Finnish Roma musician and lecturer, who was active between the 1910s and the 1940s. Åkerlund combined his talents as a singer, violinist, actor and book editor to pursue Roma civil rights during his long and varied career, building on the idea of 'Gypsy romanticism' meets 'Roma activism'. On the one hand, he exploited the popularity of so-called 'Gypsy music' – a Romani-related music played in a characteristic 'Gypsy style' and composed by non-Roma composers – for his cause and, on the other hand, he dismantled and renewed this image by combining with his art an active action in Romani affairs.

Much like Nikkinen, Åkerlund started his public work in the circles of the Roma-focused Evangelical organisation the Gypsy Mission, first selling newspapers then working as preacher, actor and musician, from 1911. After his years in the Gypsy Mission, Åkerlund was involved in the non-religious Roma civil rights movement in Finland of the time, which crystallised at the end of the 1910s in the activities of two key institutions: *Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura* (the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society), established in the spring of 1917 and *Suomen Mustalaisteatteri* (the Finnish Gypsy Theatre), which performed in 1917 and 1919. However, Åkerlund's true career was that of an independent lecturer and violinist, without any commitment to associations or artist groups. Calling himself "the only Roma Enlightenment speaker in the Nordic countries", Åkerlund and his non-Roma wife, dancer and reciter Tilda Åkerlund (who also used the forename Milda and the surnames Aulo, Jouni; 04.02.1894 – ?), organised, between 1914 and 1938, hundreds of Gypsy

evenings (*Mustalaisilta*), and later also Hungarian evenings (*Unkarilais-ilta*), all over Finland and Sweden, with music, dance and lectures on Roma issues and on the importance of art in civilising the Finnish nation.

Aleksander Åkerlund was born in the parish of Säkkijärvi (today Kondratyev/Kondratjevo), located next to the Karelian city of Vyborg, into a travelling Kaale family. In the 1890's in Säkkijärvi, there were about 90 registered Roma mainly from the Åkerlund kin (Helsingin Sanomat, 1944a, p. 3, Helsingin Sanomat, 1944b, p. 11; TA, K 9, 1895).

The transfer of the activities of the Gypsy Mission to Vyborg in 1911 had far-reaching goals concerning Kaale families in the country: education, employment, colonisation (i.e. sedentarisation) and christianisation. The Gypsy Mission planned special firewood production facilities as workplaces for men in Vyborg, and initial capital was needed: from 1912 to 1913, they organised groups of performers and the Senate of the Grand Duchy of Finland issued railway freehold tickets for them to perform in different parts of Finland. This action involved Kaale, too. Named are, for example Åkerlund himself, as well as Antti Palm, Ferdinand Nikkinen and Ida Blomerus (whose portraits can also be found in this chapter).

Åkerlund is known to have been in a fixed relationship with the Gypsy Mission and its executive manager, Oskar Johnsson (later Oskari Jalkio; 1882–1952). Many major and minor details suggest that Åkerlund's position in the Gypsy Mission and his importance to Jalkio was special. For instance, his necrology tells that he had received initial education in the Jalkio family, Oskari and Helmi. Further on, there are mentions of Åkerlund in the Gypsy Mission's *Kiertolainen* journal under the nicknames "our Saska" (probably from the Russian diminutive "Sashko" for Aleksandar) as well as "Caro". Åkerlund later used the "Chaaro" name as part of his artist name. As a side note, this nickname is thought to have been used also within the circles of the Mission, including by the Jalkios, but it is unclear what the exact meaning of the term, from Romani language, would be. Interpretations can also be drawn from Jalkio's writings that he contributed to Åkerlund becoming a prominent and influential continuator of his work, the "torch-bearer" of the Gypsy Mission (Kiertolainen, 1912a, p. 4; 1913b, p. 18; Helsingin Sanomat, 1944b, p. 11; Blomster & Roman, 2021, pp. 197–221).

There is no precise information as to why "torch-bearer" Åkerlund became slowly detached from the operations of the Gypsy Mission during the 1910s. There are hints that the reasons may have been, on the one hand, connected to a personal spiritual crisis and, on the other hand, connected to his opposition to assimilationist positions emphasised in the Gypsy Mission's early-stage activity. The separation may also have been partly the result of continued financial difficulties in the Gypsy Mission and even an outright inability to pay commissions to its employees. Some reasons can possibly be found in Oskari Jalkio's acrimonious writing in the *Maakansa* (Country People) newspaper (1914, p. 3) entitled "Beware of the Fraud!" (*Varokaa petosta!*). In it, Jalkio warned against a Gypsy youngster who, despite bans, did not stop performing and raising funds in the



name of the Gypsy Mission without permission. It remains unclear who the youngster Jalkio accused was, even though Jalkio's inscription fits temporally with Åkerlund's first detachments from the Gypsy Mission. At least from newspaper accounts of his own, Åkerlund had, coincidentally, over the course of 1914, just ended up in holding a series of appearances with speeches and music.

A good example of the concerts and presentations organised by Åkerlund at the time was the one held in the Rantasalmi Workers' House, of which the newspaper *Vapaus* (Freedom) wrote as follows. As can be seen in the written text, Åkerlund did not appear in this particular case as the representative of the Gypsy Mission, and performed as an independent artist, without Oskari Jalkio:

Gypsy youngster A. Åkerlund gave a presentation at the Rantasalmi Worker's House on 8. Day of this month. He presented his own tribe's ways of life and how it travels all around the world: exchanging, selling and buying, telling fortune, predicting and begging. This all they have as thousands of years of inheritance passed by generation to generation, and they have that so adapted in their blood, that few of his tribe can save themselves from these ways of life. He told that he himself, who has already has entrant to a better position, often gets to turn his eyes on the ground and shed tears for the reason that he was born dark and that the blond tribe still misunderstands him. The speaker hoped that blonds would evoke, his tribe from such a legacy of the hobo's life by spreading knowledge and enlightenment wherever they could be given.

Finally, he performed Gypsy violin tunes and Gypsy songs by singing. It can be also mentioned that the audience very moderately listened to Gypsy's performances. (*Vapaus*, 1914, p. 2).

The text is an interesting perspective on the emphasis of Åkerlund's speeches during the early stages of his career. Thus, here he seeks very empathetically to evoke compassion and even pity for 'Gypsies' and thereby arouse the desire to help. Also, four general points can be made of it: 1) Åkerlund's appearance took place on the premises of the local labour association's Workers' house, a practice which came to be common in the next stages of Åkerlund's career. Further on, meaningful is that 2) Åkerlund positioned himself as an "entrant to a better position" outside his "tribe", and 3) he firmly believed that the knowledge and enlightenment spread by non-Roma would improve the status of the Roma in the country. Also meaningful is the mention, that 4) Åkerlund was, already in 1914, at 24 years old, a noticeably good violin player. These themes were central to Åkerlund's future career as a free artist in Helsinki as well as his long career going into the late 1930s. That said, although his later presentations more widely talked about the history of the Roma, the same undertone that had already been expressed in this speech remained: civilisation efforts, namely education and integrating into majority society through work and housing.

It is also important to point out that Åkerlund's detachment from the Gypsy Mission and movement into left-wing circles favoured by Helsinki artists did not lead to a definitive separation from the Gypsy Mission and the values it represented. A clear indication

of this is the book *Features of the Life of Gypsies* (Piiroteitä mustalaisten elämästä, Aulo, 1934; for more information about the book, see Blomster & Roman, 2021) edited by Åkerlund, which included religious texts, such as religious poems and excerpts from the Holy Bible. It is also clear that, from the direction of the Gypsy Mission, the relationship would seem to have been open: the Gypsy Mission supported the “Mission’s former working man, musician Åkerlund” by donating to his wife, in 1926 (when, due to illness, he was in financial difficulties), 100 pieces of *Kiertolainen* to sell. And, just before the Second World War, when Oskari Jalkio returned to the Gypsy Mission’s governing bodies after his work abroad, in the Dominican Republic of Haiti (1931–1938), Jalkio joined the board as its chairperson, and Åkerlund’s name can be found in the list of board members (RMA, Protocol of the Executive Board Meetings, November 12, 1926; Viita, 1967, pp. 121–122).

Even before settling in Helsinki, Åkerlund was an experienced performance violinist. He had started his studies most probably when living in Vyborg. Vyborg was an international and vibrant music city and the centre of entertainment life, where Russian Gypsy bands performed regularly. However, according to the known Gypsyologist Arthur Thesleff, the Finnish Roma’s own involvement in public music life in early 20th century Finland was extremely limited. A few local musicians were known by name and, in the parishes of South-West Finland, a Gypsy band comprised mainly of members of the Roos family performed, playing the dance music of the countryside (Finsk Tidskrift, 1922, pp. 307–318; Blomster, 2010). When moving to Helsinki in the late 1910s, Åkerlund became involved both with the Finnish Gypsy Theatre (1917 and 1919) and the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society (spring 1917). How this all happened is not clear down to the details. In this portrait, the Finnish Gypsy Theatre is explored in more detail, while in Ida Blomerus’s portrait more focus is placed on the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society.

