

# The Housing Question

*Rena Rüdle & Vladan Jeremić*



## **Characters:**

**Arif** from Sarajevo, lives since the 70s in Rome.

**Lisabetta** from Berlin, survived Auschwitz.

**Dejan** from Skopje, lives in Skopje and Rome.

The characters are fictional. The text is based on interviews, talks and memories of witnesses.

Voices by Hildegard König, Dirk Auer and Lars Magesching.

*The so-called housing shortage, which plays such a great role in the press nowadays, does not consist in the fact that the working class generally lives in bad, overcrowded and unhealthy dwellings. This shortage is not something peculiar to the present; it is not even one of the sufferings peculiar to the modern proletariat in contradistinction to all earlier oppressed classes. On the contrary, all oppressed classes in all periods suffered more or less uniformly from it. In order to make an end of this housing shortage there is only one means: to abolish altogether the exploitation and oppression of the working class by the ruling class.*

The Housing Question, Frederick Engels, 1887



## *First Image*

### **Giardino Zoologico**

Arif: At first, we were living all over Rome, in the fields, in tents or barracks. For 25 years, we had a barrack in the centre, in Vicolo Savini. Then the police came and said we couldn't stay there anymore. After that, we got containers in the camp in Via Pontina, 30 kilometres from Rome. That was in 2005. A thousand people live here.

Dejan: Imagine. In 1985, they made a law to protect Roma culture. This law describes our culture as “nomadic”. So, Roma are nomads, they are always on the road, they don't need a flat, and live in camps. And they still see us like that today: in camps.

Lisabetta: In 1936, it was said: Berlin must be cleaned of Gypsies because of the Olympic Games. The police arrested us. Then they brought us to a collection camp in Berlin, to “Rastplatz Marzahn”, along with our wagen. Then, this student from Frankfurt surfaced. He visited us often in the camp and studied us for his dissertation on race theory. Three years later, they made a law that distinguished three categories of Sinti. “Pure Gypsies”, “Gypsy half-breeds”, and “people travelling around like Gypsies”.

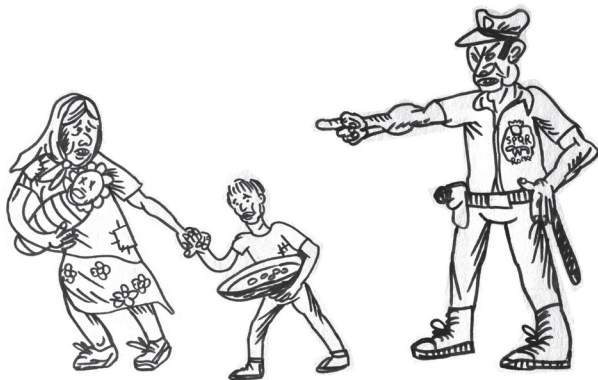
## *Second Image*

### **Piazza del Popolo**

Lisabetta: Policemen were in the camp day and night. All men had to go to work in the nearby factories. The first raid was in 1938. They needed forced labourers. My father was deported to the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen. A few months later, they arrested all women who were able to work and brought them to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück. I never saw my parents again. I stayed alone in Marzahn, with my brothers and sisters.

Arif: I have to say that I'm grateful to the Italian state because they're taking care of us. There are also church organisations helping our children go to school. My children have Italian papers. I don't, but the children do. That's important because then they can live all over Europe. Since we've been here in the camp in Via Pontina, it has been difficult to work. We're now very far from the city. There is no bus stop. We're not allowed to have workshops or storage spaces in the camp. Most of us live on social assistance.

Dejan: They evicted us from the centre and made us completely dependent on social services. Do you know that they make a lot of money with us? Just look at how many organisations there are, that survive on taking care of Roma, educating Roma kids, caring about the health of Roma, teaching Roma women... For these organisations, it's perfect having all of us registered here, living in the camps. And, ideally, we're here forever.



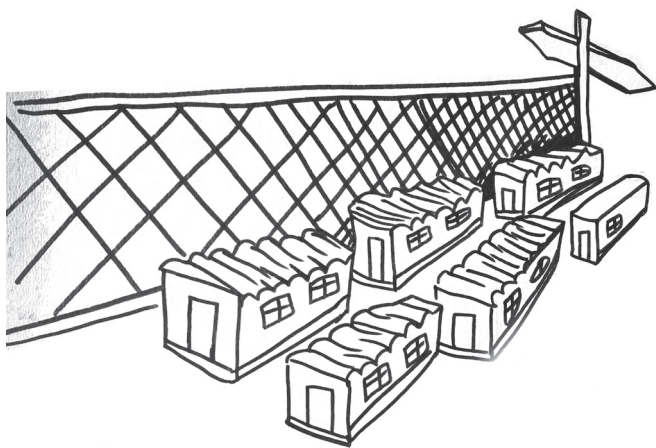
### *Third Image*

#### **Tor Bella Monaca**

Arif: Everybody from our site who had Italian residence permits or citizenship got a container. My whole family was registered, photographed, and fingerprinted for that. To get a flat in social housing is very difficult. Still, I know someone who got a flat in Tor Bella Monaca.

