

## **Elisabeth Lakatos: Making a safe space**

Translated from the Hungarian by Sára Szakál and Eszter Tarsoly

English editing by Alex Claridge

*The author of this text is one of the long-term local contributors of our participatory research projects in Tiszavasvári. She lives in a street on the edge of the Roma neighbourhood, often referred to as the "Hungarian row", but it has both Roma and non-Roma families. She has four young daughters, all in primary or secondary school. She has participated in writing a Romani storybook, translating and authoring texts in local Romani, and in writing the volume summarising the outcome of our translanguaging project (Heltani, J. and Tarsoly, E. (eds.). 2023. Translanguaging for Equal Opportunities. Speaking Romani at School. Berlin: De Gruyter.)*

What was it like to live in the Roma neighbourhood? It was good. That world and this world we live in are worlds apart. Back then, if one of us did not have something they needed, others helped them and people shared everything they had. Today's world is completely broken; people don't respect each other and talk behind each other's backs. Before, people used to be united and supported each other. Now, many people drink, smoke, and use drugs.

My parents gave us everything they could. Of course, there were difficulties, but they did their absolute best for us, so that we would not be in need. Unfortunately, my father started drinking. First only moderately, but then he became immersed in it more and more. He lost everything. As the days, weeks, and years went by, a question kept coming up in the family: why did he do all this? With difficulty, my mother accepted it; she had no choice. As I grew older, I came to my senses: I would finish school and I would do well in life. But my life took a different turn when I fell in love at vocational school. After that I was just thinking about the future so that my dreams of a good life would come true.

I started a family with the person I loved. We dated for a long time and lived with my partner's family. They loved me. Our first child was conceived. It was a beautiful time and such great joy; people congratulated us as soon as she was born. We were eager to give our child whatever we could, so that she would not lack anything. She had everything. Our parents also supported us.

As our family grew bigger, I became increasingly determined to move away from my in-laws and have our own house. But it was very difficult. Thanks to my sister, we managed to buy a house in the Roma neighbourhood. When we moved in, I kept the house nice, tidy, and clean. We were often quite stressed as some people living nearby were quite careless. There was a lot of rubbish; they did not look after anything. We had a fence but, still, we could not bear the situation any longer; we kept saying that we were going to get out of this rubbish. Although it was lovely to have our own, separate house, and the children had everything they needed, it was no use as the others were throwing away rubbish; they were just so neglectful. We kept thinking that this would never work. We kept wondering how we could break out of this situation and secure a safe future for our children: a better and safer place.

I used to go around with my grandmother to look for houses supported through the Family Home Benefit scheme (Hungarian: CSOK) until I found one on the Hungarian row, where Roma and non-Roma people live together on the edge of the segregated streets. When I attended vocational school, I was asked what I wanted to do in life, what my heart's dream was – to create a safe place for my children in the future, I answered. Finding a house outside the Roma neighbourhood was a work in progress, and eventually I succeeded. It was such a good experience for everyone, especially for me since I had spent a lot of time trying to make it happen. Finally, I did. Thank God for that.

But when I moved out, people on the Hungarian row weren't too happy, as not everyone on that street wants Roma to live there. They usually ask each other's opinion about who is who, what the Roma who want to move in are like, whether they are noisy, and how many children they have. They would tell us off even for letting the children play and run in the garden. If there was music in the house, they would ask us to turn it down, saying that it was too loud, even though the sound was just coming from the TV. But no matter how wrong they were, I agreed with them.