The Finnish Gypsy Theatre (1917 and 1919) was a Helsinki-based troupe performing nationwide as a touring theatre, led by actress and recitation artist Helinä Svensson-Timari (1887–1953). The Theatre’s repertoire was in both years of its activity a stage adaptation of a romantic tragedy written by Swedish writer Victor Rydberg (1828–1895) on *Signoalla*. *Signoalla*, which was first published in Swedish in the Aurora calendar 1857 under the subtitle “romantic fairytale poem”, was translated into Finnish, by Finnish Novelist Juhani Aho (1861–1921; translation published in 1895). In the history of Finnish theatre and literature, the Finnish Gypsy Theatre and *Singoalla* resurfaced as a project of Helinä Svensson-Timari theatre project, or one of Elvira Willman-Eloranta’s unfinished effort to extend her own artist work’s audience: *Singoalla*’s preserved manuscript recounts the fact that it was envisaged as an opera (Seppälä, 2012, p. 35; Hyttinen, 2012, pp. 120, 123).

The stable staff composition of the troupe playing *Singoalla* included six people in 1917, of which two were Roma: Aleksander Åkerlund and Ida Blomerus, or Ida Cingardy-Ora, as it was printed in the year 1917 handout, who a couple of years before had performed two shows, *The Entry of Civilisation among the Gypsies* and *The Black Wrath (Musta viha)*, on the occasion of the Gypsy Mission. The theatre was planned to consist of Gypsy actors

alone; however, this goal had to be haggled throughout the theatre's operation: the other actors named in the handout of the play year 1917 were Toivo Kivihalmé, Onni Puro, Helinä Svensson and Lidja Assik. Åkerlund's role was to play the role of Assim, the son of the Gypsy King, in this romantic tragedy between Signoalla and Erland, the son of the knight of the castle. Cingardy-Ora appeared as Assim's sister, Ciria (KA, Senaatin taloussosasto, F3 174/3, Eb 3439).

The connections behind the Theatre were multiple. The dramaturgy of the play was done by Elvira Willman-Eloranta, a leftist feminist and writer and founder of Touring Theatre of Labour People (Labour's Tour Theatre). The choreographies of the dances in the 1917 performances were done by either Hertta Idman (1890–1942), the pioneer of Finnish modern dance, or Bertha Corander (1864–1955), a choreographer at Swedish Theatre (*Svenska Teatern*) in Helsinki 1914–1916 and Apollo Theater 1916–1917, both mentioned in the sources (Uusi Suometar, 1913, p. 4; Lahti, 1917, p. 3; Seppälä, 2012, p. 35; Mikko. Olavi Seppälä 22 September 2020).

The societal nature of the Finnish Gypsy Theatre also manifested itself in several ways. It was articulated clearly in newspaper writings, as well as in the play itself. In one article published in *Työmies* (Working Man), one particular point was raised about the content of the play: “the ambivalence between the love between the Gypsy girl and the knight, the right of nature, and the schematic societal nature” (Työmies, 1917c, p. 5). Thus, the restrictions imposed by society and class on people's relations, the theme which was now raised together by the non-Roma artists and Roma in the early Roma rights movement, was included in the play itself as an unadjusted and tragically concluded love story between lovers from different backgrounds.

Of great interest is that, according to the remaining draft of the script of the play, Elvira Willman-Eloranta had preserved some scenes, in which emancipatory themes were featured. In one scene, Singoalla and her lover's mother find each other through the subordinate status of a woman, and Singoalla cries that out in her own words: “Blessed be the mother, wonderful, you are, as I am, an unsafe woman”. The insight into these breeds a bond of solidarity between them. Signoalla ends up handing over the “free flower of love”, a new-born baby which they called “Child of Sorrow”, as a foster daughter to her own grandmother (KA, Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan arkisto).

There were diverse critiques of the Finnish Gypsy Theatre's *Singoalla*. Without going deeper into this matter, it can be noted that in *Kiertolainen* a rather positive review of the Finnish Gypsy Theatre was presented, allegedly written by Oskari Jalkio (Kiertolainen, 1923, p. 11), pointing that Åkerlund and others had been coping with the “difficult task quite brilliantly”. It was also noted sarcastically with the hope that “even this one more worthy endeavour on the Roma side would remain pending as a counterbalance to any degrading trickery and camping vilification of the Roma tribe” (Ibid.).

In any case, the years as a Roma actor in Finland in Aleksander Åkerlund's career were boundary breaking. Reportedly never-before were the Roma themselves performing within the theatre in Finland, in the roles of Gypsies, or in any other roles for that matter.

For Åkerlund, the opportunity was not a once-in-a-lifetime one. During his career, he appeared as an actor in Gypsy roles at least in Joensuu Theatre's *Preciosa* (1922) based on *La Gitanilla* by Miguel de Cervantes (1613) and in the Lieksa's Workers' Theatre's play *Kylän heittiö* (1925) based on a play by the Hungarian writer Edvard Tóth (Falú rossza, Village Scamp, 1875) (Suur-Karjala, 1922, p. 3; Kansan Voima, 1925, p. 4).

Åkerlund's career as an independent campaigner for Roma issues began after the Finnish Gypsy Theatre ceased operations. That period, from the 1920s to the end of the 1930s, could be characterised as a time when Åkerlund transitioned into a professional artist-activist: Åkerlund organised hundreds of Gypsy evenings (*Mustalaisilta*), Propaganda evenings (*Propaganda-ilta*), and Hungarian evenings (*Unkarilais-ilta*), the latter of which was a popular musical topic in Finland in the 1920s, with presentations about Roma and performing as a violinist all over the country. Alongside the social aspect, the history and culture of Roma rose to be a key theme in his lectures, as well as comprising more general questions about the importance of art. It was still the time when the religious content of Åkerlund's lectures, noticeable during his Gypsy Mission period, was narrowed down, only to rise again, to some extent, in the 1930s.

Prior to this, however, he focused on his self-improvement as an artist: like Ferdinand Nikkinen some years before, Åkerlund applied to become a music student in Helsinki Music College (*Helsingin musiikkiopisto*, predecessor of the Sibelius Academy). According to the Sibelius Academy Archive's documents and the newspapers, during the year 1919, Åkerlund was studying subjects like singing, theory of music and violin playing with well-known violinists of the time Heikki Halonen, Elis Jurva and Arvo Hannikainen. Alongside his studies, Åkerlund was actively growing his repertoire as a violinist. For example, the 1925 concert programme was already fairly international: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) *Mustalaisromanssi* (Gypsy Romance), Riccardo Drigo's (1846–1930) *Serenade*, Jules Massenet's *Élégie* (1842–1912), N. R. Bakaleinikov's (1881–1957) *Ole armollinen* (Oh, Mercy), Enrico Toselli's (1883–1926) *Serenade*, Ernő Kondor's (1881–1951) *Vanha mustalainen* (Old Gypsy) and W. Proowski's (1861–1917) *Réverie*. There were also two adaptations of Finnish composer Oskar Merikanto's (1868–1924) arrangements, a Finnish folk song *Voi äitiparka ja raukka* (Poor Mom) and Elemer Szentirmay's (1836–1908) *Mustalainen* (Gypsy) composed 1875. These combined the core of Åkerlund's repertoire for years thereafter (SAA, List of given lessons during semesters 1918–1920 in the Helsinki Musical College; Aamulehti, 1927, p. 4; SM, Alex Åkerlund's tour poster 1925).

With his new repertoire and lectures Åkerlund now headed on long performing trips to different parts of Finland, acquiring performance sessions through his own contacts, and through newspaper announcements. Below is a text published in the newspaper *Perä-Pohja* (a newspaper published in Perä-Pohja province) (Perä-Pohja, 1932, p. 3) describing important aspects of Åkerlund and his wife's, Milda Åkerlund-Aulo, organised evening in the Tornio region, in 1930. Åkerlund's wife had joined his tour in 1925:

### Interesting Occasions in the Tornio Region

In the Tornio area, Mr. Axel Åkerlund-Aulo and his lady are currently holding interesting presentations and art sessions. The first of these occasions was yesterday at the Civic College of Peräpohjola and those will continue probably in schools and in other properties in the parishes of the valley of Tornio river. Mr. Åkerlund-Aulo presented the history his own nationality, Gypsies, their status in Finland and other European countries. The journals write about these presentation sessions include the following:

“When hearing of Mr. Åkerlund-Aulo’s factually exhaustive, interesting and descriptive speeches of his tribe’s hard fate under the centuries, the listener as if he awakens from his long-term slumber and begins to feel understanding and pitiful sympathy for the ideas of the person who performs the programme”.

The presentation gives you an excellent and clear picture of the fate of the Vagrant people wandering from place to place.

Except for the presentation, Mr. Åkerlund-Aulo plays also violin: Gypsy and Hungarian folk tunes as well as other playing numbers. He has studied his art under the guidance of qualified teachers and achieves an excellent technique, complemented by emotional sensitivity.

Mrs Milda Åkerlund-Aulo is mainly assisting as a reciter of poems. Her director in her art has been our well-known reciter Arvi Mansikka and Mrs Aulo’s interpretation of poems specially written by Petöfi are refined.

Yesterday’s audience at the People’s College was very pleased with what they heard. (Perä-Pohja, 1930, p. 3).