Dejan: I have been deported several times because I had no residency. I was in jail because of that for several weeks. They made a mark in my passport like this, two strokes with a ballpoint pen, and with that, they don't let me over the border anymore.

Lisabetta: Thank god, I have a flat in social housing in Berlin. But I never got any compensation for the time I spent in the concentration camps. I am the only one who survived. My sisters and brothers went up through the chimney in Auschwitz. When I went to the authorities to apply for compensation, they said I was imprisoned due to crime prevention measures. Like I had been a criminal!



## *Fourth Image*

### **Via Pontina**

Arif: All the camps that were recently built are far away from the city. They all have video surveillance and there is a security service. I don't think these camps are positive. They remind me of the camps for asylum seekers.

Dejan: First, they called the camps "villages of solidarity". Now, they're called "equipped villages". Politicians promised the voters they would kick the Roma and Sinti out of the city. People think: Gypsies are criminals and politicians must protect us from them.

Arif: At the site at Vicolo Savini, we had everything. The city had put asphalt, installed water, and electricity. It was in the centre, we could earn some money, walk to go shopping. Many weddings were held there, Šaban Šaulić came three times. But he didn't want to play in the camp. He only sang two songs at the camp and then the wedding party went on at the hotel. All the great singers were there: Sinan, Muharem, Kvaka...

Lisabetta: One day, a well-dressed woman came to the camp in Marzahn. It was Leni Riefenstahl. She needed extras for her movie, “Tiefland”, people that looked Spanish. She came to the camp to find some. From then on, some of us had to act in a few movies at Babelsberg Film Studios. It was easier work than at the factory.



## *Fifth Image*

### **Alemanno Sindaco**

Arif: I voted for Berlusconi but he brought the crisis. Then, I voted for Prodi but he was kicked out after a year. After that, I voted for Alemanno and he became mayor of Rome. Alemanno has nothing directly against us Roma but who knows? They are fascists, that's true, but what can I do?

Dejan: Some would say: Typical of these people. They will always be on the side of the ruling class, to protect themselves. That's typical for the lumpenproletariat!

Lisabetta: My father voted for Hitler. He was afraid of the SA, they were beating people up. We didn't know that they wanted to kill all of us. We really couldn't imagine something like that. He voted for Hitler out of fear.



## *Sixth Image*

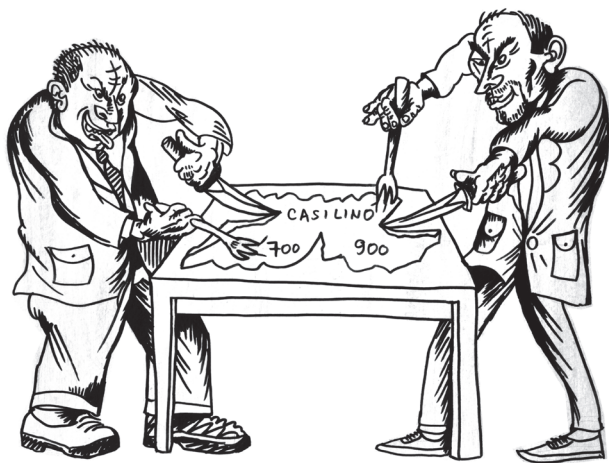
### **Via Casilina**

Dejan: You know, land in the city became very expensive. They can make a lot of money with it. If they remove the Gypsies, they can sell the land to investors for extremely good prices.

Arif: I know, it's very simple: If you remove the Gypsies from my land, I will pay for your election campaign. I'll get a loan at the bank, we'll share the bribe for the building contracts, I'll build flats there, and sell them for super high prices.

Lisabetta: Sometimes I ask myself: If they hadn't put us all together in that camp in Marzahn because of the Olympic Games in 1936, how would they have known that we're Sinti? Maybe my family would have survived.

Dejan: Without a bribe, you won't even get a place in the camp! They're not only bringing Roma and Sinti into such camps outside the city. I heard that, in Poland, people who can't pay rent for their flats anymore are transferred into container camps. They have stopped building social housing. Because it's not profitable.



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