

La tradition de l'intégration. Une ethnologie des Roms Gabori dans les années 2000 [The tradition of integration: An ethnography of Gabori Roma in the 2000s]. Martin Olivera. 2012. Paris: Éditions Pétra. 503 pp., €32. ISBN 978-2-84743-050-9

Reviewed by Cătălina Tesăr

Olivera's ethnography advances one more answer to the question that has been pre-occupying the anthropological study of Gypsies since its advent in the mid 1970s, namely, how can one explain the resilience of Romani cultural configurations in the midst of the *gaže* who push strongly for their assimilation (Gay y Blasco 2011: 445; Stewart 2013: 418)? The proposed solution might appear paradoxical: It is through their historical and social *integration* into the world of non-Gypsies that the Roma manage to maintain their socio-cosmological configuration. The book under review is a splendid demonstration of this seemingly self-contradictory explanation that the vital principle of the Roma persistence is located at the heart of their shared social history of cohabitation with the *gaže*. Surprisingly enough, the endurance of the Gypsy way of life is not seen as a counter-response or resistance to the mainstream values (cf. Stewart 1997); quite to the contrary, it is attributed to its fully fledged immersion into the local context and its embracement of local cultural idioms. However, Olivera warns the reader from the beginning that it would be misleading and reductionist to see the universe of *romanes* as a mere product of the intimate relationship between Gypsies and *gaže*, a relationship on which the reproduction of Gypsy identity depends nonetheless. *Romanes* is the manifestation of an internal principle, a force and a substance at the same time, the *baxt* (which is shown to be more than luck, blessing): "they don't seem to rely on *gaže* to make them visible (for this, the *baxt* is enough), but to *help* them *persist* in the world" (p. 444, my translation, italics in the original).

The persuasive force of this fresh and daring argument resides in the wealth of detailed evidence on which it is built. The book is not – its author makes a point to remind the reader of this repeatedly, and the title suggests it – about a-historical Gypsies, but about concrete and real Romani population who exist in a definite space and time: the Gabori (speakers of Romany, Hungarian and Romanian languages) from Transylvania, among whom Olivera carried out extensive fieldwork between 1997 and 2007, comprising some thirty months. Specialists in Romani studies may be acquainted with the Gabori population from the writings of Berta (2007; 2009; 2010; 2013), one of his papers having been published in this journal (2007). However, Olivera's book shatters previ-

Cătălina Tesăr is a postdoctoral fellow at the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, 5 Gavril Muzicescu St. Cluj Napoca 400697 Romania. Email: catalinatesar@yahoo.com

ous representations of Gabori through its professed choices of depicting native conceptions of being in the world. Olivera does away with analytical notions such as “community”, “society”, “ethnicity”, “patrigroups” in which Berta couched his depiction of Gabori and instead gives way to the Gabori’s own perspective on themselves. The result is a gradual undertaking in which the Gabori cosmology is fashioned and laid bare before the reader by means of people’s everyday gestures, practices and words. The image we get of the Gabori, rather than being fashioned as an objective entity, constructs itself before our eyes as the anthropologist himself gathers knowledge about this people.

The Gabori are Gypsies who are proud to be Gypsies, they have the air and posture of aristocracy, and their vanity shows in the way they walk (at ease), dress, speak, and behave. Men with black velour hats, loose trousers and impressive moustaches, and women with ankle-length pleated skirts and scarves covering their heads, make themselves ostentatiously visible or, in Olivera’s native language, “*se donne à voir*” (p. 19). However, none of their visible cultural traits contribute to the articulation of Gabori inner sociality, the universe of *romanes*, which reveals itself to the trained eye of the anthropologist alone while remaining invisible to the outsiders. We find out that Gabori don’t even define themselves as Gabori in their own language but call themselves *řomane řoma*, Romani Roma. Olivera’s narrative turns out to be a depiction of two different realities lived by the same people, the reality of the Gabori (or what they parade to the world) and the reality of the *řoma* which encompasses the former. People are born *řomane řoma* and in the course of their lives they may retain or lose the qualities vested in their *nature*, which become manifest in interconnectedness (both with peers and outsiders) and are conveyed by the concepts of *raj Kane* (noble or of high ancestry), *patjivale* (respectable, trustworthy) and *baxtale* (blessed), with their counterpart notions of shame (*laža*) and respect/trust (*patjiv*).