Two things can be read from the text above when comparing it with the 1914 presentation.

1) *Audience*. Broadly put, Åkerlund had now moved also into locations of other associations, restaurants, cafes, schools and even localities of universities – and to radio performances. 2) *Diverse content and Hungarian theme*. Interestingly, Åkerlund brought his own Roma background out as an international construction which was cleverly connected to Finnishness and ‘Finno-ugrianism’ via the Hungarian-Gypsy theme – a theme which, at the time, was fairly popular on the music scene in Finland. It is worth mentioning that there were also Hungarian and Romanian Gypsy orchestras and musicians visiting and performing in Finland throughout the 1920s and 1930s; for example, Banka Bista Gypsy Orchestra and Veres Károly Gypsy Orchestra and Mago Károly Gypsy Orchestra. Also, a long career on the Finnish music scene was achieved by the Romanian musician Basil Bourtenau, who also performed with Finnish Roma musicians, Ferdinand Nikkinen and Mimmi Deivali Zehai Borg (Deivali Zehai comes from the Romani language, *deuleski/deulali čaj*, and means The Daughter of the God of the Skies). Borg also performed under several other names, like Dinali Zchai-Borg (*dinali zchai*, meaning ‘silly girl’ in Romani language, thus Silly Borg’s girl) (Uusi Aura, 1923, p. 1; Helsingin Sanomat, 1925, p. 10; 1929, p. 3; Jalkanen, 2006, p. 106)

There is not much to say about how his fellow Roma took issue with the emphasis found in Aleksander Åkerlund’s lectures and playing. In the oral history of the Finnish Roma collected in the 1960s, Aleksander Åkerlund is remembered as a prominent violin player (TYKA, AK 2685/1973). Conversely, the reception of Åkerlund’s appearances as a

speaker, actor and musician was on average favoured in the newspapers by the non-Roma writers. Only to mention two: Nils Robert af Ursin (1854–1936), the first chairman of the Finnish Labour Party and the second one, whose name is not known but who signed with the pseudonym *Nuorisoseuralainen* (Member of the Finnish Youth Association, a youth movement established in 1881). Ursin, MP of the Social Democrats, wrote a speech encouraging Åkerlund and inspiring the public in the provincial newspaper *Hämeen Kansa* (Häme people) (1924, p. 3). In his writing, Ursin called for a financial support of the Roma according to Åkerlund's argument of "rising from their state of discount", as "the present society is, as with the Jewish people, to blame for their miserable social condition in large numbers". Åkerlund's activities might also be defended by arguments related to Finnish cultural nationalism. That happened when *Nuorisoseuralainen* compared Åkerlund to Väinämöinen, the wizard of the Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*, who, with his Finnish national instrument kantele, "lit a tune in our souls", the idea of the power of knowledge. Åkerlund appears in this depiction as a saviour figure of Roma, similar to the "dark Väinämöinen" (Räisälän Sanomat, 1927, p. 2).

No direct literary documentary or text written by Åkerlund himself could be found concerning the presentations Åkerlund made in connection with his public appearances. Also, so far, only one article has been found in Finnish newspapers, where Aleksander Åkerlund himself tells, in his own words, his thoughts on Roma life in Finland. In an interview from 1941, Åkerlund comments on the situation of the 1,000 Karelian Roma, who were evacuated to Finland from parishes transferred to the Soviet Union under the Moscow Peace Treaty of 1940 (a total 420,000 evacuees from the district). Åkerlund ends up presenting a series of measures that would allow the Roma, according to him, to settle, with "a sense of home and a joy of work". Below is a quote from the aforementioned:

It is sad that our enlightened country has 3,000 citizens, according to Gypsies, who are illiterate and unskilled. They will never be reached, or better said, will never become established citizens unless the state takes vigorous action against them. In Finland, the work of the Gypsies is currently at zero. Admittedly, the Gypsy Mission has been here for 20 years (after 40 years), but for the last 10 years it has been in recession. (Helsingin Sanomat, 1941, p. 9).

The realities proved to be much more challenging for Roma in Finland after the Second World War than Åkerlund had expected. Many of the evacuees across Finland ended in Southern Finland's cities and, in particular, in the suburbs of Helsinki. Finland gained its new 'Gypsy problem', an official statement which would become a key issue throughout the 1950s and again in the 1960s and led to the new rise of the Roma civil rights movement.

Aleksander Åkerlund died of pneumonia in Helsinki, on December 1, 1944, at the age of 51. In his final years, he had given up playing due to rheumatism and made a living as an itinerant art dealer, selling his wife Tilda Åkerlund's Lapland-themed paintings. However, the unknown author of the text on Åkerlund's tombstone had far-reaching

hopes. The text inscribed reads as follows: “Roma tribe Enlightening-lecturer Aleksander Åkerlund”. This indicates the hope that Åkerlund’s work on civic activism and enlightenment would be remembered (Pohjolan Sanomat, 1938, p. 3; Helsingin Sanomat, 1944a, p. 3; 1944b, p. 11).

The story of Aleksander Åkerlund, however, did not end up in the canon of Finnish Roma civil rights movement and there are only scattered references about his musical career in the writings on Roma history in Finland. In this respect, the gatekeepers of the source materials of the history and historiography of this issue had a significant role. That said, Åkerlund’s story raises the question about the frictional relationship between the non-Christian Roma civil rights movement and the Roma movement which operated on Christian grounds from the start of the 20th century. Thus, if a Roma civil rights activist represented alternative views to the hegemonic Roma elite, as Aleksander Åkerlund’s partially did knowledge about them may remain absent from the official writing of history, as well as from oral history.

## Ida Blomerus

### *Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

Born in Impilahti, Karelia, Ida Blomerus (June 16, 1890 – February 1953) was one of the central figures in the activities of the Finnish Gypsy Mission (*Suomen Mustalaislähetys*) in the first years of the 1910s. She was, among other things, the forewoman of the Roma Work-home established in Vyborg in 1913 and prominently involved in the performance and fundraising tours of 1912–1913 as a singer, speaker and reciter of her own poems. Among the other Roma who appeared with her included Tilda Ahlgren, Miss Lindberg, Ferdinand Nikkinen, Antti Palm and Aleksander Åkerlund.

While active in the Gypsy Mission, Blomerus awoke to the misery of the social and social status of Roma and later also became one of the key figures in the first hints of a Finnish Roma civil rights movement, in 1917. Blomerus had begun her independent career as a performing “Gypsy Singer” under the stage name Ida Cingardy-Ora in 1914 (also I. Cingardy; Cingardy comes from Romani language, meaning “quarrel-maker”). This led her, under the name of I. Cingardy Blomérus-Ora, into the circles of the two supposedly earliest institutions for Roma civil rights movement in Finland: *Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura* (Finnish Roma Civilisation Society), established in 1917 and *Suomen Mustalaisteatteri* (Finnish Gypsy Theatre), active in 1917 and 1919.

Perhaps due to her entrepreneurial heritage, and a folk college background, Ida Blomerus also established the registered business name *Office “Knowledge and Advice”*, in the spring of 1917. The Blomerus family history in Impilahti included her father’s entrepreneurship in the watch repairing industry, which was widely recognised even among non-Roma. According to newspaper reports, in the autumn of 1917, Blomerus’s company sold

and brokered residential shares and small firms in its business flat in central Helsinki. In Finland, at that time, women's entrepreneurship was not exactly exceptional. However, it was focused, unlike the Blomerus company, on "clothing, food and nurture" (Wuoksi, 1894, p. 2; Registeringstidning för varumärken, 1917, p. 1011; Vainio-Korhonen, 2002).

Ida Blomerus' short career moved into unfamiliarity. Despite of this, significant was the fact that the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society had in Ida Blomerus a female foreperson and chairperson – a fact that challenges the common notion that Roma women would have played a mostly passive role in the early stages of the Roma civil rights movement in Finland. Also, Blomerus' activities in the trade sector traditionally favoured by the Finnish Kaale on the terms of modern society show interestingly her quest for the construction of self-styled 'Gypsiness'. In that action, too, Ida Blomerus wanted to highlight her own background: according to the records of the trade register, Blomerus's registered business name *Office "Knowledge and advice"* was marked in the name of Ida Cingardy Blomérus-Ora – a name which Ida Blomerus had either chosen herself or had been given within circles where she was known as an artist and an advocate for Roma rights.

Ida Blomerus was born in Impilahti, in Karelia, on the northern shore of Lake Ladoga. It was only tens of miles from Impilahti to Sortavala, where Sofia Schwartz studied to become a teacher from 1907 to 1911 (see Schwartz's portrait, below). The distance to Vyborg – the city where the Gypsy Mission started its actions in 1911 – accrued some 200 kilometres. In the early 20th century, Impilahti had a large Roma population: based on a survey by the Finnish Senate of Gypsy population in the 1890s, out of 1500 Roma registered in Finland, Impilahti had 53 people enrolled. Under the name Blomerus, there were 33 people. (Karjalan Sanomat, 1912, p. 2; TA, K 9, 1895; Impilahti).

