

A rare visit to a closed world

We, Roma

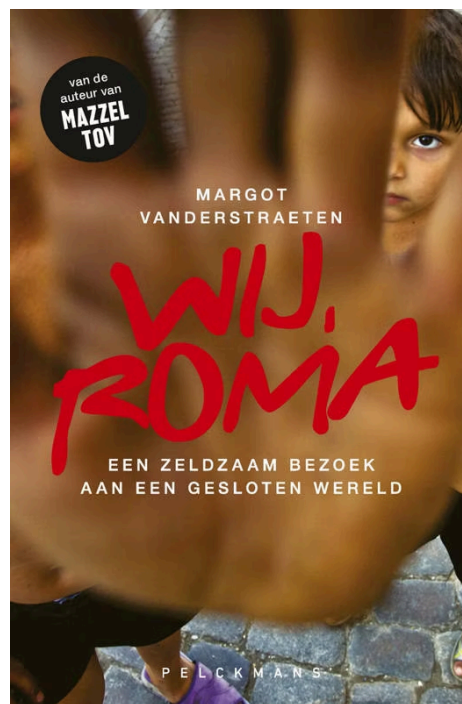
MARGOT VANDERSTRAETEN

Everybody has an opinion about Roma, but few people really know them. Their history is very complex, powerful and tragic; their diversity is so vast that no single flag can encompass it. One cannot speak of 'the Roma' as a single entity, there is not one Roma community. There are many, and they differ greatly from one another.

Following the international success of 'Mazel Tov' and 'Minjan', in which Margot Vanderstraeten explored the closed community of Orthodox Jewish communities, she now turns her attention to another misunderstood and marginalized community: the Roma. In 99 chapters, ranging from brief paragraphs to several pages, she shares stories that emerged from conversations and interviews with Roma, told by Roma and written down by an outsider.

The book explores themes as diverse as the Roma language, their justice system, the Iftar, their reverence for the Mother Gods, and the tension between prejudices and the reinforcement of stereotypes. In doing so, Vanderstraeten holds up a mirror to both the Roma and the people that judge them.

This book offers a lively and empathetic insight into a very diverse community with deeply rooted traditions. By earning the trust of her interviewees, Vanderstraeten not only presents the Roma in their own words, but also provides room for critical reflections by Roma on Roma.



AUTHOR



Margot Vanderstraeten (b. 1967) is a freelance journalist and author. She debuted with the novel 'All People Bite' in 2002, which won the Flemish Debut Prize. 'Mise en place' offers the reader a fascinating glimpse into the world of haute cuisine. The novel was nominated for the Halewijn Prize. 'The Butterfly Effect', her fourth novel, tells a human story behind international terror. 'Mazel tov' tells the story of Vanderstraeten's experiences as a tutor in an Orthodox Jewish family. *Photo © Tom van Nuffel*

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