The book is organized in three parts: “*Řomane řoma* – Romani Roma”, “*Raj Kane the patjivale Řoma* – Noble and Respectable Roma”, and “*Baxtale Řoma* – Blessed Roma”, each comprising three chapters. The first part opens with the caveat that none of the scholarly preoccupations with categorizing the Gypsies according to the language they speak and their cultural traits are applicable to the Gabori way of life, who instead substantiate *romanes* through the creation and deployment of a myriad of social relationships. It further evidences, by delving into Transylvanian local history, that the ‘exoticism’ of the Gabori is an expression of their autochthonous social history, of their shared past with Romanian peasants (especially their similar status during feudalism as *robi* and *iobagi* respectively and during state socialism as would-be *lumpenproletariat*). By way of illustration, Olivera discusses what strikes outsiders as the most peculiar thing about the Gabori, that is, their so-called tradition-

al dress. We learn that the Gabori's costumes consist of garments that their Romanian and Hungarian ethnic neighbours used to wear in the past. The Gabori's dress is a splendid objectification of the convergence of what is "given to the sight", the Gabori, and what is not revealed, the *řoma*. For the outsiders, Gabori dress is a sign of their cultural distinctiveness and as such of their moral superiority over other local Romani populations, from among whom the *řumunguri* (so called assimilated Gypsies, with "no culture of their own") are singled out and become, throughout the book, a category of reference from whom *řoma* are set apart. Conversely, for the *řoma*, who regard themselves as *ontologically* different and superior by *nature*, dress is merely an etiquette. Because they consider themselves as a society of aristocrats rather than the aristocracy of an imagined "Gypsy society" (p. 186), the decorum, grace and style of their costume are contingent, in their eyes, on their high birth. To show that this is the case, Olivera surreptitiously takes us into the home of some *řoma* who, living isolated in *gaže* villages with no *řumunguri* from whom to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the non-Gypsies, are caught off guard not sporting their attire when relatives come to visit them. They are mildly embarrassed, experiencing feelings of shame in relation to each other. This happens because, among others, *noblesse oblige* to the wearing of regalia.

What is it that makes the *řoma* an aristocracy? The second part of the book puts forward an answer to this question, by considering the idiom of relatedness. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) distinction of official and practical kin, Olivera discusses the native concept of *niamo/ nařia* (otherwise shared with the neighbouring *gaže*), a *general principle* of relatedness that can either designate the entire imagined community or the local manifestation of the (residential) family, the *čeledo* (p. 195). The *niamo* comprises more *viři*, i.e. webs of relatedness which include both the dead and the living, which emphasize patrilinearity and which conceal, under the expression of the much debated genealogical connections, preoccupations with interpreting and understanding persons' ways of being and action (p. 199). There is a hierarchy among the *viři*, with some believed to be of better ancestry than others, based on past possession and the transmission of specific material items called *taxtaja* (chalices), the quintessence of nobility. Yet this hierarchy has nothing to do with an alleged mechanical political – economic organization. It is rather, in a Dumontian understanding, a way of attributing rank to elements in relation to the whole (p. 211). Therefore, this type of hierarchy does not impede on the Gabori's egalitarianism, all the more so as, through everyday behaviour, one can enhance, validate or, on the contrary, diminish the innate qualities of one's *noblesse*. If the *řoma* are unquestionably born *rajkane* (noble), they can, through the enactment (or lack thereof) of the relational notion of *patjiv* (trust, respect) vis-à-vis the peers and the *gaže*, castigate or buttress their proclivities.

Given that aristocracy is conterminous with endogamy, one way of losing one's *noblesse* is marrying outside – and I particularly appreciate Olivera's detailed ethnography of the practices that are at variance with the ideal of *romanes*. Mixed marriages, although they do occur, go against *romanes* – as a concoction of both *rajkane*- and *patjivale*-like qualities of interconnectedness. Despite the fact that all *řoma* consider themselves to be related both through *viři* descent and general endogamy, individual families, *čeledo*, live scattered *mařkar le gažende* ('among the non-Gypsies') and their residential choice complies with the code of *romanes*. Not unlike other Gypsies, the Gabori gain their livelihoods through exchanges with *gaže*, otherwise a pool of resources which can be drawn on by means of properly policing geographical distances between the *řoma* and other *řoma* and between the *řoma* and the *gaže*. The provision of resources is contingent on a skilful "cultivation" by each *řoma* family of the relationship with their "own *gaže*", and this can be achieved through mutual enforcement of trust and respect. Olivera gently rejects the orthodox association of Gypsies with hunters and gatherers (see Day et al. 1999) and proposes instead the metaphor of agriculturalists who laboriously cultivate their connectedness with *gaže*.

In the last part of the book, "*Baxtale Řoma – The Blessed Roma*", the author shifts the focus of analysis from the reproduction of *romanes* through *integration* to the affirmation of *romanes* as a reality beyond the world of *gaže* or an *ontological* difference. The principle that institutes the distinctiveness and makes it manifest, a Maussian total social fact similar to the Maori *hau* or the Polynesian *mana*, is *baxt*. Luck, affluence and blessing at the same time, *baxt* is the *raison d'être* of the *řoma*, the underlying force of their fertility and creativity. The manifestation of *baxt* is intimately linked to the gendered division of labour, the "primitive mode of production" (Sahlins 1972) which rules out notions of shortage and replaces them with ideas of affluence, to peculiar conceptions of the body, and to the power of words. In a way reminiscent of Stewart's (1997) description of *romanes*, women are associated with the domestic space and the family's subsistence and men with the sociality beyond it, which is fuelled with money derived from *řomani butji*. Rather than being tantamount to gutter making (otherwise believed to be a "traditional" Gabori craft) and thus conveying a *savoir-faire*, *řomani butji* is conterminous with quick wits and qualitative connectedness (achieved through *integration*) with the *gaže*, and endorses certain ethics. And this is precisely where the Gabori's understanding of *řomani butji* parts with that of Stewart's Hungarian Rom. Sharing with the *gaže* – an otherwise categorical representation that does not map onto lived social realities – a conception of wealth as a limited good, the Hungarian Roms' ideology of the "free lunch" was self-delusional. In contradistinction to them, Olivera's *řoma*'s ideas of abundance are a reality grounded