There is no information on how, and at what point, Blomerus got involved in the operation of the Gypsy Mission. She had attended the East Karelian Folk College in Impilahti. With certainty, however, it is known that she acted as a speaker of the Gypsy Mission, on several occasions in 1910. Along with the role of prominent speaker, other duties held by Blomerus in the Gypsy Mission included serving, in 1913, as the forewoman of a working home for men and women in Vyborg. As her working partner, she had the deacon Fabian Hintikainen and Helmi Johnsson, the wife of Oskari Jalkio, as the executive director (Harri Blomerus, personal communication, December 19, 2020; Kiertolainen, 1910, p. 6; Kiertolainen, 1913a, p. 16)

Like the time of Blomerus' accession to the Gypsy Mission, the time of her separation is also unclear. However, the beginning of her own appearance, first as reciter, then as singer without connections to the Gypsy Mission, is timed around 1914. Interestingly, in the same year her address information can be found in the Helsinki address and trade list, which lists her professional title as "music student". Blomerus, according to newspapers, had studied solo singing under the guidance of Finnish internationally renowned opera singer Aino Ackté (1876–1944) (Työmies, 1914, p. 2; Parikkalan Sanomat, 1915, p. 2; Helsingin ja ympäristön osote- ja ammattikalenteri, 1914, p. 64; Savolainen, 1916, p. 3).



It was also during these years, from 1914 to 1916, when Ida Blomerus became an active and known performing artist, as a “Gypsy singer”, using the artist name I. Cingardy-Ora after her marriage. Broadly put, Blomerus performed frequently, especially in Worker’s houses (i.e. houses of workers’ associations) in cities and parishes in eastern Finland. In her performances, Cingardy-Ora, emphasised internationalism in many ways. For example, her repertoire consisted of Roma songs from different countries, as well as small pieces by well-known Finnish and international composers and folk songs. The languages of the songs varied between Finnish, Swedish, Russian and Italian, as well as the Romani languages of different countries. Her most liked number was a song composed by Elemar Szenttirmay *Mustalainen* (Gypsy). According to the critical reviews published, Cingardy-Ora’s special purpose was also to draw the public attention “to her tribal Gypsies, to improve and elevate their status”. In the following prior notice published in *Savolainen* (1916, p. 3) many details on Cingardy-Ora’s artist character are stressed:

#### I. Cingardy-Ora’s Concert

Next Saturday will be a rare concert in the Casino ballroom, when the Gypsy singer, Mrs Cingardy-Ora, singing not only Finnish, Swedish and Russian language songs, but also Gypsy songs in various Gypsy dialects. The singer, who is one of the pupils of Mrs Aché, performs in Gypsy costume and has won the popularity of the public in the capital and elsewhere at her concerts and has received good reviews. We hope the audience will keep the concert in their minds and rush numerously to the Casino next Saturday to hear interesting and beautiful Gypsy songs. Mrs. Cingardy-Ora’s special purpose is also to draw the general public’s attention to her tribesmen, the Gypsies, to improve and uplift their status, for which the concert derives its quite peculiar purpose and charm. (*Savolainen*, 1916, p. 3).

In many ways, Ida Blomerus’ own artist-image as a Gypsy Singer, using the stage name I. Cingardy-Ora, brings to mind the activities of Aleksander Åkerlund and Ferdinand Nikkinen, described in above. Interestingly, for Åkerlund, it is also known that his first detachments from the Gypsy Mission are similarly linked, like those of Blomerus, to 1914. It is also known that the concrete connection between Blomerus and Åkerlund continued, after working in the Gypsy Mission, to be close during their acting in the Finnish Gypsy Theatre, in 1917 (for more on the theatre, see Åkerlund’s portrait). As mentioned above, the theatre performed a play, *Singoalla*, based on a book by Swedish writer Viktor Rydberg. In the play, Ida Blomerus and Aleksander Åkerlund played the adult children, Ciria and Assim, of the Gypsy King (*Vapaus*, 1914, p. 2).

However, while information remains limited, some important changes in the life of Ida Blomerus can be assumed: settling in Helsinki, starting a determined development of her own artistic career as a student of music, and speaking publicly about Roma rights. These points became intertwined in many ways with her work, especially during the year 1917. This is also connected to a little-known activity in the backdrop of the Finnish Gypsy Theatre: establishment of the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society in the early spring of

1917. It is worth mentioning a few words about this short-lived Society, and perhaps the first Roma/Gypsy organisations in Finland which was led by Ida Blomerus, a 27-year-old Finnish Roma woman.

According to the information compiled from newspapers and archives, the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society was founded in early 1917. So far, no information has been found on its registration. However, some facts can be deduced mainly based on the texts of Ida Blomerus (or I. Cingardy Blomérus-Ora, as she used to call herself at the time): the society had about 20 members who already had some experience in societal associations and a board of trustees and committees. Blomérus-Ora also announced that the idea for the creation of the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society and its rules were invented by herself (Työmies, 1917e, p. 6). The establishment of the Society, purposes, connections and forms of action can be found in an article published in *Työmies*, on May 13, 1917, just before the first tour of the Gypsy Theatre:

The Gypsies' enlightenment pursuits have been rekindled in recent times. For that purpose, the "Roma civilisation society" has been formed here in Helsinki, with the aim of making educational work free of religious purposes among Roma, s.o. Gypsies. A tour has been organised by this Society, which in the near future will be in the countryside to perform a stage adaptation of Viktor Rydberg's wonderful poetry narrative on *Singoalla*, which details the love between a Gypsy girl and a knight, the right of nature and the schematic the ambivalence between societal. It is presented by an entourage assembled from real Gypsies. *Singoalla* has been adapted for the stage by novelist Elvira Willman-Eloranta. The troupe performs Gypsy songs, violin playing and Gypsy dances in *Singoalla's* prologue. The entourage plays primarily in the Worker's houses and the first performance takes place at Högfors, 15. this month. (Työmies, 1917c, p. 5).

The article raises two points of interest concerning the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society: the affiliation with leftist and emancipatory actors and the Society's distancing from 'religious purposes'. Both the Society and the Theatre were linked in many ways with labour associations and the people involved in them. For example, Elvira Wilman-Eloranta, who was responsible for the script and dramatisation of *Singoalla*, was a well-known left-wing writer and a feminist with connections to the Touring Theatre of Labour People (*Työväen Kiertueteatteri*). Similarly, the Society's two fundraising evenings, organised in the spring 1917, were held at the premises of labour associations: the Railwaymen's Union (*Rautatieläisten liitto*) and the Swedish-speaking Labour association Friends of Work (*Arbetets Vännern*) (Työmies, 1917a, p. 3; Työmies, 1917b, p. 2; Hyttinen, 2012, p. 120).

Also crucial is the fact that the Society publicly remained disconnected from religiously-justified activities. This theme became the subject of an interesting debate published in *Työmies*, which opens up the context of Ida Cingardy Blomérus-Ora's and the *Society's* activities. The debate had two parties: the *Society's* chairwoman Blomérus-Ora, representing the non-religious and active line, and the group of Roma as a board of the directors of the Society, representing the religious and conservative line. A reply to the original

writing arrived in *Työmies* on 20 May 1917, where the group appearing as the Board of Directors decided that the Society would hereby be disconnected from the activities of the Finnish Gypsy Theatre.

#### Gypsies' enlightenment Hobbies

In the writing of *Työmies* no 127, we ask for a little clarification. The inscription showed that a travelling theatre, called *Gypsy Theatre*, the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society founded in Helsinki and its purpose goodbye, would have been set up by the director Helina Svensson-Timari.

Consequently, it is announced by the Board of Trustees of Finnish Roma Civilisation Society, that no theatre tour has been sent by our Society and that Finnish Roma Civilisation Society is not in connections with the so-called Gypsy Theatre Tour. Yes, our Society has an amusement committee, but it works locally here in Helsinki. In addition, we granted permission to our Acting Secretary Antti Palm of Vyborg to increase our amusement committee and to operate as a local Society in Vyborg.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Finnish Roma Civilisation Society. (*Työmies*, 1917d, p. 9).

Chairwoman Blomérus-Ora's response was published just two days later, on May 22, 1917. She accused this "family group that represented the Christian-conservative line in the Society" of being unwilling to promote the Society's explicit and enshrined purposes. Blomérus-Ora's partly ironic response may also reveal something about the author's personal character, a hint as to why she had the artist name "Cingardy" (i.e. quarrel-maker):

#### Gypsies' Enlightenment Hobbies

To explain the descriptive account published in Sunday's *Työmies*, representing the personal intrigues of the former Secretary of the *Finnish Roma Civilisation Society* and his relative council, is hereby informed as follows:

Primo: the purpose in accordance with the rules of the said civilisation society includes, as an essential part, the establishment of the Gypsy Theatre and the objectives of its activities; the theatre must be regarded as being sent by the said society (since the home stayed members of the society did not have the functionality and willingness required for mobilisation), the chairperson of the society is the publisher and actor of the theatre, on whose initiative and measure also the society and its rules are born; the society whose current secretary has been in theatre rehearsals travelling from Vyborg (although he could not be used in the planned role); the society, which substantial part of the membership body (1/3), constitutes the staff of the said theatre tour; who, at the same time, reportedly have all attended organisational activities in labour associations.

