Engebrigtsen, Ada I.: Exploring Gypsiness. Power, Exchange, and Interdependence in a Transylvanian Village. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. 217 pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-229-2. Price: $ 75.00

This book is the revised version of a doctoral dissertation written by the Norwegian anthropologist Ada Engebrigtsen. It is based on fieldwork conducted some ten years ago in an unnamed Transylvanian community bifurcated into a village, inhabited by ethnic Romanian and Hungarian peasants, and a segregated "hamlet" populated by Gypsies or Roma. The author had firsthand exposure to both parts, and this enables her to offer illuminating insights into the lives and thoughts of the members of both – the majority as well as the minority.

The work has descriptive as well as analytical ambitions. On the descriptive level, Engebrigtsen provides an interesting sketch of the economy, cosmology, politics, kinship, and gender relations of the Gypsies who live in the local settlement – somewhat oddly named "hamlet Roma." These people belong to the *Vlach* subgroup of Romanian Gypsies, and their competent description is a significant contribution to ethnography. The social structure of these people is characterized by a strong emphasis on male solidarity and equality, and an acephalous leadership pattern qualified only by a traditionally expected (but not always given) obeisance of women to male authority. Their cosmology is, according to Engebrigtsen, starkly dualistic and based on the separation of contrasting entities, such as male vs. female, pure vs. impure, dead vs. alive, and Roma vs. *Gadje*. Yet, the daily observance of these principles is subject to practical considerations and needs, often triggered by the ever-present necessity to adjust to the larger universe populated by Romanian neighbours. The ethnographic sketch of the hamlet Roma doesn't provide any radically new insights into the workings of *Vlach* society – the author clearly follows, and acknowledges, the template of Michael Stewart's work with Hungarian *Vlachs* – but that doesn't detract from the value of the ethnography itself.

Engebrigtsen strikes a more innovative note in her exploration of the local economy and of its role in shaping the relations between Roma and *Gadje*. Not unlike most other Gypsies that have been described by anthropologists, the people of Roma shy away from agriculture, preferring scavenging and trade to the labour intensive and backbreaking peasant mode of life. However, since the purchase of the goods and services offered by the Roma depends on the goodwill of the villagers, the former are obliged to "cultivate" networks of *Gadje* patrons who can be counted on as trading partners or simply dispensers of alms. In a nicely presented argument Engebrigtsen describes the various components of this cultivation of social relations and how this Gypsy counterpart to the peasant mode of production sustains an essentially complementary or symbiotic coexistence between the Roma and their village neighbours. Although asymmetrical, the ties binding the two clusters of residents are of practical as well as symbolic value to both. The peasants use the Gypsies to explore the forbidden realm of magic, but also to partake of gossip and to gather information about other villagers. The Gypsies use the *Gadje* as providers of the food which they refuse to cultivate themselves, but also as the local guardians of the manifold boundaries that keep the two groups separate and that enable the Roma to enjoy a significant degree of social and cultural autonomy.

Engebrigtsen indicates that the process of modernization triggered by the 1989 revolution and accelerated by Romania's integration into "Europe" will have far-reaching consequences for the traditional *modus vivendi* that she observed in the 1990s. For example, she claims that the rise of the country's "Gypsy problem" to national and international prominence has made the coexistence of Roma and *Gadje* more problematic as the latter resent the loss of national prestige in the eyes of the normative West Europeans. In the long run, Engebrigtsen predicts that the expansion of the "Gypsy agenda" from a local to a national issue (witness the proliferation of NGOs, ethnic politicians, and government policies) will result in the erosion of the locally cultivated relations between Roma and *Gadje* and of the cultural superstructure they prop up.

"Exploring Gypsiness" is a valuable book that makes a significant contribution to the discussion of interethnic relations in Romania and beyond. But it also suffers from a few shortcomings that ought to be mentioned. Its origin in a dissertation is disturbing in the opening sections that place too much emphasis on the enumeration of theoretical issues to be tackled and not enough on the people chosen for study. The reader has to wait until page 40 before the setting of the book is properly introduced. And even then, throughout the ethnographic chapters that constitute the core of the work, the degree of detail is not always sufficient to support the author's theoretical aspirations. A particularly glaring omission is the absence of a more nuanced socioeconomic profile of local Roma. The reader learns nothing about internal differentiation; are there no differences in income or the ability to manage resources, giving rise, in turn, to such widely reported institutions as usury and internal exploitation associated therewith? This is an unfortunate gap in the context of Engebrigtsen's emphasis (following Michael Stewart) on egalitarianism and the ethos of brotherhood as an important pillar of *Romanimo.* Overall, though, this is a valuable book that addresses a multitude of intriguing questions in a competent manner. David Z. Scheffel

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Does anthropology really matter beyond the limits of academia? This old question, often answered emphatically in the most diverse kinds of anthropological literature, generally by making a plea for more public engagement, continues to be reasonable and justifiable in a context of frequent political contestations about the social utilities of humanities. Thomas Eriksen, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo and

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