in their domestication of the *gaže*. They are embedded in a conception of the gendered body which, going beyond the preoccupations with maintaining socioethnic boundaries through pollution beliefs (cf. Okely 1983), epitomizes relational ideas of shame and respect amongst peers. By means of everyday practices, the Gabori construct themselves as *řoma* living according to *romanes*, that is, being *baxtalo* (blessed), or else failed *řoma*, *bi-baxtalo* (poor, miserable and wretched) living in the way *řumunguri* do. “One who ceases to be *baxtalo* progressively ceases to be a relative, and the one who ceases to be a relative (by means of an exogamous marriage) cannot (because there is no *reason* for one to be) be *baxtalo*” (p. 437). The *baxtale řoma* are the *raj Kane* and *patjivale řoma*, the *řomane řoma*.

In the conclusions to this book, drawing on Descola (2005), Olivera proposes an understanding of the Gabori way of being through the lens of social ontologies. Here, I should caution the non-anthropological readership that the jargon-loaded discussion may be a bit of a headache. I shall try to translate into lay language an abstract schema whose threads, once disentangled, shed light on the self-positionality of Gabori Roma vis-à-vis other Transylvanian Roma populations and the *gaže*. The Gabori *řoma* consider themselves to be of a different *nature* from the *gaže*, the difference being instituted by means of the *baxt* which dwells in the bodies of the former and not in the bodies of the latter. They believe nonetheless that they share with the *gaže* the same culture (as manifested in the Gabori appearance and behaviour) and a certain degree of ‘civilization’, an idea underlying the folk distinction between ‘we’ (Gabori and *gaže*) vs. *tigani* (the local term for the Gypsies, imbued with negative stereotypes such as ‘dirty’ and ‘non-civilized’) in which the resilience of *romanes* is rooted. Against the grain of orthodox anthropological thinking about Gypsies, the *gaže* – otherwise *ontologically* different and therefore beyond one’s own (the *řoma*’s) realm of moral reasoning – are not an antithetical category when it comes to the *řoma*’s self-definition. Conversely, the *řoma* construct themselves as moral beings in opposition to the *řumunguri*, people who could have lived according to *romanes* but have failed to do so and ended up being *bibaxtale* (non-blessed). The *řoma* who do not live according to *romanes* do not become *gaže* but *řumunguri*.

Inasmuch as it marshals verbal imagery rather than facts, it is rather difficult to assess whether this triangulation of the *řoma*, *gaže* and *řumunguri* categories – and I have only very roughly sketched Olivera’s argument here – maps onto the lived experiences of *řoma*. While I acknowledge the force of his endeavour, I would like to put forward some questions which might open up a conversation to which this text makes a significant contribution. We are presented with few ethnographic examples of *řoma* who choose not to live according to *romanes*, either temporarily or permanently. Those who travel abroad in search of work

renounce the Gabori costume, and those who conclude mixed marriages are ushered out of *romanes* through the back door. I am led to wonder whether these people, who become the target of other *řoma*'s harsh moral judgments, do not take pride in their transgression and in living a more "cosmopolitan" life (Gay y Blasco 2010)? Furthermore, is it not the case that their subjectivities present a challenge to the anthropologist's obsession with *natural* orders and ethic dichotomies? Does not the whole intellectual endeavour of classifying people according to their allegedly different physical features, in my reading, rooted exclusively in discourse, go against non-normative practices?

These questions aside, I find compelling the argument at the heart of the book – that the resilience of *romanes* is the result of Romani people's *integration* into the world of non-Gypsies. This should give food for thought not only to the anthropologists who conceptualize Roma in opposition to the *gaře*, but also to those involved in social work and political mobilization targeting Roma populations who often overbid the latter's contrastive culture. The book is good-humoured and written in a self-reflexive literary style, which makes it accessible to a wide readership. The delightfully dense ethnography is enriched with visual material such as kinship graphs, maps, photos and painting reproductions. In this way, Olivera's book makes for a daring and well-deserving candidate to the hall of fame of classical monographs authored by Okely (1983), Piasere (1985), Stewart (1997), Tauber (2006) and Williams (1984, 2003), and should be required reading for anyone interested in Romani studies. The book has been already translated into Romanian and published by the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities in Cluj-Napoca, in 2012 – the same year as the original French publication.

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