So that this family, representing the Christian-conservativeness in the society, would have done more wisely, in my opinion, than representing the "enlightenment pursuits" of our Gypsies, when representing their soapy solution for the treatment of gout, naturopathy and quackery – in the paid notification section of the journal.

I. Cingardy-Ora.

The chairperson of the S. R. S. (Finnish Roma Civilisation Society). (*Työmies*, 1917e, p. 6).

Two points in this reply by Ida Cingardy Blomérus-Ora still demand their own comment in this context: the relations between Roma families and the ‘Christian-conservativeness’ of the action. Presumably, both points were intended to influence the activities of the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society, on the one hand, as a motivating factor for its activities and, on the other, as a dispersing factor. Inter-family relations, or as Blomérus-Ora writes, “personal intrigues of the former secretary of the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society and his kinsmen” may refer to the form of blood feuding in the Finnish context, which is most commonly manifested today in a principle of avoiding encounters between families in conflict (Grönfors, 1977; Mohamed-Salih, 1985; Markkanen, 2003; Viljanen, 2012). So, it may be inevitable that there was at least a certain level of questioning of the so-called cultural reasons behind the dispersal of the board’s opinions.

In terms of the ‘Christian-conservativeness’ that Ida Cingardy Blomérus-Ora pretends, the gaze eventually turns to the Gypsy Mission. We can also bring up here another archival source signed by Blomérus-Ora that illuminates the context from this point of view. According to Blomérus-Ora’s and Helinä Svensson’s writings, when asking the Senate for free tickets for the use of the Finnish Gypsy Theatre (with no success), the disparity to the Gypsy Mission was similarly noticeable. The request published below was addressed to the Finance Department of the Senate of the Grand Duchy of Finland:

We, the undersigned, who have set up a summer tour called “Gypsy Theatre” to assist Finnish Gypsies in their studies, beg – referring to the civically neglected status of our Gypsies, as well as the fact that the government assisted with free travel tickets on railways religious conversion work carried out under the name of so-called Gypsy Mission, which we Gypsies have not yet come to appreciate, and have not more generally realised its blessing – humbly ask: that the Senate would be favourable to the Finnish Gypsies self-help company that we represent, and to grant the “Gypsy Theatre’s” six-person (6) stamp troupe starting today, free tickets for three months on the Finnish State Railways.

In Helsinki May 14th, 1917.

Helinä Svensson. Gypsy-born actress. Head of the “Gypsy Theatre”.

I. Cingardy Blomérus-Ora. Gypsy-born singer. Chairperson of Finnish Roma Civilisation Society. (KA. Senaatin talousosasto: F3 174/3, Eb 3439).

However, this request was unanimously rejected, with no justification for that rejection being published, as was the custom. Despite the absence of an official reason for the rejection, a few speculations can be made about the political and social reasons that led to it. First, Finland was still a part of Russia as a Grand Duchy of Finland in the spring before its independence in December 1917 and, during the Russian revolution occurring in 1917, there may have been no reason to support any kind of achievements interpreted as left-wing and radical. Second, the activities of the Gypsy Mission, which was prominent in the public eye, were seen as both socially and culturally constructive, and therefore supportable. Attention is also drawn to the fact that the emphasis on the application is strongly on Roma’s own activities and both signatories that appear state their Gypsy

background (although, in Helinä Svensson's case this status would be left without confirmation). Finally, from the point of view of the authorities, the pleading of a group of 'Gypsies' operating through an apparently unregistered association and the support of the project perhaps seemed simply dubious, based on old prejudices.

Whether that was the case or not, the public bickering ended with the decision of the editorial of the *Työmies*, but it undoubtedly continued with other occasions for a long time. That said, ribbings such as that of Blomérus-Ora in the last paragraph, were also familiar in the pages of *Kiertolainen*: she refers here to Oskari Jalkio's pursuit of natural medicine, which he actively introduced in *Kiertolainen*'s newspaper writings (Viita, 1967, pp. 66–67).

The Finnish Roma Civilisation Society moved into the twilight of history after 1917. Likewise, the Finnish Gypsy Theatre suspended its activities in 1918, when there was a sizeable civil war in Finland, and the revolutionary labour movement experienced a bitter defeat. Moreover, the name Ida Blomerus disappeared from the sources and archives after the Finnish Gypsy Theatre ceased its operations. Blomerus married doctor Eino Heikel in 1920 and acted as an entrepreneur under the name of Irda Heikkeli. She continued her career as an artist, at least to some extent, performing with the Helsinki based opera troupe in 1922 in Vyborg, together with renowned opera singers Wäinö Sola and Eino Rautavaara. The family's memory records state that she later kept a restaurant in Lappeenranta and moved to Sweden where she died in Gothenburg, in February 1953 (Wiborgs Nyheter, 1922, p. 3; Harri Blomerus, personal communication, December 19, 2020).

However, if other traces of Blomerus have disappeared, the poems written by her have remained: Ida Blomerus' song text *Sun ristisi juurelle, Jeesus* (By Your Cross, Jesus) can even be found in editions of the songbook *Hengellinen laulukirja* (Spiritual Songbook) favoured by the Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal congregations as well as the Free Church in Finland (*Hengellinen laulukirja*, 1976, 469–470). It is also unclear which of the poems, if any, published with pseudonym in *Kiertolainen*, are written by Blomerus. Perhaps behind the name "Gypsy girl" (*Mustalaistyttö*) is Ida Blomerus – a Roma woman who defended the Roma civil rights alongside her impassioned but brief public career in 1910s.

Ida Blomerus' activity and contribution to the 1917 Finnish cultural, social and economic life was exceptional. As a representative of that cultural life, she sought to develop herself through education as a 'Gypsy Singer'. However, in her social activities, she did not settle for being a line member of associations but was a founder and chairwoman, setting up that which is supposedly the first Roma-driven association in Finland. Furthermore, in economic life, she sought to act in her Romani-language artist name of Ida Cingardy Blomérus-Ora. Ida Blomerus will remain in the history of Finnish Roma as well as the history of Finland as a progressive and ground-breaking personality.

## Sofia Schwartz

*Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

Anna Sofia Schwartz (May 20, 1887 – November 3, 1932), later the surname changed to Säilä and, after her marriage, to Santamo, was born in Kuivaniemi in 1887, Northern Ostrobothnia (north of the city of Oulu). Alongside other women, such as Mandi Isberg, Ida Blomerus, Ina Palmroth and, in the 1930s, Maria Hakaranta (Viita, 1967, p. 109), she was one of the key female Kaale workers within the Gypsy Mission, and a protegee of Oskari Jalkio (Tervonen, 2012, p. 128). She worked as a teacher for the first Roma School of the Mission (1905–1907) and continued her collaboration with the Gypsy Mission through the years, graduating from the Sortavala seminary in 1911. While she could never find a permanent job as an educator, she continued to work as a substitute teacher throughout her life. Schwartz's work within the Gypsy Mission, as well as her particular positions concerning issues of sedentarisation and social integration, position her as a key figure in the history of Roma civic emancipation in Finland, as well as a prime example of the role of women in the Roma movement for mobilisation in the country.

Little is known about Schwartz's family background apart from what has been written in the journal *Kiertolainen* and her own descriptions of her early life, and a short biographical entry written by Tuula Rekola (2010b). However, she presented herself as being a Roma woman who had graduated from primary school in 1905. In 1905, at 18 years old, and in the same year of her graduation, she also happened to meet Oskari Jalkio (at the time known as Anders Oskar Johansson), while he visited Paltamo (the place of Schwartz's studies) as part of his missionary work. The Gypsy Mission had not yet been officially founded (this would occur the following year) but Jalkio's work among Roma/Gypsies in the country had already begun. The Mission had already set up small posts in Tampere (its future headquarters) and travels for the purpose of evangelisation and missionary work among so-called Gypsies (*mustalaiset*) were a key part of the future organisation's work.

According to her testimonies and Jalkio's descriptions of their encounter throughout the years, Sofia Schwartz was the one who contacted Jalkio asking him to help her in her pursuit of further education. As some of the key foci of the Mission's activities were also those of education of Roma in the country, Jalkio took a keen interest in Sofia Schwartz's goals and interests. When a Sunday school for Roma children was set up in Vyborg (an area with a large Roma population at the time), in 1905, Schwartz also became involved and, when the school expanded into a day time school, she also became a school teacher within it (Viita, 1967, pp. 63, 65).

The school, which had 18 pupils, among whom also 3 adult students (*Kiertolainen*, 1907b, p. 5; Blomster, 2012, p. 359), was focused on teachings primarily related to religion. However, a key part within it was also the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics

and singing. Sofia Schwartz took great interest in teaching children, mainly by means of Bible stories, and often emphasised the children's interest in learning, underlining that Roma children too wished and were keenly interested in their education. The greatest reticence, she found, came not from the children, but from the parents (Kiertolainen, 1907b, p. 5). Due to lack of resources, the school closed its doors on February 28, 1907 (see Rekola, 2010b).

