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Book Review:

The Roma in European Higher Education: Re-Casting Identities, Reimagining Futures, ed. Louise Morley, Andrzej Mirga & Nadir Redzepi (2020, London: Bloomsbury Academic).

Review by Barbara Read, School of Education, University of Glasgow.

This wide-ranging edited collection is the first academic book to be published on the topic of Roma students and staff in Higher Education. It springs from the work of the Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility (HEIM) project – a collaboration between the universities of Seville, Sussex and Umea and the Roma Education Fund, in an “act of Roma-Gadji solidarity” (1). Authors are drawn from across the continent and include both Roma and non-Roma scholars. Reading the book I was struck with a keen sense of the real paucity of research conducted in this area up until now, and just how valuable this book is – and the work of the authors within. Not only does it shed some much-needed light on patterns of inequality and aspects of experience in relation to this under-represented group in HE, but we cannot adequately explore broader issues of equity in European HE without an understanding of the complex dynamics behind their marginalisation.

The chapters that make up the book all approach the topic in slightly different ways, ranging from broad policy analyses to reports of in-depth qualitative studies. The geographical sweep ranges from a Europe-wide focus to spotlights on issues within particular countries, notably in part 2 of the book which focuses in particular on the national/regional contexts of Spain, the Nordic Countries, Serbia and Greece. There is also some variety in terms of theoretical lens: whilst a Bourdieuan perspective seems to be slightly favoured among the authors, others successfully utilise poststructuralist analysis, the work of Fraser, Spivak, and Ahmed, and Sen’s capabilities approach to assessing social justice.

A rich array of issues are raised across chapters, including the patchiness of detailed disaggregated data that hinders our ability to gain a clear picture of numerical under-representation in some countries and regions; the inadequacies of policies designed simply to support numerical access to HE without further support once students have arrived; the role of neoliberal governmentality in misrecognising continuing structural constraints and barriers for Roma in favour of a model of success as won meritocratically by individual ‘enterprising selves’; the role of Romani feminists aiming to challenge assumptions in the well-worn arguments over the incompatibility between feminism and multiculturalism; the need to challenge epistemic injustice and support Roma as knowledge producers in HE rather than simply the ‘objects’ of research; the need to disrupt narratives that construct Roma as passive victims, ‘fairytale villains’ (18), or a community that does not value formal education.

Overall the authors in the book are united in pointing out what we can do as HE policymakers and practitioners to challenge and change the picture painted in this book – there is a challenge here to critically interrogate our practices in all areas, from curriculum and pedagogy to staffing decisions, from student and staff support to our policies on widening participation and internationalisation. Key within this is the

issue of representation. The authors challenge us here: “can we refresh narratives, images and accounts of /from/about/for the Roma?....A key invitation to us all is to imagine different futures for the largest ethnic minority group in Europe” (10). This intriguing collection is a decisive step on this path.