It was after the Vyborg school was closed that Sofia Schwartz undertook a trip to Ingria, where she encountered Ingrian Roma. Schwartz, according to her own narration, had met in Vyborg, in the autumn of 1906, a teaching couple from Ingria who had urged her to go on this trip. There are no further details of this travel program or the duration of the trip, only that she arrived in the village of Annamaise in Ingria, on March 9, 1907. However, in connection with her visit, she wrote two articles, one before the trip, in the newspaper *Uusi Inkeri* (New Ingria) (1906b, p. 3) and another, after the trip, in *Kiertolainen* (1907d, pp. 6–7).

One point should be made concerning Schwartz's Ingrian trip: Sofia Schwartz, a Finnish Roma woman, who represented the Evangelical Gypsy Mission, wrote her revival salute to the Gypsies of Ingria in the pro-Finnish newspaper *Uusi Inkeri*, whose predecessor was *Inkeri – The Finnish Proponent of St Petersburg and Ingria* (*Inkeri – Pietarin ja Inkerin suomalainen äänenkannattaja*). The newspaper itself (edited for the same reasons in Vyborg, and no longer in St Petersburg) was disbanded in 1906 by the Russian censorship authorities, on the grounds that its content was interpreted as being too radical. This, whether intentional or not, raises the question of the importance of Ingrians for the Fennoman's nation-building project in the Finnish Grand Duchy. Since the 1840s, when Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884), the author of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, visited the region to collect folklore among the ancestors of the Finns, Ingria had a special importance within the Fennoman's project: namely, Ingria was seen as a region where Finnish folklore remained more 'authentic' than elsewhere, and Finno-Ugric people living in this area were seen as an integral part of the Finnish nation, and a thriving force in the nation-building process. While the ties of the Finnish intelligentsia with Ingria, both concrete and ideological, were strong, there were also firm connections at the grass-roots level, also with local Roma. Without going further into the Ingrian Roma issue, it can only be mentioned that, according to the sources available, in 1906, approximately twenty Ingrian Roma families were estimated to live in the area (*Uusi Inkeri*, 1906a, p. 1), and the networks of familiar houses offering accommodation to Finnish Roma extended even to the Western localities of Ingria (Schoultz, 1955, pp. 130–136). It is, however, difficult to gauge what impact the question of Finnishness and the Ingrian issue had on Schwartz's activities. Nevertheless, Schwartz's trip to Ingria arguably received at least some of its justification from this direction as well.

Following her trip, Schwartz wrote a lengthy article in the journal *Kiertolainen*, about the encounter, comparing Finnish Roma to Ingrian Roma (Kiertolainen, 1907d, pp. 6–7). As a summary of her account, it is interesting to note her position concerning the key

issues revolving around the issue of Finnish Roma social emancipation in the country, as well as the ways in which her views seem to converge with those of the Gypsy Mission at the time. According to Schwartz, unlike Finnish Roma, Ingrian Roma were seen to be much more inclined in believing in God, attending school and going to Church, while also being much less suspicious of missionary work. Also according to Schwartz, this situation may have been due to the fact that the Russian state seemed to have been treating Roma there much more favourably than in Finland and it was far less common to attribute the crimes of one individual Roma to the entire Roma population. At the same time, Schwartz sought to partially justify the suspicion on behalf of the Finnish majority: stating that because Finnish people were hard-working people they were perhaps less likely to accept those who did not work (Ibid.).

Sofia Schwartz's 1907 article thus illustrates a few key points, which also underline her subsequent work with the Mission:

- 1) The use of the term Roma instead of Gypsies can be seen throughout, converging with Jalkio's plea in an article in the first issue of *Kiertolainen* to abandon the use of the latter for the former (Kiertolainen, 1907a, p. 5);
- 2) Schwartz's justification for the suspicion on behalf of the Finnish majority of the Roma in the country underlined the importance of hard-work which also lay at the core of the Gypsy Mission's activities among Roma, while also emphasising Finnish Kaale's connection to Finland and her own desire for the Kaale community to become more fully connected with (or even assimilated within) majority mentality, aspirations and worldviews;
- 3) Connected to the latter, the article contains subtle hints of Schwartz's advocacy of sedentarisation and schooling, also key elements of the Gypsy Mission's projects.

Furthermore, prior to her trip to Ingria, Schwartz had written a short article in *Uusi Inkeri*, in September 1906, addressing the 'Gypsies' (whom there she stated were called Roma in their own language) in that region. Below is a translation of that article. It is worth noting that the Finnish translation of the poem was written in a typical poem structure, while the Romani language version of the poem was written as a sentence structure. The translation below maintains the format of the original source:

Greetings.

We have received the following from Gypsy lady Sofia Schwartz, an employee of the Finnish Gypsy Mission sending her greetings to her Ingrian tribe:

Dear Gypsy sisters and brothers in Ingria!

My heartfelt greetings to you, the unknown Roma\*, and at the same time I am very pleased to announce that the morning is already beginning to loom for us too.

Now the God of love has begun to call especially those of us who are despised in the world and hated by it. I am one of your brethren too, and I have decided to sacrifice my life for raising our people. May the God of love help me in this work.

I believe that soon we can say that every Gypsy:

Oika somma kaalat çenna, / kaali de som çesta panna. / Bi menat rahhaa kaalipa; / soralo hin maan naa va fina. / Doi suksuvaanne kaalibosta. / Parni deske parno jiu.



(I am black on the surface, / My heart is blacker. / But I do not mourn my blackness: / My supporter is strong. / That is my black heart / Transformed into snow white.)  
Sister: Sofia Schwartz

\* Gypsies call themselves Roma in their own language. (Uusi Inkeri, 1906b, p. 3).

The above piece is an interesting example of Schwartz's engagement within the Gypsy Mission (wherein the editors of the newspaper presented her as an employee), as well as Schwartz's emphasis on the pathway to raising her people, through an emphasis on the theme of spiritual uplifting. Furthermore, it is important to note that, in 1906, while Schwartz addressed the community in Ingria as *mustalaiset* (Gypsies), she also emphasised that the latter are called Roma in their own language. It is unclear whether her views were influenced by Oskari Jalkio or the two connected based on similarities of their approaches. In her 1907 article published in *Kiertolainen*, mentioned above (1907d, pp. 6–7), she used exclusively the term Roma to refer to both the community living in Finland and that living in Ingria. This somewhat denotes the ways in which her writing was connected also to the audience she was addressing (readers of *Kiertolainen* or general Finnish readership, for whom the Kaale were known primarily as *mustalaiset*). This could be noted also in another short piece of writing she did for the newspaper *Koitto*, published by the Teachers' Health and Sobriety Association, where she introduces herself as a Gypsy girl (*Koitto*, 1906, p. 8).

Finally, the short piece of poetry at the end, written in Romani language and providing a translation in Finnish (in brackets), underlines both the thematic approach to the issue of emancipation within the Mission (and Schwartz's own views within it) and the dual audience of her message: the Finnish speakers/readers and the potential Ingrian Roma recipients. The authorship of the poem is unclear but versions of the poem were also published in *Kiertolainen*, in 1907, with an article signed by Helmi Johnson's (Oskari Jalkio's wife) (*Kiertolainen*, 1907c, p. 8), as well as in *Kiertolainen*, in 1914 (*Kiertolainen*, 1914a, p. 7), with no signature, and in Oskari Jalkio's book of Roma Songs, in 1939 (Jalkio, 1939, pp. 6–7).

Following her trip to Ingria, Schwartz again came in contact with Oskari Jalkio, who, at the time, was based at the Central Office of the Gypsy Mission, in Tampere. Jalkio supported her continuing studies and, in June 1907, she attended seminary preparation courses in Kuortane, where she also participated in, and organised, missionary evenings and events. Following that training, Sofia Schwartz was admitted to the Sortavala seminary where she studied to become an elementary school teacher (*Kiertolainen*, 1907e, p. 7; Viita, 1967, pp. 70–71; Rekola, 2010b; Lindberg, 2012, p. 146).

During her time at the seminary, Schwartz changed her surname to Sofia Säilä, in 1910 (Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti, 1910, p. 4) and she graduated in 1911, after which she worked as a substitute teacher in various locations. She also continued, throughout this time, her work with the Gypsy Mission, as an evangelist, speaker, and writer for

*Kiertolainen*, until her death. Sofia Säilä later married the Finn Väinö Juhani Santamo (Rekola, 2010b). The details of her marriage date and circumstances remain unknown.

A key aspect in Sofia Schwartz's life was, as mentioned above, her unique position. In her role as a schoolteacher, Schwartz became one of the few female teachers at the start of the 20th century. The fact that her background was Roma made this role even more unique, especially in the context in which not many Kaale children at the time graduated from primary school.

Furthermore, her pursuit of education, her contact with Jalkio and the Mission, and her diligence to continue her schooling, show a key element in her life course, which could also be observed in her writings for *Kiertolainen*: namely, the emphasis placed on education as a pathway to social integration within the country. Alongside that, Schwartz also seemed to have fully internalised the views and goals of the Gypsy Mission; or, at the very least, her views seemed to have fully converged with the latter.

One of the key aspects in this respect was her approach to housing and sedentarisation. According to Schwartz (as well as according to other Roma writers on the pages of *Kiertolainen*, see Nikkinen for example), the seizing of a wandering life was the pathway to a better life, and education as key within it (see also Kiertolainen, 1913c, p. 15). Her career pursuit of becoming a schoolteacher clearly illustrates this position.

At the same time, Sofia Schwartz represents an illustrative example of the agency, voice and determination that Roma women had as part of the movement for civic emancipation among Roma in Finland as well as an example of the role that Roma women had as part of the Gypsy Mission itself. While her Kaale background (and her typical Roma surname) may have hindered some of her chances of gaining permanent employment (during her Sortavala years she had, in fact, changed her family name to Säilä, very likely in order to increase her chances of future employment), she nevertheless continued to work as either a substitute or probationary teacher throughout her short life. Sofia Santamo died of poor health, at the age of 45, on November 3, 1932. Her place of death remains unknown.

## Antti Palm

*Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

Antti Palm (June 11, 1874–May 13, 1939) was a Finnish Kaale pastor and evangelist as well as a key figure within the Gypsy Mission during the early 20th century. He began by working within the midst of the organisation and contributed to expanding its influence among the Karelian Roma/Gypsies in Vyborg and the Finnish Kaale community in Finland, acting as a mediator and a preacher at the various events organised by the mission in the country. He was one of the key members of the Vyborg charter of the Gypsy Mission and, in 1907, part of the group of Roma members that constituted most

of the local branch's board of directors. Alongside this, Antti Palm was involved in what was perhaps the very first Roma-led organisation in the country, the *Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura* (The Finnish Roma Civilisation Society), established in 1917, led by Kaale woman Ida Blomerus (also known as Cingardy-Ora) which was also connected to the first Gypsy Theatre (*Mustalaisteatteri*) in the country (led by Helinä Svensson-Timari, active in 1917 and 1919) (Työmies, 1917a, p. 9). While presently little information has been gathered on Antti Palm concerning his life story or work with the latter two organisations, his influence both within the Gypsy Mission and in the overall work for Roma civic emancipation and Roma mobilisation in the country cannot be understated.

Antti Palm was born on June 11, 1874, in Vyborg, Karelia, a town which has historically been a boundary zone between the Russian and Finnish worlds, having been part of different empires and duchies throughout its history. This is relevant here especially in connection to Karelian Roma/Gypsies, some of whom were Finnish Kaale, some who had mixed connection with Gypsy communities in Russia. As discussed in the introduction, before Finland's independence, in 1917, Vyborg was part of the Grand Duchy of Finland, also part of the Russian Empire. During the interwar period, Viipuri gained the status of the fourth largest town in Finland, and the seat of the Viipuri province. After the end of the Winter War (1939–1940), Vyborg was once again part of Soviet Union and the status of the Karelian refugees from that area to Finland would become a political issue in the conflict between the two countries.

Vyborg was home to a large Finnish Kaale community, among whom were also Antti Palm and his family. The Palm family lived in Vyborg and other the rural provinces of Karelia. The family included father, Malakias (born 1820), mother, Margareta (born 1832), as well as five boys and two girls (born between 1855 and 1874) (Karjala Database, 2019). Anders – or Antti as he was known during his professional life – and his sister Ida, were born as twins in 1874. According to what is preserved of the family's memory records, at least some the children had attended school, at least to some extent, and had achieved fluent reading and writing skills. Also, at least some of them had adopted a Christian-orientated world view. This is all referenced also the boys' nicknames, such as 'Koulu-Hermannin' (School-Hermannin), 'Herran-Janne' (Lord's Janne) and 'Pappi-Antti' (Antti the Priest) (Päivi Majaniemi, personal communication, November 9, 2020; Richard Palm, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Little else, however, is known of the wider family's, and Antti Palm's specifically, earlier history and life.

While the Gypsy Mission seemed to be run primarily by non-Roma and has often been presented as a non-Roma led organisation targeting Roma, in reality, many Kaale were affiliated or members of the Gypsy Mission, from its very inception. This included Otto and Ina (Albertina) Palmroth, Sofia Schwartz, Piini (Albiini) Mäntyniemi, Adolf and Miina Långström, Karl Fredrikki Lindström, Ida Blomerus, Tilda and Yrjö Lindeman, Ferdinand Nikkinen, Alex (Aulo) Åkerlund as well as the most famous Roma preachers among them, Herman Korpp and Antti Palm. It was in his role as a preacher and

evangelist that Antti Palm became most influential within the Mission, from its beginnings in the 1900s.

His work with the Mission seems to have started from the very beginning of the Gypsy Mission itself, in 1907. Furthermore, Antti Palm was also connected to a development which occurred in Vyborg: namely, the organisation of a charter of the Gypsy Mission at a meeting in Vyborg, as early as 1907. There, the Vyborg charter seemed to have, unlike the central seat of the organisation, which was, at that time, based in the city of Tampere (Southern Finland), a majority of its board members Roma: more specifically, 16 Finnish Kaale members and 7 non-Roma members (Tervonen, 2012, p. 128). The Roma members included several of the Palm family, at least based on the family name: Herman Palm, Amalia Palm, Antti Palm, Aleksander Palm, Matilda Palm, Rosa Palm, Iida Maria Palm, Anna Lowisa Palm, alongside Gustaawa Enroth, Wilhelmiina Hagert, Katriina Hagert, Juhana Hörman, Amanda Bollström, Johan Herman Hedman, Wilhelmiina Korppi, Lowiisa Isberg (Kiertolainen, 1907e, p. 7). This situation did not last for very long and the Roma membership gradually decreased over the next few years, as the subsequent issues of *Kiertolainen* note in their detailed memberships.

Furthermore, as early as the 1910s, Palm published regularly in the pages of *Kiertolainen* (1912c, p. 8), alongside other Kaale authors, such as Sofia Schwartz and Karl Fr. Lindström (Tervonen, 2012, p. 128). His publications often concerned his work as a Roma evangelist and his descriptive profession was often simply as 'Romani'. He also featured as a key missionary of the organisation, both on the pages of *Kiertolainen*, as well as in the mentions of mainstream regional newspapers of the time (Wiipuri, 1912, p. 4; Suomalainen, 1912, p. 2; Uusimaa, 1915, p. 2).

One particular article, titled "Helping Gypsies (open letter to the Finnish people)" appeared both in the journal *Kiertolainen* (1912b, pp. 4–5), and elsewhere in large popular newspapers across the country, such as *Helsingin Sanomat* (1912, p. 13). The article presented the main work of the organisation, in an address to the "Finnish people" and included the names of the main board members, among which Antti Palm and Karl Fr. Lindström appeared. The article also invited readers (of the majority) to become acquainted and to assist in the work of the Mission, in whatever way possible.

As mentioned above, his role as a Roma writer in *Kiertolainen* was not unique. In fact, many other Roma writers (men and women) also seemed to publish short pieces of their life stories or work on the pages of the Mission's journal. Nevertheless, his work as an evangeliser among the Kaale in the country and the Roma/Gypsy community in Karelia, became influential in the overall success of the Mission among the Kaale. It is worth noting that Antti Palm seems to have temporarily left the Gypsy Mission in 1914, without giving a precise reason for his decision, but writing a short piece in *Kiertolainen* about his leave (1914b, p. 12) only to return again later on.

These dynamics have not yet been accounted for but resemble to some extent the moves of Åkerlund, Blomerus and Nikkinen. Unlike the other three, Antti Palm nevertheless continued the work with the Mission, including during the interwar period and,

alongside other Roma members of the Gypsy Mission (such as Karl Fredrikki Lindström), his evangelising activities on behalf of the Mission were recorded regularly, including in the 1920s (Viita, 1967, p. 107). His activities and work as a “Roma evangelist” were, once again, regularly recorded in many mainstream newspapers of the time, such as *Suomalainen* (Finn), *Mikkelin Sanomat* (Mikkeli News), *Uusi Suomi* (New Finland), *Uusimaa* (literally meaning “new country” but also the name of a southern region in Finland; thus a newspaper published in the Uusimaa region), etc. (Wiipuri, 1912, p. 4; *Suomalainen*, 1912, p. 2; *Uusimaa*, 1915, p. 2; *Mikkelin Sanomat*, 1922, p. 4; *Maaseudun Sanomat*, 1922, p. 2; *Uusi Suomi*, 1923, p. 14; *Keskisuomalainen*, 1923, p. 1; *Aamulehti*, 1923, p. 7). This shows the key role that Kaale members of the organisation had in the dissemination of the Mission’s views and intentions, as well as the ways in which the Mission could not have succeeded without the influence of key Kaale members within it.

Finally, alongside his work with the Gypsy Mission, Antti Palm seems to have been, at least partially, affiliated with what could perhaps be the very first Roma-led organisation in the country (founded in 1917), the Finnish Roma Civilisation Society (*Suomen Romanien Sivistysseura*). As discussed in Ida Blomerus’ portrait, this organisation seems to have had at the very least, a part Roma leadership, with Kaale women Ida Blomerus (also known as Cingardy-Ora) as a spokesperson (Työmies, 1917e, p. 6), and Antti Palm mentioned as a secretary (Työmies, 1917d, p. 9). It also seems that Palm was somehow connected to the Finnish Gypsy Theatre, but in the end, he did not actually attend theatre performances (Työmies, 1917e, p. 6). Antti Palm died on March 13, 1939, in Mikkeli, at the age of 64, where he is also buried. The circumstances and cause of his death remain unknown.

## Conclusion

### *Risto Blomster and Raluca Bianca Roman*

The portraits presented throughout this chapter each illustrate the ways in which Roma individuals at the start of the 20th century have played key roles as active agents in the shaping of the Roma mobilisation movement in Finland, positioning them as central players in the Roma emancipation process in the country. They were all, in one form or another, intrinsically connected to the influence of a central evangelical organisation in the country, the Gypsy Mission, which would become a defining feature in the history of the Roma movement more broadly: be it through shaping its future allies; or its future critics.

At the same time, while not directly, their history and lives were not enacted out of context and were each connected to the shaping of Roma emancipation movements occurring elsewhere in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe at the early 20th century and during the interwar period of time. Namely, much like in all the other countries

discussed throughout this book, the process of Roma emancipation in Finland at the start of the 20th century was undoubtedly connected to the development and formation of a new nation-state: in this case, the gaining of Finland's independence from Russia in 1917, the transition from it being a Grand Duchy of Finland, its continuing connection to Russia through subsequent conflicts and its striving for the construction of its own Finnish national identity. In other words, the forms and pathways of Roma emancipation in Finland all depended on the national context in which it unfolded. The common lines between Finland's case and those of other nations in the region can most clearly be articulated in the framework of Miroslav Hroch's discussion of the formation of nations and national revivalism (Hroch, 1985, pp. 25–30; Hobsbawm, 1990, pp. 11–12). According to Hroch, the early twentieth century, the timeframe within which the Roma civic emancipation in Finland (and elsewhere) most clearly emerged, was also the timeframe of the construction of new nation-states and nation-building. Finnish Kaale, as members of their nation, were also an intrinsic part of this process. In other words, the emergence, shape and development of the Roma movement in Finland needs to be understood in conjunction with the nation-building process occurring in Finland during the same period of time and they were connected to the broader process of national revival, as members of their own Roma community and as members of the society in which they had lived, for centuries (Marushiakova & Popov, 2016e, p. 15).

As a manifestation of this, the individuals whose portraits were presented in this chapter articulated their visions for the future of the Kaale population, both in line with, or detached from, the aims and goals of the Mission they each began their particular work in. These visions connected the emphasis placed on maintaining elements of the Kaale cultural identity in the country (such as writings in Romani language, addressing 'Roma brothers' and 'Roma youth', emphasising the concept of the 'nation') with an emphasis placed on being more clearly fully embedded members of the Finnish nation, which was in the process of its own becoming (with the emphasis placed on the issue of sedentarisation and education, for instance). These two elements are not contradictory and, once again, reflect the multi-dimensional belonging of Roma individuals more broadly: not just as members of their own community but as members of the societies they inhabit.

This can be seen in all the portraits presented here. In addition to this, some interesting aspects can be noted in the life stories of Nikkinen, Åkerlund and Blomerus, and particularly in the different public images they were presenting. On the one hand, all three began working within the midst of the Gypsy Mission, partially aligning with the latter's views on the sedentarisation and education of Kaale in the country and emphasising the need to use the term 'Roma' as a replacement for that of *mustalainen*, or 'Gypsy'. On the other hand, as artists, all three became performers of 'Gypsy music' and used Romani-language inspired nicknames as their stage names: "Gaaloo" for Nikkinen (meaning Ferdinand the Dark), 'Chaaro' for Åkerlund (exact meaning unknown), and 'Cingardy' for Blomerus (meaning 'Quarrel-Maker'). While these stage names could be seen as mere means of utilising their Roma background in their work as 'Gypsy artists',

they also denote the ways in which the particular choices of their ‘artist ‘names’ may have evoked the actual position they were taking (i.e., Blomerus, as the “quarrel-maker”) in a shifting relationship with other key institutions or organisations (including the Mission itself). Furthermore, given that the Romani meaning of the term would most likely only be understandable to other Romani language speakers, the audience of their nicknames was not only the majority public (who may have found a ‘Gypsy’ name ‘interesting’) but other Kaale, who would understand the the humorous and tongue-in-cheek meaning of the terms. These nicknames also subtly illustrate the complexity of their own affiliations, ideals and goals. At the same time, all three worked, simultaneously on (at least) two dimensions: as ‘Gypsy’ artists, in their performances, and as Roma activists, wherein they also seemed to have promoted key lines that aligned with the Gypsy Mission’s goals (for instance, sedentarisation and education of the Kaale community in the country), while nevertheless having a more or less shifting relationship with the latter. This denotes the ways in which the very meaning of emancipation, even when seemingly emerging within the midst of the Mission, shifted throughout the life of individuals.

At the same time, as mentioned in the introduction, the individuals presented throughout this chapter are not the only ones exemplifying this. Rather, they are manifestations of the forms that Roma emancipation, showing how Kaale, men and women alike, played an active part in shaping the work of the Gypsy Mission in Finland, an aspect often left aside when presenting the latter as a non-Roma organisation. But there are also others, whose names are rarely mentioned in connection to the Roma movement in Finland, but whose role in showcasing the different manifestations of Roma civic emancipation should not be understated. One such name is that of Kalle Tähtelä.

Kalle Tähtelä (1891–1919; full name Kaarlo “Kalle” Aleksander Tähtelä, also known as Franzén, from 1906, and Junno, later on) was a writer, fighter pilot, socialist revolutionary and translator, born into a mixed Kaale-Finnish family (his father Roma, his mother majority Finn). A more detailed account of his life and work is presented in the Finland chapter of the book *Romani Writings* (Blomster & Roman, 2021). However, a summary of his work and life is necessary here, as it shows the diversity of shapes that key Roma emancipatory and mobilising figures took throughout the 20th century in Finland.

Briefly put, Kalle Tähtelä was a prolific writer, who published extensively (in Finnish) on social themes, connected to his socialist visions for his country. He was born on May 26, 1891, in Leppävirta, in the Northern Savonia region of Finland, to Aleksanteri Franzen (formerly Hagert) and Retriikka Jaakontytär Junno. Like Ferdinand Nikkinen, his family was rather unique compared to other Roma families of that time. For instance, the children were all educated and his family-owned their own homestead (i.e., they were not travelling). Kalle also attended primary school. His upper secondary school education (*lyseo*), however, was cut short once he began working in the newspaper industry: for the dailies *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* (Eastern Finland News) and *Aamulehti* (Morning Paper). He then continued working as a journalist across Finland. Most notably, in 1909, at just 18 years old, he wrote what is perhaps the only piece of his work directly referencing

“Gypsies” – a play made up of 3 acts, titled *The Gypsy Revenge* (Tähtelä, 1909). A story of romantic revenge about a young Gypsy, named Aslak, whose father was killed by a man called Gunnar Haugen. Aslak seeks revenge for his father’s death by seducing Gunnar’s daughter, but instead of exacting his revenge as planned, Aslak falls in love with her, extinguishing his desire for revenge.

After the publication of his play, Tähtelä briefly studied in Germany (in 1910) and then travelled to the US (in 1911). While in America, he worked and published in several Finnish-language labour American magazines (Tervonen, 2012, pp. 130–131). His time in the United States of America also inspired several of his novellas and short stories, all of which focused on the struggles of the immigrant, refugee and impoverished communities (Tähtelä, 1913, 1915, 1916a, 1916b). Once back in Finland, from 1917 onwards, he continued his work as a writer, collaborating with several socialist newspapers at the time, such as *Länsisuomen Työmies* (Western Finland Working Man), of which he was an editor. He would then join the ‘Reds’, during the Finnish Civil War and, after the latter’s failed revolt, he would flee to Russia, where he became a fighter pilot in the Red Naval Forces of the Baltic Sea. Tähtelä died at only 28 years old, on the October 24, 1919, two days after his plane was shot down near Petrograd, by the troops of General Nikolay Yudenich (at the time, the leader of the anti-communist White movement in North-Western Russia during the Civil War) and is buried in the Common Tomb of the Revolutionary Heroes of Oranienbaum, present-day Lomonosov, part of St Petersburg (Geus, 2004, p. 189; Tervonen, 2012, p. 131).

While Kalle Tähtelä’s life and work are rarely connected to the Roma movement in Finland in the broader historical canon, he is undoubtedly an important figure, one who showcases the myriad shapes that the very notion of ‘emancipation’ can take: from ideas of ‘inclusion’ within majority society, to pursuing socialist ideals in their work to, at times, even disconnecting fully from his Roma background. His life and work add new shades of colour to the manifestations of mobilisation embodied in the portraits of Nikkinen, Åkerlund, Blomerus, Schwartz and Palm presented throughout this chapter. He was, for instance, completely outside the work of the Gypsy Mission, the most influential and important organisation working on Roma issues at the time, and his life goals and pursuits followed a clearly socialist agenda. Nevertheless, these distinctive elements are also crucially important in emphasising that there was never only one dimension, or one pathway, to the process of Roma emancipation in Finland and that, perhaps, many others can also be included in the future. The portraits presented in this chapter, therefore, are key illustrations of the myriad pathways of Roma civic emancipation in Finland and, in time, we hope, they may open up the door for further work to be conducted on the topic.